

W. J. T. Mitchell: Theories of Media
English 12800/32800 Art Hist 25900/35900
Winter 2002
CWAC 157

Lectures: Mon/Wed 1:30-2:50
Discussion: Fridays at 12:30, Wednesdays at 3:30
Screenings and Performances: Tuesdays, 7-9 PM

This course will explore the concept of media and mediation in very broad terms, looking not only at modern technical media and mass media, but at the very idea of a medium as a means of communication, a set of institutional practices, and a "habitat" in which images proliferate and take on a "life of their own." The course will deal as much with ancient as with modern media, with writing, sculpture, and painting as well as television and virtual reality. Readings will include classic texts such as Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Cratylus, Aristotle's Poetics, and modern texts such as Marshall McLuhan's Understanding Media, Regis Debray's Media Manifestos, and Friedrich Kittler's Gramophone, Film, Typewriter. We will explore questions such as the following: What is a medium? What is the relation of technology to media? How do media affect, simulate, and stimulate sensory experiences? What sense can we make of concepts such as the "unmediated" or "immediate"? How do media become intelligible and concrete in the form of "metapictures" or exemplary instances, as when a medium reflects on itself (films about films, paintings about painting)? Is there a system of media? How do we tell one medium from another, and how do they become "mixed" in hybrid, intermedial formations? We will also look at recent films such as The Matrix and Existenz that project fantasies of a world of total mediation and hyperreality. Students will be expected to do one "show and tell" presentation introducing a specific medium. There will also be several short writing exercises, a midterm exam, and a final paper. PQ: Any 100-level ArtH or COVA course, or consent of instructor.