media in literature
studying media history and theory through poetry and prose

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If we listen to the space between Emily Dickinson’s words, we can hear a telegraph clicking. Similarly, we hear a film projector rolling underneath Gravity’s Rainbow, while, down in DeLillo’s Underworld, televisions are blaring and cell phones are chirping. Thanks in large part to language and literary scholars such as Friedrich Kittler and Katherine Hayles, “the nexus of literature, media, and theory has become one of the most exciting topics of contemporary literary scholarship” (Menke 34). Working at the media/literature interface can challenge us to make connections between an era’s media landscape and the conventions and styles of its literary creations. By reading various works of literature in concert with literary historical and theoretical texts, and media historical and theoretical texts, we will assess how media landscapes and literary cultures are mutually constructed. We’ll focus on works by Laurence Sterne, Herman Melville, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, Jack Kerouac, William Gaddis, Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and John Barth, but we’ll also draw on historical and theoretical texts by a variety of media and literary scholars.

evaluation.

Attendance and Participation. 20%. You are permitted two excused absences. Any unexcused absences, and all absences in excess of two, will negatively impact your grade.

Reading Journal. 20%. On our class’s website, you can keep a multimedia record of your processes of engaging with the course material, and drawing connections to relevant outside texts, things, and experiences. You’re encouraged to post photos and audio clips and virtual trinkets – but please make sure to exercise the linguistic parts of your brain (i.e., write something!) in at least half of your submissions. Aim for at least 12 entries – that’s a little less than one per week – over the course of the semester, and aim for at least half of that 12 – or six – by the semester’s midpoint… just so you’re not playing catch-up at the end.

Application Exercise: 20%. By mid-semesters we will have identified myriad parallels between a particular media culture, or ecology, and the literature that culture produces. I now encourage you to think about some of those forces at play at the media/literature interface, and apply them to another realm of cultural creation. Think about what impact the telegraph might have had on pop music…or choreography…or painting. An Australian Creative Media Masters Student wrote a thesis examining the impact of the Internet on opera, and proposing an Internet opera: http://www.toysatellite.org/agarton/MA/project/report/proj_report.pdf. How might the mid-century television wave have inspired book jacket design? How might handheld devices be influencing typographers – or composition teachers? (See the prospectus for this upcoming book: http://www.u.arizona.edu/~kimmieha/goinggoingwireless.htm#changing.) Are motion graphics, or kinetic texts, filtering into other once-static textual realms? This assignment is intended to be a creative application – maybe even a case study of a single piece – but you are still expected to support your claims and, if possible, back them up with a little research. Your work can be presented in any form – as a six- to eight-page paper, on a website, in a multimedia production, etc. Due WEEK 9.
Final Project. 40%. This final project will give you the opportunity to delve deeply into a research area of personal interest. You should begin thinking about potential topics immediately—but you must make sure to email me a one-paragraph proposal before WEEK 11. The final project could be presented in a fifteen-page paper, or as a creative project with three-page accompanying text.

week 1. introductions.

week 2. oral culture and epic form.

Read for Class:

Discuss in Class:
• Walter J. Ong, Orality and Literacy (New York: Routledge, 2002).

week 3. the printed text.

Read for Class:
• Desiderus Erasmus, “Festina Lente” In The Adages of Erasmus (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
• Excerpts from Ludovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso, Guido Waldman, Trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Discuss in Class:
• David Quint, Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source (Yale University Press, 1983).
week 4.  finding the nexus of literature, media, and theory.
    precursors to hypertext.

Read for Class:

week 5.  early modern hypertext.

Read for Class:
  • Excerpts from Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759-1767).
  • Alfred, Lord Tennyson, In Memoriam (1850).

Discuss in Class:
  • David R. Hammontree, “Tristram Shandy in Hypertext”: http://www.english.ilstu.edu/students/drhammo/tristram/
  • Excerpts from George P. Landow, Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1997).

week 6.  the telegraph.

Read for Class:
  • Herman Melville, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street” (1853): http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/11231.
  • Henry James, “In the Cage” (1908): http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1144.
Discuss in Class:


week 7. the gramophone.

Read for Class:


Discuss in Class:


week 8. the typewriter.

Read for Class:

- Excerpts from e.e. cummings, Complete Poems, Ed., George James Firmage.
- Eugene Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, Robert Massin, Designer (Grove Press, 1982).

Discuss in Class:


week 9. the typewriter, cont’d.

Read for Class:
• Excerpts from James Joyce, Ulysses (1922): http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/ulyss12.txt.

Discuss in Class:

week 10. film.

Screen In Class: Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story

Read for Class:
• Excerpts from Jack Kerouac, Visions of Cody.
• Excerpts from William Gaddis, JR.

Discuss in Class:
week 11. “information multiplicity.”

Read for Class:


wks 12-14. “information multiplicity.”

As a class, we’ll consider the following options, plus any that you propose, and set our agenda for the next three weeks. Take a look here -- http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/index.html -- for some other ideas.

- John Barth, “Click”: http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/barth.htm
- Don Barthelme, ?
- William Burroughs, Naked Lunch
- Mark Danielewski, House of Leaves
- Don DeLillo, Libra, White Noise, Cosmopolis, or Underworld
- David Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest, Girl With Curious Hair, or Consider the Lobster
- Joseph McElroy, Lookout Cartridge
- Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49, Gravity’s Rainbow, or Vineland

week 15. texts both corporeal and virtual.

- Excerpts from N. Kathrine Hayles, Writing Machines (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002)
• Excerpts from N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

**supplemental reading:**