New York University
Department of Media, Culture, and Communication
The Digital and the Analog
(Special Topics in Critical Theory -- MCC-GE 3010)

SPRING 2023

Professor Alexander R. Galloway　　　　　　Time: Weds 2pm - 4:50pm
galloway@nyu.edu　　　　　　　　　　　　Location: East Building, Room 741
Office Hours: Tu 3:30pm-5; Wed 10am-12pm

Digital and analog, what do these terms mean today? One common response to the question of the digital is to avoid definition, and instead make reference to things like software, hardware, or computers in general. The analog is also difficult to define, with attempts at definition often consisting of mere denotations of things: sound waves, the phonograph needle, magnetic tape, a sundial. In this doctoral seminar we will define the digital and the analog explicitly, not merely by reference to actually existing media technologies, but also, and perhaps more importantly, through encounters with theory and philosophy. If digital and analog describe media artifacts, they are also modes of thinking and being, with the digital closely aligned with rationalism, logic, and politics, while the analog with empiricism, aesthetics, and ethics. From Sigmund Freud's "mystic writing pad," to Friedrich Kittler's Linux computer, to Catherine Malabou's neural net, the course is structured around a series of encounters between thinkers and the media objects through which they think. Themes in the course include analogicity, digitality, the logical, the illogical, interfaces, cybernetics, psychoanalysis, geometry, and arithmetic. Readings are drawn from the work of Friedrich Kittler, Sarah Kofman, Catherine Malabou, Brian Massumi, Katherine McKittrick, Hito Steyerl, McKenzie Wark, and others.

Schedule

Jan 25 -- Course Introduction

Feb 1 -- Anthony Wilden's Analog & Digital
Anthony Wilden, "Analog and Digital Communication" (PDF).
Vincent Hollier, "Analog and Digital" (PDF).
Calvin Warren, "The Catastrophe: Black Feminist Poethics, (Anti)form, and Mathematical Nihilism" (PDF).

Feb 8 -- Sarah Kofman's *Camera Obscura* I
Karl Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret" (PDF).
Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura*, chapter 1.
Kaja Silverman, "Introduction" [from *The Miracle of Analogy*] (PDF).
Brian Massumi, "On the Superiority of the Analog" (PDF).

Feb 15 -- Sarah Kofman's *Camera Obscura* II
Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (PDF).
Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura*, chapters 2 and 4.
Jacques Lacan, "Psychoanalysis and cybernetics, or on the nature of language" (PDF).
Lydia Liu, "The Cybernetic Unconscious: Rethinking Lacan, Poe, and French Theory" (PDF).

Feb 22 -- Friedrich Kittler's Computer I
Midterm paper topics given out today.
Friedrich Kittler, "A World of the Symbolic--A World of the Machine" (PDF).
Friedrich Kittler, "There Is No Software" (PDF).
Sarah Pourciau, "On the Digital Ocean" (PDF).

Mar 1 -- Friedrich Kittler's Computer II
Friedrich Kittler, "Computer Graphics: A Semi Technical Introduction" (PDF).
Mark Marino, "Kittler's Code" (PDF).
Bernhard Siegert, "Coding as Cultural Technique: On the Emergence of the Digital from Writing AC" (PDF).

Mar 8 -- Midterm paper writing workshop

Friday, Mar 10, 5pm
Midterm papers due.

Mar 15 -- Spring Break

Mar 22 -- Katherine McKittrick's Algorithm I
Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (first half).
Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Queerying Homophily" (PDF).

Mar 29 -- Katherine McKittrick's Algorithm II
Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (second half).
Kevin Quashie, "To be One" (PDF).

Apr 5 -- McKenzie Wark's Vector
McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto*.

Apr 12 -- Catherine Malabou's AI
Final paper topics given out today.
Catherine Malabou, *Morphing Intelligence*.

Apr 19 -- Brian Massumi's Blockchain
Brian Massumi, *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value*.

Apr 26 -- Hito Steyerl's .MOV File
Hito Steyerl, "How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File" (video).
Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (PDF).
Hito Steyerl, "The Spam of the Earth: Withdrawal from Representation" (PDF).
Aria Dean, "On the Black Generic" (PDF).

May 3 -- Final paper writing workshop

Monday, May 8, 5pm
Final papers due.

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Books & Readings
The syllabus contains articles, books, and one video. The articles and video will be distributed electronically. Students should also obtain the following books:

1. Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*, trans. Will Straw (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998).
2. Catherine Malabou, *Morphing Intelligence: From IQ Measurement to Artificial Brains*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).
3. Brian Massumi, *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).
4. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
5. McKenzie Wark, *A Hacker Manifesto* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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Course Requirements

Reading -- Students are expected to read the assigned texts in advance of class and participate in seminar discussion.

Discussion Leaders -- Students are required to act as a discussion leader for two different weeks during the semester.

Writing -- Students are required to write 20 pages total for the semester, split between a midterm paper and a final paper. Papers should adhere to standard format (12 point font, double spaced, one inch margins, no spaces between paragraphs, etc.) and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*. All writing should demonstrate a close reading of the required materials and exhibit a method of critical analysis. Paper topics will entail researching one of the technical objects from the syllabus, including the *camera obscura*, the mystic writing pad, random numbers, source code, ray tracing, clustering algorithms, vectors, neural nets, blockchain, and compression.