

English 6997 2023 Winter Term

Course Director: Professor B.W. Powe

Class Time: Thursday 11:30-2:30

Location: to be announced

Title:

Issues in Contemporary Theory: Marshall McLuhan and the Global Village

Description:

The media seer, Marshall McLuhan, had a powerful, lasting influence on many writers, artists, moviemakers, and thinkers. It is no exaggeration to say that he is to date Canada's most significant and prophetic theorist. His audacious interdisciplinary and trans-historical approach to the study of new electric media fields led to controversy and essential insights. His impact on writers—and their impact on him—is pivotal to understanding his embrace of and unease with our wired and wireless environment. This course begins with a summary text that organizes and presents many of McLuhan's most profound insights, through his methodology of aphorism, figure/ground, tetrads, suspended judgment, and probes. We will explore from the beginning of our class how McLuhan revised his vision of the global village percept in favor of the global theatre recognition and media ecology, the creation of an electronic supra-nature. Then we will explore works that both manifest and

represent the vision of radical rewiring, the reinventions of consciousness and sensibility, indeed of the world, that have emerged through media, digital communications' technologies. These articulations may be either Utopian or Dystopian, and both. They may extend McLuhan's perceptions directly, or indirectly. This course will trace and explore the McLuhan lineage and its original adaptations and metamorphoses, from articulations of paranoia and ecstasy to intimations of A.I. and media ecology, and new kinds of sensory mysticism. It is a course that sets out to discover how McLuhan's searing insights that we are being altered and transfigured by media extensions have found literary, theoretical, artistic, and multi-media expression. This course will also explore how widely differing approaches or sensitivities to this global transformation have and can spark crises of form, voice, perception, and content.

Reading List:

(This is the order in which these works will be engaged and read.)

1. Marshall McLuhan, *The Book of Probes/*
2. Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker, *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting*
3. William Gibson, *Neuromancer*
4. Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*
5. Mael Renouard, *Fragments of an Infinite Memory: My Life with the Internet*

6. Patricia Lockwood, *No One is Talking About This*
7. Douglas Coupland/Shumon Basar, *The Extreme Self: The 21st century is about who belongs to what*
8. Don DeLillo, *Mao II*
9. Anne Carson, *H of H Playbook*
10. R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (selections), John Cage, *Silence* (selections)
11. Two works of cinema: *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*; with a reading of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
12. Patti Smith, *Devotion* to be paired with Paulo Coelho, *The Aleph*
(All books available at York bookstore)

Evaluation:

Short presentation essay (1000 words): 40%

Research Essay (5000 words): 50%

In-class Engagement: 10%

Class Schedule

--Thursday, September 5th

Marshall McLuhan and Post-Theory

Percept/Concept/Ground/Figure

The conditions of global communications: our electric ground.

Methodologies instead of System and Theory:

Probe, aphorism, wit, art, interval (gap), field, environmental awareness, exploring invisible architecture of icloud. What's reading in a time of pulse and feel? New Dark-Light Age

Text: ***The Books of Probes***

- This book will serve as our primary reference work for the term.

--Thursday, September 12th

McLuhan continued—aphorisms and prophecies

AI, virtuality, simstim, Dystopia

Identity as War, addiction and bio-mental

harvesting, intimations of new world

consciousness and sensibility after cyberpunk

Global Theatre as inner battle

Text: ***Neuromancer***, William Gibson

--Thursday, September 19th

McLuhan continued—imagination and
perception of the invisible
Dialogue between colliding sensibilities

Poetics and Utopia of reverie
Counter-realities
Prophetic evocation of invisible
architecture of Icloud
Intimations of sensibility of out of body
experience through imaginative writing

- Text: *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino
(In translation)

--Thursday, September 26th

--Addiction, extension, intimations of
hallucinatory ADD addled electroscapes
Paranoia as field of exploration
Surveillance and Big Data
Possession and conspiracies
Prophetic recognitions of new consciousness in
its apogee/nadir states, shock and sensitivity
Junk as metaphor for electrical current
Implosion of literary form into total disconnect
Multiple voices, parodies, arias, essays

- Texts: *Naked Lunch*, William S.
Burroughs
- “Notes on Burroughs”, short essay by
Marshall McLuhan (hand out)

--Thursday, October 3rd

AI, replicant, pornography and body
Identity as last frontier of human sensibility
Science-fiction becoming map of new reality
Howl of new birth and “me#2”
Deliberate disordering of senses and forms
Sexual rebellion and robotic extension
“Polymorphous perverse”
“I sing the body electric” reborn
Codes of sensitivity to effects of invisible
architecture of information, data swirling
Convergence of computer and flesh

- Texts: *Empire of the Senseless*, Kathy Acker
“I Sing the Body Electric” Walt Whitman
(excerpts)

--Thursday, October 10th

The writer, reader, in mass-crowd conditions
Alphabet awareness (solitude, silence, library,
reading time) and Digital environment
(plug in, network, optics, speed of light)
Environmental evocations of global conditions
Solitude and Network, isolation and intensity
The author (privacy) and the terrorist

(publicity), the literary sentence and masscult
popcult

- Text: *Mao II*, Don DeLillo
“Simulations” Jean Baudrillard (excerpts)

--Thursday, October 17th
No Class; Reading week
(Time to be alone and read)

--Thursday, October 24th
McLuhan, Review, How the book
reflects free-fall reading conditions
Unloose the words and bookform
Poetic configurations of text and image
Hybrid work as mimesis of media ecology
Philosophy, essay, poetics, aphorism
Vision of transforming pages
Future of book that isn't nostalgia
Hermetic Inwardness

- Text: *Float*, Anne Carson (excerpts)

--Thursday, October 31st
Imagination and soulfulness
Screen-fiction, eros and email
connectives, trolling for love
Identity and quest in the network

Renewal of humanism in cyber, network conditions, expansion of connective to consciousness and sensitivity

The collective heart-journey of the internet
Search for new metaphors in electric
Convergence, Fragments and fractals

- Text: *The Powerbook*, Jeanette Winterson

--Thursday, November 7th

Acoustic Space, echo-land, vibration, pulse
New environment as sound

Musical sensitivity as guide to global theatre
“In the electronic age we are living entirely by music”

After neural overload and anxiety in hyperintensive network (unseeable information spaces) comes explorations of the pulse, quanta conditions (infinite possibilities)

Training and practice to be inside the pulse environment

- Texts: *Soundscape*, R. Murray Schafer (excerpts); *Silence*, John Cage (excerpts)

--Thursday, November 14th

Identity and AI, quest for soul

Science-fiction, again, as mapping
of reality Networks and Simulation
of the human; how cinema reworks
literary work, extension of cinema work

conditions in *Blade Runner* movies
Codes/spaces of images that complement
words and stories: hybrid experience,
film and CGI and sci-fi tropes meet literature
Philip K. Dick as prophet of invisible
architectures (paranoid sensitivity
anticipate humanist perceptual crises)

- Texts: *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep*, Philip K. Dick
Films: *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* (to be viewed on your own)
- Please reflect, when viewing these movies, and reading Dick's novel side by side with your viewings, how the works are changed by the makers. Note that the title *Blade Runner* came from William S. Burroughs. Reflect, too, on how both movies were relative failures upon release.

--Thursday, November 21st

Hybrid visionary work, essay and story
Memoir and poetics, mysticism and
hermetic inwardness, new dark-light age

open to clairvoyant forms of
understanding, post-theory the cutting
edge must be sensibility
New consciousness and articulations of
energy forms and ancient wisdom reborn
Beyond paranoia into connective and
recreation, post simulation into
insubstantiality yields to
invisible architectures of spirit
Pulse, vibration, feel, and collective
search/quest and receptivity in
literary forms that reach bestsellerdom

- Texts: *The Aleph*, Paulo Coehlo
Devotion, Patti Smith
(These books will be discussed over
a two week period)

--Thursday, November 28th
Discussion of Smith and Coehlo continued

--Thursday, December 5th
Review of class themes, percepts/concepts
McLuhan, and beyond
Premature theory, embryonic perceptions
Role of poetics in intuition, intimation
(optional class; classes end earlier in
week)

--Thursday, December 5th
End of fall term

- Discussion of due dates for papers will be done in class during the early part of the term

BWP, August 2019