

Media Theory by Artists (expanded version)

Fall 2026 Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Zach Blas

Visual Studies, Daniels Faculty, University of Toronto

Tuesdays, 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM

In Person: DA 315

Since the birth of the world wide web and the advent of “new media theory” in the 1990s, artists have consistently written some of the most important and ground-breaking works in media theory to date. This seminar focuses solely on media theory written by artists, attending to the experimental and conceptually adventurous ways in which they craft theory. As relations between theory and practice in contemporary media studies have increasingly become dominated and restricted by neoliberal institutionalization, this seminar offers an alternate history and trajectory—promiscuous with form, brazen in politics, unabashed in desire—of ways that electronic and digital media can be theorized within and beyond the university.

Week 1

Cyberfeminism, Xenofeminism

VNS Matrix, “A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century” (1991)

VNS Matrix, “Bitch Mutant Manifesto” (1996)

Old Boys Network, “100 Anti-Theses of Cyberfeminism” (1997)

Laboria Cuboniks, “Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation” (2015)

Week 2

Critical Art Ensemble: Electronic Disturbance

Critical Art Ensemble, *The Electronic Disturbance* (Autonomedia, 1994)

Week 3

Kodwo Eshun: Sonic Fiction and Black Atlantic Futurism

Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (Quartet Books, 1998)

Week 4

Hito Steyerl: From *Wretched of the Screen* to *Medium Hot*

Hito Steyerl, *Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press & e-flux, 2012, selections)

Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War* (Verso, 2019, selections)

Hito Steyerl, *Medium Hot: Images in the Age of Heat* (Verso, 2025, selections)

Week 5

micha cárdenas: Trans Media Theory

micha cárdenas, *The Transreal: Political Aesthetics of Crossing Realities* (Atropos Press, 2011, selections)

micha cárdenas, *Poetic Operations: Trans of Color Art in Digital Media* (Duke University Press, 2021, selections)

Week 6

Aria Dean: On Blacceleration and Memes

Aria Dean, *Bad Infinity: Selected Writings* (Sternberg Press, 2023, selections)

Week 7

Laila Shereen Sakr: Arabic Glitch

Laila Shereen Sakr, *Arabic Glitch: Technoculture, Data Bodies, and Archives* (Stanford University Press, 2023)

Week 8

Trevor Paglen: Artificial Intelligence and Visual Culture

Trevor Paglen, *How to See Like a Machine: Images After AI* (Verso, 2026)

Week 9

James Bridle: More-than-Human Intelligence

James Bridle, *Ways of Being: Animals, Plants, Machines: The Search for a Planetary Intelligence* (Allen Lane, 2022)

Week 10

Gary Zhexi Zhang: Catastrophe Time!

Gary Zhexi Zhang, ed., *Catastrophe Time!* (Strange Attractor Press, 2023, selections)

- Gary Zhexi Zhang, “Catastrophe Time!”
- Basyma Saad, “Contingent Sentiment”
- Bahar Noorizadeh, “The Great Illiquidity”
- Kei Kreutler, “Mediums of Memory”
- Diann Bauer and Suhail Malik, “Xenotemporality and Time-Complexes: Recomposing Time for Non-Experiential Risks”

Week 11

Jordan Crandall: A Theory-Fiction of Superintelligence

Jordan Crandall, *Autodrive* (Goldsmiths Press, 2023)

Week 12

Marek Poliks & Roberto Alonso Trillo: Exocapitalism

Marek Poliks & Roberto Alonso Trillo, *Exocapitalism: Economies with Absolutely No Limits* (Becoming Press, 2025)

Week 13

Metahaven: Art, Perception, and Technology

Metahaven, *The Hard Question of Art: Cognitive Futures* (Verso, 2026)