

English 230: Milestone 1 (for Tuesday, September 20th)

At this point in the term, you should be familiar with three aspects of media and fiction:

1. *How media are material agents that turn this into that.* Consider, for example, how audio, image, and text in *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT* transform what might be a conversation between two characters into abstract art for us to interpret. *MOOD* is like a recording this way, or like we're eavesdropping on an interaction. We're transported suddenly into the middle of a moment. What's going on? What is this? There's no narration to help us situate the story, the animation feels like a spectacle, and our engagement with the content is highly mediated: recall, for instance, the impersonal Monaco typeface, the electronic adaptation of "Guachi Guaro," the flashing content, the synchronization of sound with text (called "Mickey Mousing"), and the lack of setting, voice actors, and touch or "interactive" content. Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries thus prompt us to compare this abstract work with the experience of a real-time or live event. How do we understand lived experiences in relation to our recordings of them? What changes from *this* to *that*?
2. *Why modalities matter for storytelling.* Works such as *MOOD* rely on a variety of media and modalities to communicate a story. We do not only read them. As we progress through the term, we'll learn more techniques for interpreting such "multimodal" works: ways of seeing, listening, and interfacing with stories, for instance. For now, we should keep in mind that multimodal content is designed to shape our attention and experiences. *MOOD* is a spectacle because it addresses us. It wants to capture our attention, and it assumes we're watching, reading, and hearing it and nothing else. If we "mask" one of its communication channels—watch it without the sound or listen to it without reading the text—then we can learn more about its design and what it wants us to know and experience.
3. *How stories make a mood.* In education, we spend a lot of time "making sense" of fiction: we interpret it to comprehend or understand it. We spend less time on sensing and experiencing fiction—on considering its vibe and how it makes us feel. *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT* addresses this dynamic by taunting art critics. When is "making sense" an expression of control over fiction and culture? When does it risk missing the point or neglecting the embodied experience of art? Of course, *MOOD* also has a mood. It isn't just commentary. We might call its mood playful or whimsical, especially when we consider the music ("Guachi Guaro"). We might also call it loud or forward, particularly when we recall the flashing imagery with the text in all caps. This mood affects the meaning, even if the effects are not homogeneous. (That is, not everyone will experience or understand *MOOD* in the same way even if some interpretations are more common than others.) A story's mood also shows us why we should take feelings and emotions seriously. When do we bounce off works, and when are we drawn to them? When do we insist on making sense of stories, and when do we want to simply enjoy them or play along? The mood of a story doesn't simply happen. It's made, and it becomes a relationship with a work. Our emotions and feelings are structured by media, content, and content producers, yet they are also shaped by our own personal histories. How we approach a given work will be informed by our impressions of previous stories like it and what we associate with it.