

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Division of Arts and Machine Creativity (AMC)

AMCC5410, in Fall 2026/27

Course code: AMCC5410 (3 credits)

Course title:

Abbreviated title:

Course instructor: Dr. Vennes Cheng

Target students: MA/Mphil/PhD

Class quota: 35

Grading requirement: Letter grades

Course description:

Taking a survey approach and employing a semi-seminar format, this course examines a range of theories on appreciating and critiquing art and art-making, from Plato to contemporary posthumanism thinkers. The course aims to trace intellectual connections between historical understandings of humanity and science, and today's technological conditions. Students will be guided to think critically and to develop the capacity to apply these theories to future projects related to machine creativity in the age of AI in the 21st century.

Enrolment requirement: N.A.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of major developments in art theory, tracing key ideas from classical Greek philosophy to contemporary thought, and articulating the connections between these periods.
2. Analyse the social, cultural, and intellectual contexts that have shaped the evolution of art theories, with particular attention to humanist and post-humanist perspectives.
3. Critically interpret and analyse visuality and its underlying creative frameworks in works of art.
4. Apply alternative and innovative perspectives to creative and curatorial projects, demonstrating original thinking in both art-making and exhibition practices.

Teaching and learning activities:

Students will be expected to:

1. Attend lectures and participate in classroom presentations and discussions to develop arguments and deepen their understanding of theories.
2. Analyse examples and texts from art and visual culture, focusing on the concepts, politics, and aesthetics of the theories covered in the course.

3. Complete in-class and take-home assignments to explore the power dynamics, ideologies, and ethical considerations that characterise human–nonhuman relations.
4. Produce research essays to develop skills in scholarly writing and critical thinking in relation to art theories.

Planned Assessment & Weightings:

Type of Assessment Methods	Weighting	Related LQ	Description of Assessment Tasks
80% or above Attendance	10%	NA	NA
In class group presentation and interaction	10%	1,2	Active class participation and interactions (5%); Presentation on selected topics (5%)
Mid-term reflective essay writing	30%	1,2,3	Critical responses to questions that assess students' knowledge about the theories and their ability to apply them to interpret cultural texts and real-world examples
Final paper outline Submission	10%	All	
Final research paper	40%	All	A research essay on a selected topic that tests students' ability to make arguments, support arguments with concrete examples, express the contemporary relevance and form judgement on the theories that are covered in the course.

Weekly Course Outline

Week	Description	Essential Reading	Presentation topic	Indicate which course ILOs this topic is related to (Write CILO-1, CILO-2, etc.)

1	Introduction to the course. Exploration of ancient Greek concepts of 'techne' (craft) and 'poiesis' (bringing forth), establishing the foundational relationship between human creation, technology, and nature.	Plato: <i>The Republic</i> (Book X), <i>Timaeus</i> (28a–30c), <i>Ion</i> (533d–536d); Aristotle: <i>Physics</i> (Bk II, Ch 1, 8), <i>Poetics</i> (Ch 1–4, 6).	NA	1,2
2	Cultural/scientific revolutions systematizing art theory. 17th-century Academies, Enlightenment philosophy (Kant) vs. the "machine," and aesthetic challenges in automated production.	Kant: <i>Critique of Judgment</i> (Select), <i>The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World</i>, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> (Categories); Yuk Hui: <i>Kant and the Machine</i>.	NA	1,2
3	Modernity and 19th-century art criticism via Hegel. Contextualizing shifts within the Industrial Revolution, mechanization, and photography's impact on the artist's role.	Hegel: <i>Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics</i> (Intro); Baudelaire: <i>The Painter of Modern Life</i>; Butler: <i>Erewhon</i> (Ch: "Book of the Machines"); Nietzsche: <i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>.	Ernst Kapp Organ Projection Hegal Chapter IV.A&B: "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondship" P.102-135 Chapter V.A.a: "Observing Reason: Observation of Nature and Organic Form" p.136-147	1,2

4	Guest workshop: AI Bias (1.5 hours) By Keith Lam and team		Bernard Stielger <i>Time and Technic</i> Part 1: SS3 Who invent human Part 2: The Fault of Epimetheus	3,4
5	20th-century aesthetics; phenomenological analysis (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) on technological mediation of perception and early media theory (technology as sensory extension).	Heidegger: <i>The Question Concerning Technology</i> ; Merleau-Ponty: <i>Phenomenology of Perception</i> (Excerpt); McLuhan: <i>Understanding Media</i> (Ch 1).	Carl Mitcham Thinking Through Technology: The Path Between Engineering and Philosophy Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. Phenomenology of Perception	1,2
6	Psychoanalysis and its influence on early 20th-century art/theory (Freud, Lacan). Exploring frameworks for mind, dreams, and desire in relation to Surrealism.	Freud: "The Uncanny"; Lacan: "The Mirror Stage"; Breton: <i>Manifesto of Surrealism</i> (1924).	Freud : Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)	1,2
7	Mid-Term Test & Submission of one-page essay outline.	N/A	N/A	3,4
8	The Frankfurt School's critique of the intersection of capitalism, technology, and culture; the loss of the "aura" and	Benjamin: "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; Marx: <i>Capital, Vol I</i> ("Fetishism of	Marx: Machinery and Large Scale Industry Horkheimer	1,2,3

	critique of digital cultural consumption.	Commodities"); Adorno & Horkheimer: "The Culture Industry".		
9	Structuralism and post-structuralism are applied to technology. Foucault's Panopticism applied to surveillance, digital data, and biased algorithms.	Foucault: <i>Discipline and Punish</i> ("Panopticism"); Noble: <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> (Excerpt).	Foucault: Discipline and Punishment, Chapter 3/ Part 3 Feenberg Between Reason and Experience: Essays in Technology and Modernity (MIT Press, 2010), Feenberg gathers key essays that articulate his central concept of Democratic Rationalization.	1,2,3
10	Postmodern interrogation of representation, originality, and absolute meaning; the instability of signs and the role of simulacra in digital/virtual art.	Lyotard: <i>The Postmodern Condition</i> ; Baudrillard: <i>Simulacra and Simulation</i> ("Precession of Simulacra"); Krauss: <i>The Originality of the Avant-Garde</i> .	Jean Baudrillard: Simulacra and Simulation (1981) — Focus on Chapter 1: "The Precession of Simulacra" Jacques Derrida: "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (1966) OR Excerpts from Of Grammatology (1967) on Différance and the trace.	1,2,3

11	Dismantling human/machine binaries. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and feminist "cyborg" perspectives challenging gender norms and human-robot ethics.	Haraway: "A Cyborg Manifesto"; Latour: <i>Reassembling the Social</i> (pp 1–17); Case studies on household/sex robots. Braidotti: <i>The Posthuman</i> (Ch 1);	Kathleen Richardson 'The Asymmetrical Relationship: Parallels between prostitution and the Development of Sex Robots'	1,2,3
12	TA presentation (30') Guest Lecture: Art and Curating in the age of posthuman/cyborg (Tentative: Sunny Cheung, M+ Curator)	N/A	N/A	3,4
13	How technology redefines the human body and artistic practice. enhancement, bio-art, and genetic modification alongside generative AI, machine vision, and automated curation to interrogate the ethical limits of technological augmentation and the shift toward human-machine co-creation in contemporary art.	Manovich: <i>The Language of New Media</i> (Ch 1, 5); Vint: <i>After the Human</i> ; Stelarc: <i>The Body is Obsolete</i> ; Case studies on CRISPR/gene editing. Zylinska: <i>AI Art: Machine Visions and Warped Dreams</i> .	Zylinska: AI Art: Machine Visions and Warped Dreams. p.65-137	1,2,3

Student learning resources:

Essential reference

1. Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott, 94–136. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002.
2. Aristotle. *Physics*. Translated by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. Book II, Chapters 1 and 8.
3. Aristotle. *Poetics*. Translated by S. H. Butcher. Chapters 1–4 and 6.
4. Baudelaire, Charles. *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Translated and edited by Jonathan Mayne. London: Phaidon Press, 1964.
5. Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
6. Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn, 217–252. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
7. Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.
8. Breton, André. *Manifestoes of Surrealism*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.
9. Butler, Samuel. *Erewhon*. London: Trübner & Co., 1872. (Specifically: "The Book of the Machines").
10. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977. (Specifically: "Panopticism").
11. Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny'." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919)*, translated and edited by James Strachey, 217–256. London: Hogarth Press, 1955.
12. Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto." In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 149–181. New York: Routledge, 1991.
13. Hegel, G.W.F. *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by Bernard Bosanquet. Edited by Michael Inwood. London: Penguin Books, 1993.
14. Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
15. Hui, Yuk. *Kant and the Machine: Critical Philosophy after AI*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2026.
16. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

17. Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
18. Kant, Immanuel. *The Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World*. 1770.
19. Krauss, Rosalind E. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985.
20. Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I." In *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, 75–81. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
21. Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
22. Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
23. Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.
24. Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. London: Penguin Books, 1976.
25. McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994.
26. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012.
27. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
28. Noble, Safiya Umoja. *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York: New York University Press, 2018.
29. Plato. *Ion*. Translated by Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper, 937–949. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.
30. Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett.
31. Plato. *Timaeus*. Translated by Donald A. Zeyl. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.
32. Vint, Sherryl, ed. *After the Human: Culture, Theory and Criticism in the 21st Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.
33. Zylinska, Joanna. *AI Art: Machine Visions and Warped Dreams*. London: Open Humanities Press, 2020.