

PDS Seminar: Part 1. A Few Utopias / Part 2. Technology is Not Solid
Fall 2019: Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:00–10:30 AM
Prof. Zachary Rawe; zachary.rawe@gmail.com
Office Hours: by appointment

****This syllabus can change, be prepared for switches, digressions, and unforeseen topics****

The here and now is a prison house. We must strive in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds
—José Esteban Muñoz



A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.
— Walter Benjamin

Create a space that escaped the grasp of power and its laws, without entering into conflict with them yet rendering them inoperative]

come, here, Angel
this is the center of time
time's backwater

—Simone White

This seminar course is staged primarily in two parts. The first, titled **A Few Utopias**, looks towards utopian thinking that merges with art, and what can be gained from creative practices engaged with forward-thinking momentum. The second stage of the course, titled **Technology is Not Solid** looks towards art and technology with a critical eye towards reproduction and the reality

of endless material possibility. The goal of this course is to look at contemporary and historical approaches within art and critical theory, as it grapples with changing landscapes, new tools, weird possibilities for imagination, and boundless opportunities for making and engineering *what comes next*. Before we approach utopia or technology, however, we will dip into a conversation about art school, education, and the relationship of student to university as well as student to teacher.

Here are a few questions to guide our conversation through this course.

Prelude: Art Education & Radical Pedagogy

What is the relationship of teacher to student?

What can be done to loosen the idea of a classroom?

What do you know, what could you teach?

What role do you have to the educational institution?

Do you change the institution, or does the institution change you?

Pt. 1 A few Utopias

What is utopia, and how impossible is it?

What horizons do/can artists see?

How much are those horizons built on the ones we know?

How collaborative is the idea of utopia?

How autonomous is utopia?

What comes next?

Where is utopia?

Pt. 2 Technology is not Solid

What sustains an interest in making images, when images are endlessly scrollable and forgotten?

When globalization has given us endless refuse, how can reusing and repurposing be an artistic or political project?

What new tools are available, and what do they help build?

What is the role of making when so much is made?

How do new technologies adjust our imagination?

How do new technologies change our perception?

Are we merging with machine, and would that so bad?

Are we already cyborgs?

1. Attendance and active participation for every seminar session is mandatory. Participation means more than just showing up—it also means doing the required reading before you come to class, thinking about the texts, preparing your notes in advance, focusing on the readings, and actively engaging with our shared texts, conversations, criticism, and debates. We have a no-laptop/iPad/tablet/phone policy so that we are all engaged with each other rather than looking at screens.

Seminars run on conversation, and input from each student is crucial. Speak up, speak out, speculate, interrogate, fantasize, discuss: the class is a space for constructive, respectful debate. Don't be afraid to ask "obvious" questions—these can often spark new directions, and we are here to learn together. Solidarity is key.

More than one unexcused absence will result in a lowered grade. Tardiness, likewise, seriously damages the flow and pace of the course; excessive tardiness (coming to class late more than twice) will also result in a lowered grade.

2. Weekly Reports

Each week you will turn in summaries of that week's reading, no more than a total of 1.5 single-spaced, about a page in length. for each week's reading, identify:

a) What is the main question/problem engaged by the texts?

b) What is the main argument of the texts (try to keep this to two sentences) and, moreover, what is at stake for the author(s) in this argument?

c) You should end with a question provoked by the reading that is specific to the reading but that opens out into a discussion topic for the seminar.

d) Be experimental! Try and take the content of each week somewhere new, and don't limit the form your writing takes.

3. Focus Discussions

In groups of two, you will be responsible for preparing discussion for one of our class sessions – this will involve bringing in thoughts and ideas sparked by the assigned readings as well as two or three questions that will aid us further working through the week's topic. You could also think of an exercise for all of us to do, a video to watch, etc. You are expected to work with your partner in advance to come up with a game plan and be creative. Please mostly stick to the texts and material in our required readings — remember, your job is to help us as a class go over what we have read together and elucidate some of the more interesting points.

4. Individual Presentations

A few Wednesdays during the semester will be dedicated to presentations sharing the work of artists and thinkers outside of the syllabus. On one of these days, each of you will present a slideshow including a handful of materials that excite you. . This does not necessarily have to correspond to the texts, but rather it is an informal sharing of some exciting new materials. **Presentations will be held September 18th, October 9th, October 30, November 6th**

5. Final papers

Each student will undergo a final paper that thinks with an artistic practice that has utopic ambition. The art practice doesn't necessarily have to be explicit in its utopic ambitions, but it should maintain a future-leaning ambition that sees possibility and a different horizon.

A one-paragraph prospectus for your final project will be due October 16th. First Draft will be due November 13th. The final papers, which will be due the last day of class, should be about eight to ten double-spaced pages in length.

There will be at least two individual meetings to discuss the prospectus and/or final paper with the instructor. We will arrange meetings throughout the semester, on an ongoing basis.

Schedule

Important: This class will be conducted in two parts: a **Monday** lecture/seminar session and a **Wednesday** workshop session reserved for screenings, writing, reading, and roundtable discussions. We will be meeting *every Wednesday* even if not specified as such on the syllabus below. **Please pay careful attention to in-class and email announcements regarding the weekly schedule.**

Workshops: Workshops (to be held on Wednesdays as announced) will focus on the exchange/discussion of research ideas and their development in writing. True to the topic of this course, much of this labor will be collective in small groups and/or with the instructor. Here as well, the practice of solidarity is key—come prepared to work.

Mon, August 26

Introduction

Sign up for focus discussions
Sign up for individual presentations

Prelude: Art Education & Radical Pedagogy

Wed, August 28

Screening of “A Bugs Life” directed by John Lasseter (1998)

Mon, September 2

No Class, Labor day!

Wed, September 4

Seminar 1: Radical Pedagogy

1. Fred Moten & Stefano Harney, “The University and the Undercommons” in *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* 25-30
2. Jacques Ranciere, “Intellectual Adventure” in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 1-11

3. Elia Rita, "Don't Look the Other Way: Escuela de Arte util," in *Art Practical* 1-3
4. Creative writing approach excerpt: selection from *The Hundreds*, Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart

Part 1: A Few Utopias

- Mon, September 9** **Seminar 2: Introducing Utopia (Last Day to drop Class)**
1. Ernst Bloch, selections from *Principle of Hope* 195-205
 2. David M Bell, "Art's Utopian Function" from *Nomadic Utopianism blog* 1-11
 3. Creative writing approach excerpt: selection from *Bluets*, Maggie Nelson
 4. Recommended: Ernst Bloch, selections from *Principle of Hope* 210-217
- Wed, September 11 Screening: "Fantastic Mr. Fox" directed by Wes Anderson
- Mon, September 16** **Seminar 3: Queer Utopia and Revolting Animation**
1. Jack Halberstam, "Animating Failure: Ending Fleeing Surviving" in *Queer Art of Failure* 174-187
 2. José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: Feeling Utopian" in *Cruising Utopia* 1-10
 3. Creative writing approach excerpt: selection of poems by Mel Elberg
- Wed, September 18 Individual Presentations
- Mon, September 23** **Seminar 4: Futurists & Speed Utopia & Whose Time is it Anyway?**
1. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "The founding Manifesto of Futurism" in *Futurism An Anthology* 49-54
 2. Antonio Sant' Elia, "Futurist Architecture" in *Futurism: An Anthology* 198-202
 3. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "Railway Space and Railway Time" in *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* 33-44
 4. Creative writing approach excerpt: selection from *Ordinary Affects* by Kathleen Stewart
- Wed, September 25 Introduction about prospectus
Discussion about writing around art
- Mon, September 30** **Seminar 5: Situationists & Pirate Utopias**
***Guest Speaker will lead this class**
1. Guy Debord, "Theory of the Derive"
 2. Constant Nieuwenhuys, "New Babylon" in *Ulrich Conrads, ed., Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* 177-179
 3. Constant/Debord, "Situationist definitions" in *Ulrich Conrads, ed., Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture* 161-162
 4. Hakim Bey, "Pirate Utopias" and "Waiting for the Revolution" in *Temporary Autonomous Zones* 123-130
- Wed, October 2 Screening: The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto, Martine Syms 2015
- Mon, October 7** **Seminar 6: Afrofuturism & Utopia**
1. Ytasha Womack, "A Human Fairytale Named Black" in *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* 25-38
 2. "Kerry James Marshall talks about Rhythm Mastr" *Artforum* (Summer 2000) 148-149

3. WEB Dubois, “Double Consciousness” in *The Visual Studies Reader* 124-125
4. Creative writing approach excerpt: WEB Dubois, “The Comet”

Wed, October 9 Individual Presentations
 Individual meetings about prospectus

Mon, October 14 **Seminar 7: Anti Work + Feminism as Utopia**

1. Kathi Weeks, “Marxism, Productivism, and the Refusal of Work” in *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, and Anti Work Politics* 96-101
2. Kathi Weeks, “The Not Yet Consciousness” in *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, and Anti Work Politics* 190-193
3. Paul LaFargue, “Preface & A Pernicious Dogma” in *The Right To Be Lazy* 3-8
4. Creative writing approach excerpt: selections from *Dear Angel of Death* by Simone White
5. Nap Ministry, ‘about’ section on their website
6. Maria Eichorn, ‘press release’ for *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*

Wed, October 16 Prospectus Due
 Peer editing

Part 2: Technology is not Solid

Mon, October 21 **Seminar 8: Introducing Technology (Mechanical Reproduction)**

1. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations* 1-20
2. Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, October 23 loose sharing of our research topics and final paper
 *please bring preliminary research and thinking for your final paper to share with the class

Mon, October 28 **Seminar 9: Constructivism**

1. Christina Kiaer, “Boris Aratov’s Socialist Object” in *October* 105-118
2. Manifesto of the Working Group of Constructivists 170-173
3. John Elderfield, “Constructivism and the Objective World” 73-79
4. Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, October 30 Individual Presentations

Mon, November 4 **Seminar 10: Cyborgs, and Ghosts**

1. Donna Haraway, “An Ironic Dream of a Common Language for Women in the Integrated Circuit” in *The Cyborg Manifesto* 1-10
2. Jan Verwoert, “Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art” in *Art&Research A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1-7
3. Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, November 6 Individual Presentations (Mierl Ukeles)

Mon, November 11 **Seminar 11: Bad Images and Soft Grids**

1. Hito Steyerl, “Defense of the Poor Image” (e-flux Inc. 2012) 31-45

2. Marisa Olson, "The Rhetoric of Soft Tools" in *The Emergence of Video Processing Tools*
Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, November 13
First Draft Due
Peer editing

Mon, November 18
Seminar 12: Repairing Broken Worlds after Mass Product(ion)
(Around the work of Abraham Cruzvillegas)
1. Robin Adele Greeley, "The Logic of Disorder: The Sculptural Materialism of Abraham Cruzvillegas" in *October* 78-90
2. Steven Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" 221-226
3. Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, November 20
Screening of *Vertigo Sea* by John Akomfrah

Mon, November 25
No Class, Turkey Week!

Wed, November 27
No Class, Turkey Week!

Mon, December 2
Seminar 13: Repairing Broken Worlds after Mass Migration
(Around the work of John Akomfrah)
1. John Akomfrah, "Interview" in *Artforum*
2. Nora Alter, "Waves of Migration: The Recent Work of John Akomfrah" in *Artforum*
3. TJ Demos, "Feeding the Ghost: John Akomfrah's *Vertigo Sea*" in *John Akomfrah: Signs of Empire, Ballard and Kopel* 76-81
4. Creative writing approach excerpt: TBD

Wed, December 4
Work on paper **in class** today
*Final questions, collaborative help, assistance

Mon, December 9
Papers Due, Last Day of Class