

## **HUMA 16100: Media Aesthetics - Text Winter 2019**

### **Course Description**

Media Aesthetics is a Humanities core sequence that investigates the aesthetic dimension of human experience. Over three quarters, we explore how and why we look, read, or listen to a variety of aesthetic objects and media—including painting, films, novels, poems, plays, and music. Together, we investigate the sorts of knowledge or experience that aesthetic objects afford, as well as the challenges that aesthetic objects pose to other ways of knowing or experiencing the world. Over the course of the sequence, we also consider philosophical issues raised by aesthetic objects—the anxieties and aspirations that visual, textual, and sonic media have inspired, from ancient times to the present.

In the Winter quarter, we focus on textual representation, and on the medium of writing in particular. Our readings and discussion will be organized around a number of key themes and questions:

Writing, Materiality, Textuality: What is a text? How do texts mean, and what else do they do? What is the difference between a written text and spoken discourse? In what ways does writing shore up, shape, or unsettle our sense of self? In what ways does writing aid memory, or corrupt it? How and when does writing serve as an instrument of power or discipline, and how might it open avenues of resistance, freedom, or play?

Reading and Interpretation: What does it mean to read a text? When and how is interpretation called for, or constricted? What makes one interpretation “better” than another? Are there criteria for valid interpretations, and can these be shared? Are there different ways of reading and can we articulate their various pleasures, purposes, or values?

### **Key Questions for Winter**

- What is a sign? What kind of a sign is text? What authority do words claim on truth? What is the difference between uttered speech and material writing, between text on paper and text on a canvas or an electronic screen?
- What are the different modes of reading, how do we use them?
- What is the relationship between language and the self? How does the idea of writing inform our beliefs about identity? What is a “signature?”
- What sort of “reality” do words have, and is this “reality” similar or different to that of images? What is the difference between looking and reading?
- What is a misreading? What is a revision? What is a definition?
- How is it possible to translate words from one language to another, from one medium to another, from one platform to another? Does meaning persist when materiality changes?
- What role does the author play in our understanding of how a fiction can be known? What role does the reader play? What *are* authors and readers?
- Philosophically speaking, what is interpretation? How does it affect the object it intervenes upon? How do we know what to interpret and when?
- Where do narratives ultimately exist – on the page, or in our minds?

Course Texts (at Seminary Coop)Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Arden) ISBN 1408133474Plato, *Phaedrus* (Hackett); ISBN 9780872202207Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home* (Mariner Books); ISBN: 978-0618871711Class Schedule**Mon. 1/7****Week 1      The Matter of Writing**A            Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*  
Joseph Kosuth, *One and Three Chairs*B            Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, “Nature of the Linguistic Sign” and “Linguistic Value” and “Syntagmatic and Associative Relations”**Mon 1/14****Week 2      Translation and Poetics**A            Selections from *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*B            Genesis Chapter 11  
R. Crumb, “Genesis 11” *The Illustrated Book of Genesis*  
Jorges-Luis Borges, “The Tower of Babel”  
The Rosetta Stone  
Joseph Kosuth, *Ex Libris J.-F. Champollion***Mon 1/21****Week 3      Interpretation and Authorship; Text and Context**A            Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”  
Cleanth Brooks, “History Without Footnotes: An Account of Keats’s Urn

B            Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

**Mon 1/28****Week 4      Speaking and Desiring; Writing as technology**A            Plato, *Phaedrus*B            Plato, *Phaedrus***Mon 2/4**

**Week 5      Orality and Literacy**

**A            Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (selections)  
 Franz Boas, “On Alternating Sounds”  
 Folk song recordings made by Hurston  
<https://www.loc.gov/collections/florida-folklife-from-the-works-progress-administration/about-this-collection>  
<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/guides/Hurston.html>**

**B            Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (selections)**

**Mon 2/11**

**Week 6      Speech Acts and Deconstruction**

**A            J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (selections)**

**B            Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” *Limited Inc.*, pp. 1-21**

[Alternative: Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory”]

**Mon 2/18**

**Week 7      *The Tempest***

**A            Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**B            Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**Mon 2/25**

**Week 8      *The Tempest***

**A            Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**B            Shakespeare, *The Tempest***

**MARCH 1, 3-5pm, Film Screening: *Rashomon* at Doc Films (1212 E 59th St)**

**Mon 3/4**

**Week 9**

**A            Kurosawa, *Rashomon***

**B            Kurosawa, *Rashomon***

Parker Tyler, "Rashomon as Modern Art"

**Mon 3/11**

**Week 10**

A Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*

B Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*