

ENGL W3986: SCREEN READING

Spring 2014

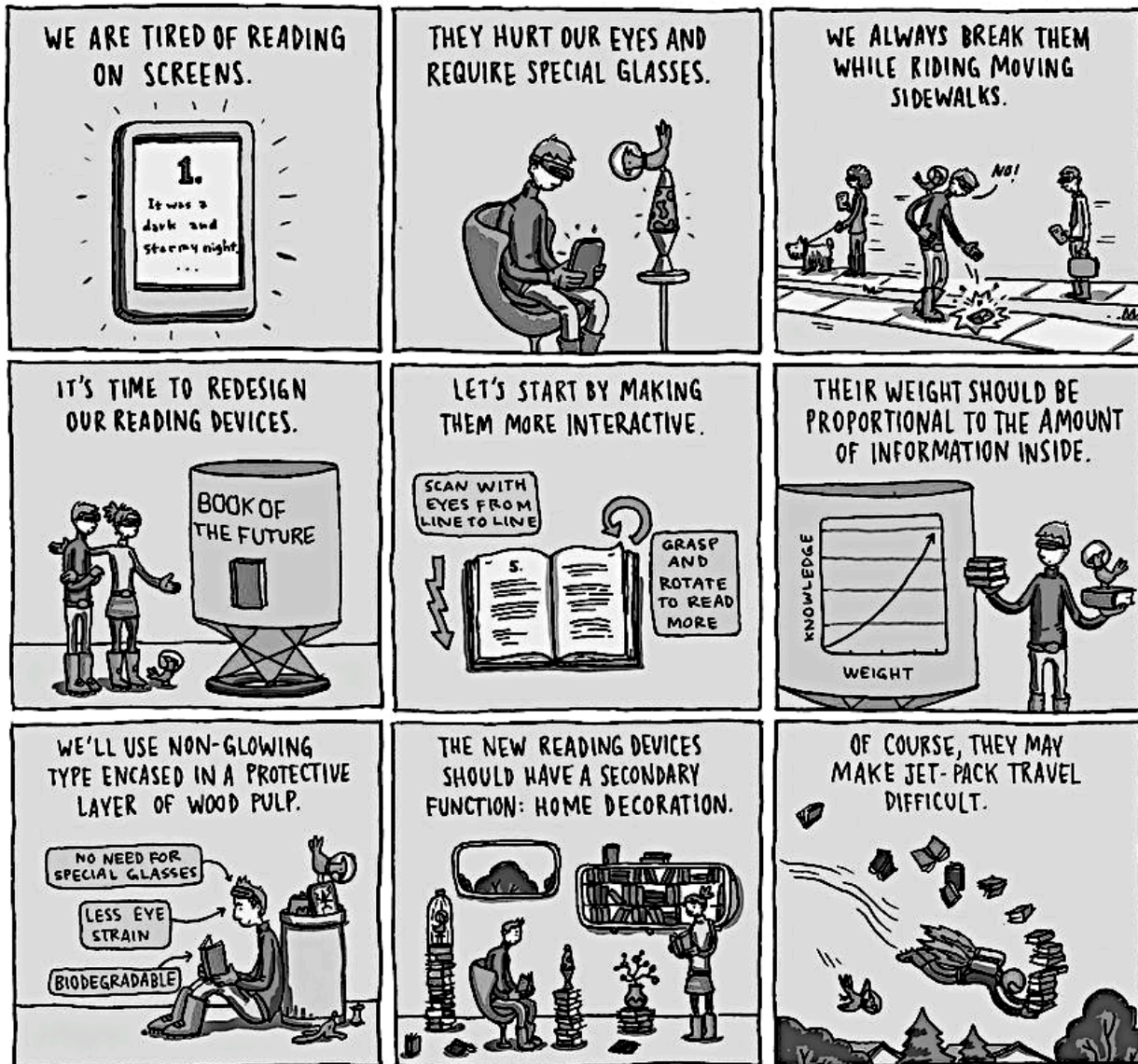
Thurs 4:10 - 6:00

Instructor: Grant Wythoff

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Heyman Center 304

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



Grant Snyder, "The Book of the Future," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2012

==== 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 practices of the book from Renaissance humanism to machine reading. How do technologies of literacy – 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.

==== Requirements ====

Attendance & participation (including one presentation): 20%

Weekly writing exercises: 20%

Midterm project: 20%

Final project: 40%

=== Provisional Schedule of Readings ===

Jan 23: Books process, record, and transmit data.

- Lucien Febvre & Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800* (1976)
“Preliminaries: The Introduction of Paper into Europe” through “The Book,” pp. 29-76
- Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” *Selected Writings* vol. 3 (1936/2002), pp. 143-166
- Friedrich Kittler, “The History of Communication Media,” *CTHEORY* (1996)

Jan 30: Western thought is the product of a paradigm shift from orality to literacy, pt. 1

- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964/1994)
“The Medium is the Message”; “The Spoken Word: Flower of Evil?”; “The Written Word: An Eye for an Ear”; “Roads and Paper Routes”, pp. 7-21, 77-105

Feb 6: Western thought is the product of a paradigm shift from orality to literacy, pt. 2

- Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (1982/2002)
“Print, Space and Closure”; “Oral Memory, The Story Line and Characterization” pp. 115-149
- Elspeth Jajdelska, *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator* (2007)
“The Birth of the Narrator,” pp. 166-194

Feb 13: 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)
- Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (2000)
Introduction; "Literary Life"; "Faust and the Pirates", pp. 1-186, 324-379

Feb 20: "They conveyed their thoughts to one another in an instant over cities or mountains."

- Gerard Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (2011)
Introduction; "The Philologist and the Epicurean", pp. 1-15, 78-119
- Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (2009)
Introduction; "Sharing", pp. 1-18, 121-152

Feb 27: "How greatly this page here resembles a thousand other pages"

- Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer*
- Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made By Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (2009)
"Codex in Crisis: The Book Dematerializes", pp. 288-326

Mar 6: Texts cannot be said to have fixed properties; they are always in flux.

- Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (1991)
- Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Scissoring and Scrapbooks: 19th Century Reading, Remaking and Recirculating" in Lisa Gitelman (ed.) *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004)

Mar 13: Media reconfigure the logic of the senses, pt. 1

- Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (2009)
Introduction; "The Age of Windows", pp. 1-24, 101-148

==== Spring Break ====

Mar 27: Media reconfigure the logic of the senses, pt. 2

- N. Katherine Hayles, "Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis," *Poetics Today* 25:1 (Spring 2004): 67-90.
- Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (2002)
"What is New Media?"; "The Interface," pp. 18-115

Apr 3: Multitasking threatens attention span and the ability to sustain complex thought.

- Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (2009)
"The Screen" through "The Future of Windows", pp. 149-244.
- Alexis Madrigal, "Books on Paper Fight Analog Distractions" (2012, web)
- Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" (2008, web)

Apr 10: Reading takes place within feedback loops between old and new technologies.

- N. Katherine Hales, *My Mother Was a Computer* (2005)
"Intermediation: Textuality and the Regime of Computation," pp. 15-38
- Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (2012)

Apr 17: There have been 129,864,880 books published, ever.

- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (2007)
- John Unsworth, et al., "How Not to Read a Million Books" (2008, web)
- Gregory Crane, "What Do You Do With a Million Books?" (2006, web)
- Robert Darnton, "Google and the Future of Books" (2009, web)

Apr 24: New media are described mathematically and subject to algorithmic manipulation.

- Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (2011)
- D. Sculley and Bradley Pasanek, "Meaning and Mining: The Impact of Implicit Assumptions in Data Mining for the Humanities," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 23:4 (2008)

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

- *Electronic Literature Collection 2* (ELO, 2011)
- Meredith McGill, "Remediating Whitman," *PMLA* (2002) w/ selections from *Walt Whitman Archive*
- Craig Mod, "Platforming Books: Making Art Space Tokyo Digital," (2012, web)

==== Statement on Academic Integrity ====

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.