MCC-GE 2129–001 New Media Research Studio: Rethinking Reading

Initially, this course was going to be about the book as such. Thought and discussion about it over the holiday made me realize we were coming at the question of the book from the wrong angle – we needed to think through attention, and through attention, reading, and then the future of books and publishing. Therefore, within the framework of the act of attention embedded in reading, we’re investigating the modes of attention and cognition evolving in digital devices and formats in general.

Assignments & grading Most weeks involves a small “challenge” assignment, for a total of ten; each will also incorporate your participation for that week, and will be worth 5% of your total grade, 50% in all. You will produce a 15 page research paper about the topic you choose at the beginning of the semester and independently pursue, accounting for another 25%. Finally, you will produce a prototype that engages with attention in new media, whether through environment, system, content or application, which will account for the last 25%. Each of these projects will be addressed in detail in separate documents. All assignments should be emailed to me directly at fb42@nyu.edu before the start of class on the day due. Late submissions will be penalized. All writing should be in the usual format: 12-point font, double spaced, with a common citation standard (I don’t care which one) – you know the drill.

Grading rubric
A = Excellent This work is comprehensive and detailed, integrating themes and concepts from discussions, lectures and readings. Writing is clear, analytical and organized. Arguments offer specific examples and concisely evaluate evidence. Students who earn this grade are prepared for class, synthesize course materials and contribute insightfully.
B = Good This work is complete and accurate, offering insights at general level of understanding. Writing is clear, uses examples properly and tends toward broad analysis. Classroom participation is consistent and thoughtful.
C = Average This work is correct but is largely descriptive, lacking analysis. Writing is vague and at times tangential. Arguments are unorganized, without specific examples or analysis. Classroom participation is inarticulate.
D = Unsatisfactory This work is incomplete, and evidences little understanding of the readings or discussions. Arguments demonstrate inattention to detail, misunderstand course material and overlook significant themes. Classroom participation is spotty, unprepared and off topic.
F = Failed This grade indicates a failure to participate. Plus and minus grade indicate the standing within the above grades.

Boring but necessary stuff
Absences More than two unexcused absences will automatically result in a lower grade. Chronic lateness will also be reflected in your evaluation of participation. Regardless of the reason for your absence you will be responsible for any missed work. Travel arrangements do not constitute a valid excuse for late work. There are no extra credit assignments for this class. Academic dishonesty and plagiarism We abide by the Steinhardt standards of academic integrity: http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/policies/academic_integrity. Don’t plagiarize, don’t cheat, don’t double-submit. I’m bound by my job to get you in trouble for it (and yes, we notice; Google exists; etc). Writing help If you need assistance with writing, contact the NYU Writing Center (schedule appointments online at www.rich15.com/nyu/ or just drop in).
Students with physical or learning disabilities are required to register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities, 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, (212–998–4980) and are required to present a letter from the Center to the instructor at the start of the semester in order to be considered for appropriate accommodation.
Readings All readings are available as excerpted PDFs in our classes site, except for Crary’s 24/7, which is available everywhere – get it from Amazon, pick up a copy at McNally Jackson, etc.

1/27 - Introduction of syllabus, discussion of course goals and grading. Brainstorming topics in attention, media, and technology. We create a map, and then over the next week the students each pick a topic to research independently for the semester.

2/3 - Models of Technical Attention: What are we doing when we read? Reading to build the basic vocabulary: Cimprich, Csikszentmihalyi, James, Marks (excerpts provided)
Assignment due: Select a topic for independent research. Write one paragraph explaining your interest in the topic, and list three starting points for your research.

2/10 - Antitheses: Thinking about boredom and distraction Reading: Svendsen, “The Problem of Boredom” Assignment due: A brief essay, 2–3 pages, describing an experience of boredom in a media context (book, text, Web, game, film, music etc) with as much precision and detail as possible. In exactly what ways is the experience boring? Can you distinguish qualities of boredom particular to that medium?

2/17 - NO CLASS (HOLIDAY)

2/24 - The Students Are Awake, 1: first half of 24/7 Reading: Chapters 1 and 2 of 24/7; Koolhaas, “Junkspace” Assignment due: Choose one of the dynamics articulated in the chapters. Briefly describe it, and then propose an intervention – a technological object, system, or application – which will either resist or reinforce that dynamic. Total length between 3–5 pages.

3/3 - The Students Are Awake, 2: second half of 24/7 Reading: Chapters 3 and 4 of 24/7 Assignment due: Select a creative work (music, text, video, painting etc) which, in your opinion, engages with the themes Crary describes in the latter chapters as he articulates through works himself. Briefly describe the work, and explain its relevance. 2–3 pages

3/10 - The Overload: Thinking about information-saturated environments Reading: Colomina, “Enclosed by Images”; Bulgakowa, “Eisenstein, the Glass House and the Spherical Book: From the Comedy of the Eye to the Drama of Enlightenment” Assignment due: Send me an example of an information-saturated experience (from a film, from an environment, from the web, etc) and a brief explanation – one page max – describing the particular nature of the saturation: what is it trying to accomplish?

3/17 - SPRING RECESS

3/24 - Histories of Attention and New Media: storytellers, survivors, automatons Reading: Benjamin, “The Storyteller” (discussion of concepts of experience); Stites, “Man The Machine” Assignment due: A brief essay, 2–3 pages, describing a transition in the nature of technological/mediated experience that has taken place in your life. How much can you precisely recall of the transition as it took place? What was gained, what was lost, what is different?

3/31 - Attention Practices: Reading and writing Reading: Adorno, “Punctuation Marks”; Saper, “Readies”; Mak, “Architectures of the Page” Assignment due: Write a passage of minimum 500 words, on a subject of your choosing, which uses experimental typography (punctuation, structure, arrangement, etc) IN DIALOGUE with its subject. Consider how the management of words alters the experience of reading
4/7 - Attention Practices: Theater and performance
Reading: Slowiak, “Grotowski: Practical Exercises”; another TBD
Assignment due: Select one of the Grotowski exercises. Propose and describe (2–3 pages) a tool, application, or environment that would achieve a similar goal as the exercise (not necessarily in the same way!)

4/14 - Attention Practices: Interfaces and interactions
Reading: Sterling, “The Interoperation”; Bardini, “Language and the Body” and “Inventing the Virtual User”
Assignment due: Consider ClearWorks, and its relationship to a particular kind of architectural practice. Select a particular kind of writing – not necessarily a traditional one – and describe (2–3 pages) a new form of application, device, or environment that would enable that form of writing

4/21 - Attention Practices: Listening and sounding
Assignment due: Write an essay (2–3 pages) about an information-bearing sound, or a family of related information-bearing sounds, other than the human voice. Describe how they sound, and how they work – deliberate or accidental, complex or simple

4/28 - Attention, Media and Time: Temporalities of technical experience, reading as arrangement
Assignment due: Briefly describe two media interventions – new interfaces, objects, applications, etc – one of which helps us remember, and one of which helps us forget

5/5 - Models of Future Attention: The fate and future of the book (finally)
Reading: Weiser, “Calm Technology”; another reading TBD
Assignment due: 15 page final research paper

5/12 - Last Day: Plans and futures
Assignment due: Prototypes of attention intervention (discuss in class)