Communism and the Cold War: Legacies for Visual and Cultural Studies

Thursday 2-4.10, 194 Mercer room 202

Convener: Nicholas Mirzoeff (nm45[at]nyu.edu)
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Office hours: Weds 12-2

This class asks: what do we need to know of communism and the Cold War in a present in which the President is denounced as a Communist, while the idea of communism is newly being discussed? For most people under 35, these subjects are shadowy memories at best. Can there be a communism that is not haunted by Stalin’s parodic Communism? What is forgotten but not gone from the period (1945-1990)? How should visual and cultural studies negotiate their own Cold War and Communist legacies and perhaps futures? This class explores this history of the present, with particular regard to visuality in film, art and performance. While this is not a “history” class, it is centrally concerned with how ideas of history shape and form that which we call “culture.” Each participant will therefore undertake a research project (format open) using materials in the Tamiment Library (or elsewhere if preferred) and will present the results in a mini-conference at the end of the semester.

Requirements
Attendance (10%), participation measured by posts to class wiki (20%) and presentation to class (20%), final project (50%).

This is a class designed to collectively produce a sense of what histories we need to interpret, analyze and define the present; attendance, reading and participation are therefore key. The assignment is not a formal research paper but rather a project for a 15-minute presentation to be delivered at a collective conference at the end of the semester. The format and topic are open and it is therefore a major part of the assignment to decide upon these (see due dates below). The hope is that participants can then revise their presentations and deliver them at formal conferences.

Required Books

Akira Mizuwa Lippit, *Atomic Light*
Don Delillo, *Underworld*
Slavoj Zizek (ed.), *The Idea of Communism*
Other readings at the wiki: https://wikis.nyu.edu/display/communism/home

Meetings
1. Jan. 30 Introductions

2. Feb. 3 The Common

Select and prepare to present an extract or image from:

Readings:
For the text: [http://www.bilderberg.org/land/lawofree.htm](http://www.bilderberg.org/land/lawofree.htm)
You can download the text from here, follow the instructions.

Follow up in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (1973)

William Blake *America: A Prophecy* (1793)
Text widely available but be sure to also look at the illustrated version

Follow up: WJT Mitchell and Saree Makdisi in Norton Critical Edition of Blake [PDF on wiki]

3. Feb. 10 Communism

Select and prepare to present an extract from:

Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/)
Lenin, *What Is to be Done*, chapters one and two
*The State and Revolution* (1917), chapters one and two
Jacques Derrida, from *Specters of Marx*, i-29
Susan Buck-Morss, “The Second Time as Farce...Historical Pragmatics and the Untimely Present” [IOC](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/)

4. Feb. 17 Visit to Tamiment Library, with curator Michael Nash: a wide range of visual and other materials will be made available for you to look at. Bring pencils or laptops—no ink.

**Individual presentations begin**: we will volunteer from here on: there are seven meetings with readings, everyone should help present at least twice.
5. Feb. 24 Cold War Worlds and the Military-Industrial Complex

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Farewell Address” [online]
Serge Gruzinsky, (from) *Image Wars: 1492 to Bladerunner*
Viewing: *Blade Runner* director’s cut

6. Mar. 3
Cold War Cinema: The Military-Industrial-Entertainment Complex

Viewing: (at least two of) *Invasion of the Body Snatchers, The Manchurian Candidate, The Third Man, Dr Strangelove, The Spy Who Came in From the Cold, The Russians Are Coming The Russians Are Coming*; or other Cold War cinema that you specify

Reading: Susan Sontag, “The Imagination of Disaster”
       James der Derian, “Virtuous War/Virtual Theory”

March 10: no meeting: SCMS

March 17: Spring Break

**Project Proposal due on or before March 21**

7. March 24
Atomic Visuality

Reading: Akira Mazda Lippit, *Atomic Light*
       Eva Cockcroft: “Abstract Expressionism: Weapon of the Cold War”
       Viewing: Sankai Juku, Butoh performances (YouTube); AbEx @ MoMA

8. March 31
Underworlds

Reading: Don Delillo, *Underworld*
       Tom Vanderbilt (from), *Survival City: Adventures among the Ruins of Atomic America*
       Joseph Masco, “Survival is Your Business: Engineering Nuclear Ruins in America”
       Viewing: *Pan’s Labyrinth*
9. April 7
Imag(in)ing the Wall and Ostalgie

Sunil Manghani (from), *Image Critique and the Fall of the Berlin Wall*
http://www.ressler.at/socialism_failed/

10. April 14
The Cold War and Cultural Studies

Reading: Raphael Samuel (from), *The Lost Worlds of British Communism*
CPHG, “The Class Struggle in Local Affairs,” 1956
Raymond Williams, (from), *Culture and Society* 1956
Angela Y. Davis and Cassandra Shaylor, "Race, Gender, and the Prison Industrial Complex: California and Beyond", *Meridians* (2001)

11. April 21
1968 and After: Decolonization and the Cold War
Kristin Ross, (from) *May 68 and its Afterlives*
Viewing, Godard *La Chinoise* (1968)

14. April 28 Conference presentations part one

15. May 5 Conference Presentations part two [alternative: consecutive meetings on a weekend day]