

ENGL W3986: Screen Reading

Spring 2014

Thursday, 4:10 - 6:00

Professor: Grant Wythoff

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Heyman Center 304

Office Hours: Wed, 10:30 - 12:00



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Description

From novels to newspapers, legal contracts to medical records, the past decade has seen a dramatic movement of readers from page to screen. For Sven Birkerts, screen reading is “a keyword-driven process, and the reader has to exert near constant mental counter-pressure – drive with his foot on the brakes, as it were.” Do we accept that a change in format can have such an effect on the ways we read? In order to better understand the “newness” of digital media, this advanced undergraduate seminar will examine reading practices from the invention of writing to Renaissance humanism to machine learning. How do technologies of the book – scrolling, bookmarking, page, index, tab, bookshelf – become metaphors in the digital age? Are there any traces of these original tools and techniques in their metaphorical afterlives? Finally, what new forms of knowledge are made possible by the so-called “distant reading” of digitized text? Each week, we will discuss key assertions in the history of the book that emphasize the materiality of literature in different ways: from the importance of the book as a unit of knowledge production to the instabilities of textuality across print, manuscript, and XML versions. With each of our writing assignments, we

will approach our screens not just as readers, but as writers who design texts with an eye toward particular modes of reading.

Policies and Assignments

Grade breakdown

- Attendance / participation / presentation: 20%
- Weekly writing exercises: 20%
- Essay project: 35%
- Final exam: 25%

Course components

Each student will give a **brief presentation** (of no more than 10 minutes) once during the semester to open up our readings to discussion. Your presentation can involve a close reading of a particular passage, a short activity, or a complication of one of the points made by our authors. You are not expected to present original research – if it feels like you’re writing a full-on essay in preparation, then you’re probably going too far. Think of the presentation as a way of communicating to the class your thought process as you went through the week’s readings. How did this text sync up with ideas from previous weeks, or with the overall themes of the course thus far? What were some particular moments you loved, or had a real problem with? In other words, you will lay out a series of guideposts and questions that will help orient us in the discussion to follow.

Each week, students will post 400-word **writing exercises** to the CourseWorks blog by classtime on Thursday. The default format for your piece should be a blog post that either a) links to a primary source ([defined](#) as a document that “provide[s] first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation”) related to the readings for the week, or b) an explanation, questioning, or complication of the week’s readings. More specific exercises may emerge throughout the course of the semester, about which there will be further instruction provided.

Your **essay project** will use one of a number of digital platforms we explore throughout the semester. You will be expected to not only compose an original argument or narrative, but to highlight and reflect critically on the affordances of the platform you choose. Further details to follow.

In order to help you focus your reading and to serve as a mnemonic device, I will provide key terms for each week of class. Your **final exam** will consist of a selection of these terms, which you will be asked to define. Please note that the definition I will request is not the dictionary definition of the term, but an

elucidation of the term as we have used it in the context of the class: in our discussions, in our readings, and in our project work. You will be expected to cite relevant authors (though not exact quotes or page numbers) as well as class discussions.

Laptop policy

Bring your laptop to class, every week. Practice good screen etiquette – keep it to the side and don’t stare too long.

Course texts

In keeping with the topic of the course, all readings will be provided in electronic versions. But in order to fully appreciate the variety of reading experiences we’ll be learning about throughout the semester, all readings listed below as “protected PDF” will be available in hard copy at Butler Library reserves. Similarly, I ask that you **buy any one** of the following books, each of which runs under \$15.

- Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*
- Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*
- Steven Fischer, *A History of Reading*
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*

Links

Online resources

- [Institute for the Future of the Book](#)
- [Electronic Literature Organization](#)
- [Future of the Book column](#) on *The Millions*
- [Futurebook](#) blog by *The Bookseller*
- Blogs
 - James Bridle’s [booktwo.org](#)
 - [Craig Mod](#)
 - Khol Vinh, [Subtraction](#)

Potential field trips around New York

- [Center for Book Arts](#), 28 West 27th St, NY
- [LeRoy Neiman Center for Print Studies](#), 310 Dodge Hall

- [Barnard Zine Library](#), 3009 Broadway
- [Singularity & Co.](#), 18 Bridge St, DUMBO Brooklyn

Schedule

January 23: Preliminaries

- Sven Birkerts, [“The Room and the Elephant”](#) (2011, web)
- Jaron Lanier, [Preface to *You Are Not a Gadget*](#) (2010, pdf)
- Stephen Ramsay, [“The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around; or, What You Do With a Million Books”](#) (2010, pdf)
- Craig Mod, [“Books in the Age of the iPad”](#) (2010, web)

January 30: The invention of writing coincides with the emergence of civilization.

- Denise Schmandt-Besserat, [How Writing Came About](#) (1997, protected pdf), pp. 1-85
- Lydia Liu, [“Writing”](#), in *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (2010, protected pdf)
- Steven Roger Fischer, [A History of Reading](#) (2003, protected pdf), pp. 11-98
 - “The Immortal Witness”
 - “The Papyrus Tongue”
- Mara Mills, [“What Should We Call Reading?”](#), *Flow TV* (2012, web)

Supplementary:

- Barry Powell, [Writing: History and Theory of the Technology of Civilization](#) (2012, protected pdf), pp. 1-18
- André Leroi-Gourhan, [“The Language of Prehominids,”](#) in *Gesture and Speech* (1965, protected pdf), p. 112-116

February 6: Western thought is the product of a paradigm shift from orality to literacy.

- Walter Ong, [Orality and Literacy](#) (1982, protected pdf), pp. 77-152
 - “Writing Restructures Consciousness”
 - “Print, Space and Closure”
 - “Oral Memory, The Story Line and Characterization”

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964, protected pdf), p. 3-21, 77-88
 - Introduction
 - The Medium is the Message
 - The Spoken Word: Flower of Evil?
 - The Written Word: An Eye for an Ear
- Friedrich Kittler, “The History of Communication Media,” *CTHEORY* (July 1996, web)
- Amaranth Borsuk, Jesper Juul and Nick Montfort, *The Deletionist* bookmarklet, “a concise system for automatically producing an erasure poem from any Web page.”

February 13: Books process, record, and transmit data.

- Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (1976, protected pdf), p. 8-108
 - Preface
 - 1. Preliminaries: The Introduction of Paper into Europe
 - 2. The Technical Problems and their Solution
 - 3. The Book: Its Visual Appearance
- Erin Reilly, Ritesh Mehta, Henry Jenkins, *Flows of Reading: Engaging With Texts*, a USC Scalar project

February 19: LAB 1: Annotation

A workshop on tools for organizing and annotating digital text, including Zotero, Calibre, Evernote, Delicious, Rap Genius, Goodreader, Skim, Annotation Studio (by MIT’s HyperStudio) Institute for the Future of the Book’s SocialBook, and Prism.

February 20: It took 200 years for libraries to shelve print & manuscript as separate entities.

- David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript, and the Search for Order, 1450-1830* (2003), p. 1-52
 - 1. The Printed Word and the Modern Bibliographer
 - 2. Dependent Skills
- Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (2000), pp. 1-57, 380-443

- 1. Introduction: The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book
- 6. The Physiology of Reading: Print and the Passions
- [Reading Experiences Database](#): the experience of reading in Britain, from 1450-1945

February 27: “How greatly this page here resembles a thousand other pages.”

- Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1992), 92pp
- Roger Chartier, “Texts, Printings, Readings,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Hunt (1989)
- Anthony Grafton, “Codex in Crisis: The Book Dematerializes”, in *Worlds Made By Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (2009), pp. 288-326.
- Assignment with [X-Ray Goggles](#) by [Mozilla Webmaker](#): remix and publish one website.

March 6: “They conveyed their thoughts to one another in an instant over cities or mountains.”

- Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (2009), pp. 1-18, 121-152, 235-245
 - Introduction: Bibliographic Subjects
 - 4. Sharing
 - In Place of an Afterword: Next to the Book
- Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator* (2007), pp. 21-75
 - 1. Income, Ideology, and Childhood Reading
 - 2. Pausing for Effect
- “[Future of the Book](#)” (2010), “[Zinio](#)” (2001), and Ideo’s design exploration of digital reading.
- [Readings on sharing ebooks]

March 12: LAB 2: Writing

A workshop on word processing, markup, and typesetting systems, including Pandoc, markdown, and Scrivener.

March 13:

- Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (2012)
 - [selections]
- Leah Price, *How to Do Things With Books in Victorian Britain* (2012). We'll annotate this on Institute for the Future of the Book's "SocialBook" platform.
- Leah Price, "You Are What You Read," *The New York Times*, Dec. 23, 2007.
- Michel de Certeau, "[Reading as Poaching](#)," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), pp. 166-175

March 17-23: Spring Break

March 27: Texts cannot be said to have fixed properties; they are always in flux.

- [Intro to textual studies]
- Jerome McGann, *Radiant Textuality: Literature After the World Wide Web* (2001), pp. 1-28, 137-166, 193-208
 - Introduction. Beginning Again: Humanities and Digital Culture, 1993-2000
 - 5. Rethinking Textuality
 - 7. Dialogue and Interpretation at the Interface of Man and Machine

Supplementary:

- Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the After-life of Tradition* (2011)

April 2: LAB 3: Interface

A workshop on the [Makey Makey](#) interface kit.

April 3: Media reconfigure the logic of the senses.

- Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (2009), pp. 1-24, 101-148, 191-248
 - Introduction: The Virtual Window

- 3. The Age of ‘Windows’
- 5. The Multiple
- Conclusion: The Future of Windows: Smart Glass, Streaming Portals, and Screenless Images
- Johanna Drucker, “Reading Interface,” *PMLA* (2013)
- Write an epistle with [Between Page and Screen](#)

April 10: Multitasking threatens attention span and the ability to sustain complex thought.

- N. Katherine Hayles, “Print is Flat, Code is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis,” *Poetics Today* (Spring 2004)
- Alexis Madrigal, [“Books on Paper Fight Analog Distractions”](#) (2012)
- Nicholas Carr, [“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”](#) (2008)
- Michael Cobb, “A Little Like Reading: Preference, Facebook, and Overwhelmed Interpretations,” *PMLA* (2013)
- Naomi S. Baron, “Redefining Reading: The Impact of Digital Communication Media” *PMLA* (2013)
- Betsy Sparrow, Jenny Liu, and Daniel M. Wegner, “Google Effects on Memory: Cognitive Consequences of Having Information at Our Fingertips,” *Science* (2011)

Supplementary:

- Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, *The Distraction Addiction: Getting the Information You Need and the Communication You Want, Without Enraging Your Family, Annoying Your Colleagues, and Destroying Your Soul* (2013)
- Chade Meng Tan, *Search Inside Yourself* (2012), by Google’s “happiness guru”

April 17: Reading takes place within feedback loops between old and new technologies.

- Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (2012)
- N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005), pp. 1-14, 89-116
 - Prologue: Computing Kin
 - 4. Translating Media
- James Bridle, [“How to See Through the Cloud”](#) (2013), a brief introduction to the physical structure of the web
- Roundup of [Implementing New Knowledge Environments](#) (INKE) projects from DH2012

April 24: There have been 129,864,880 books published, ever.

- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2007)
- D. Sculley and Bradley Pasanek, “Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for the Humanities,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* (2008)
- Robert Darnton, “[Google and the Future of Books](#),” *New York Review of Books* (2009)

Supplementary:

- Matthew K. Gold, ed., *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (2012)
- Jonathan Goodwin and John Holbo, *Reading Graphs, Maps, Trees: Critical Responses to Franco Moretti* (2011)

April 30: LAB 4: Collaboration

Experiments with notes taken throughout the term.

May 1: The book has become a “post-artifact,” platform independent medium.

[Readings still in process.]

- *Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. 2 (2011)
- The Newer York’s [Electric Encyclopedia of Experimental Literature](#)
- Craig Mod, “[Post-Artifact Books and Publishing](#)” (2011)
- Craig Mod, “[Platforming Books: Making Art Space Tokyo Digital](#)” (2012)
- Craig Mod, “[Embracing the Digital Book](#)” (2010)
- Tao Lin, *Taipei* (2013)
- Lutz Koepnick, “Reading on the Move,” *PMLA* (2013)
- Sonja Todd, “[My Latest Article is a PDF](#)”, *The Millions* (2013)
- [something on [Alt Lit](#)]
- **Show and Tell: Recent Artifactual Books** (I’ll bring copies of these in)

- Amaranth Claire Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Page and Screen* (2012)
 - Anne Carson and Gaius Valerius Catullus, *Nox* (2010)
 - Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (2006)
 - Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes* (2010)
 - Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts: A Novel* (2007)
 - B.S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates* (1969/2007)
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