

DISTRACTED READING

Professor Rita Raley

New York University, Department of English

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It is a cliché universally acknowledged that we (where “we” means, variously, the Twitter generation, the Millennial generation, participants in the Network Society) no longer read, or if we do read, we read poorly, with insufficient attention and affect. Reading, by which is meant literary reading, is said to be a “[lost art](#)” and certainly “at risk.” We multitask and thus cannot sustain the kind of focus and attention required for a long, complex narrative. Our primary source of information, education, and entertainment is the screen. The evidence for these claims is often anecdotal but at times calculated: our daily information consumption in print is .6 hours ([UC San Diego](#)); there has been a 10% decline in literary reading and a 28% decline in the 18–24 age group ([NEA](#)), etc. The task for our seminar will be to consider a set of large but pressing questions that both emerge from and engage this general account of technological transformation: What are the different modes of reading and what is their relationship to different media environments? How do contemporary works of print and electronic literature both reflect and anticipate different modes of reading? What is the place of “close reading” – still the most important basic skill taught to English majors – in a complex media ecology that encourages skimming, browsing and watching? How can we meaningfully situate our own reading practices within that same media ecology? Is all reading now distracted reading and, if so, can we still speak of rigor? With Henry James at one pole and Talan Memmott’s [Lexia to Perplexia](#) at another, we will be reading a range of literary texts that help us to think through these questions. We will also consider a sample of creative works produced for the iPad and other mobile devices. Along the way, we will review the debates about attention, the futures of the book, and the effects search algorithms have had on both cognitive habits and knowledge production.

September 4: Introduction

September 6: Always On

David Ulin, “[The Lost Art of Reading](#)” (LA Times; August 2009); Johann Hari, “[How to Survive the Age of Distraction](#),” The Independent (June 24, 2011); Linda Stone, [Continuous Partial Attention](#)

–!> Review executive summaries: [How Much Information? 2009 Report on American Consumers](#); NEA, [Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America](#) (2004); [To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence](#) (2007); [Reading on the Rise: A New Chapter in American Literacy](#) (2008)

September 11: Imagination, perception, attention

Emma Donoghue, Room

September 13: Generation distraction

Matt Richtel, "[Growing up Digital, Wired for Distraction](#)" (NY Times; November 2010); Cathy Davidson, *Now You See It: How the Brain Science of Attention Will Transform the Way We Live, Work, and Learn* ([Introduction](#)); [Frontline interview](#) with Clifford Nass  
 -!> Take the two multitasking tests on the NY Times site ([Test How Fast You Juggle Tasks](#) and [Test Your Focus](#))

September 18: The dumbest generation?

Nicholas Carr, "[Is Google Making Us Stupid?](#)" (July/August 2008); Clay Shirky, "[Why Abundance is Good](#)"; Jamais Cascio, "[Get Smarter](#)," *The Atlantic* (July/August 2009)  
 -!> Video: [short interview](#) about *The Shallows* with PBS  
 -!> Post your own response on the [discussion page](#) of our course blog

September 20: What 'the Internet does'

Nicholas Carr, [The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains](#) (excerpts); Sven Birkerts, "[Reading in a Digital Age](#)," *The American Scholar* (Spring 2010)  
 -!> Video: Clay Shirky, [Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age](#)

September 25-27: Reading in the early 20C

Henry James, *In the Cage*

October 2: Reading today

Erik Loyer, [Chroma](#)

October 4: Reading today, II

Ian Hatcher, [Signal to Noise](#)

October 9-11: Close reading

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

-!> Links: [A list of useful threads](#) (HoL forum) | XKCD, "[Click and Drag](#)" | [A House of Leaves. First Movement](#) (DRAF; Fall 2012)

October 16: Fall recess

October 18: *House of Leaves*, continued

October 23: Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (Chapter 1 of Sam and Hailey) [to be distributed]

October 25: Modernity, attention, and distraction

Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener*

October 30: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological

[Reproducibility](#)" (Sections II, III, IV, VI, XV, XVII, XVIII) — OR— Jonathan Crary, [Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture](#) (pp. 11-51) [TO BE DETERMINED]

November 1: Class canceled (instructor conference)November 6-8: New modes of attention

N. Katherine Hayles, "[Hyper and Deep Attention](#)" (*Profession*; 2007); Hayles, excerpts from [How We Think](#) (55-68); Cathy Davidson, [Now You See It](#) (pp. 23-58)

Young-Hae Chang, "[Rain on the Sea](#)" [[txt file](#)]; William Poundstone, [Project for](#)

Tachistoscope

–!> Video: [Changing Education Paradigms](#)

November 13: How we read now

I Read Where I Am (Amsterdam: Graphic Design Museum, 2011)

–> Compose your own 200-500 word reflection on present or future forms of reading and post it to [our course website](#).

November 15: The futures of the book

Robert Moor, “[Bones of the Book](#),” n+1 (February 2012); Craig Mod, “[Books in the Age of the iPad](#)”

–!> Browse: [The Institute for the Future of the Book](#) | [Gamer Theory](#) | Goldberg, Hristova, and Loyer, [Blue Velvet](#)

–!> Audio & Video: “[Take Me to a Future Where Books Act Like This](#)” (Gizmodo; September 2010) | “[The Future of Children’s Books](#)” (NPR; February 2012) | Jonathan Safran Foer, [Tree of Codes](#)

November 20: Page to screen

Johanna Drucker, “The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-space,” [A Companion to Digital Literary Studies](#); Joseph J. Esposito, “[The Processed Book](#),” First Monday 8:3 (2003)

November 22: ThanksgivingNovember 27: Machine-assisted reading

Franco Moretti, Graphs, Maps, and Trees (pp. 1-64, 91-92)

November 29: Moretti, continued

–!> Begin experimenting with text analysis tools such as [Many Eyes](#), [TAPoR](#), and [PieSpy](#)  
–!> [TAPoR Portal Recipes](#) (e.g. [identify themes within a text](#))

December 4: Algorithmic reading

Geoffrey Rockwell, “[What is Text Analysis?](#)” (also see “[Electronic Texts and Text Analysis](#)”) Stephen Ramsay, “[Toward an Algorithmic Criticism](#)” and excerpt from Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism ([Chapter 1](#))

–!> Explore [Culturomics](#) and the [Google Books Ngram viewer](#)

December 6: New reading devices

Cathy Davidson, Now You See It (pp. 61-71)

–!> iPad and iPhone apps (watch videos): Aya Karpinska, [Shadows Never Sleep](#) | Jason Edward Lewis and Bruno Nadeau, [Poems for Excitable \[Mobile\] Media](#) | Erik Loyer, [Strange Rain](#) | [The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore](#) | Jason Shiga, [Meanwhile](#) | Marc Saporta, [Composition No. 1](#) | [Alice for the iPad](#) | [Once Upon an App](#) | [Stephen Fry iOS book app](#)

–!> Audio: Jason Lewis [interview](#)

December 11: New reading interfaces

–!> Video documentation: Noah Wardrip-Fruin et al, [Screen](#); Sandy Baldwin, [New Word Order: Basra](#) | Caitlin Fisher, [Andromeda](#) | Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, [Between Page and Screen](#) | Daniel C. Howe and Aya Karpinska, [open.ended](#)

–!> Browse: [Cityspeak](#) | [Moving Canvas](#) | [The Distributed Legible City](#) | [Cave Writing and the CAVE Simulator](#)

December 13: Reading without words

Shaun Tan, *The Arrival*

Donna Leishman, [RedRidinghood](#)