

HONORS 319  
Spring 2008  
TR 2pm – 3:15pm  
Fogarty 120

Prof. Jennifer Jones  
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Independence 175B  
Office Hours: R 12:30-  
1:45pm and by appt

## Immersion and the Modern Art Work

[http://www.uri.edu/artsci/english/jjj/courses/Honors\\_319\\_S08/index.html](http://www.uri.edu/artsci/english/jjj/courses/Honors_319_S08/index.html)

In the twenty-first century, notions of *immersion* associated with virtuality and digital technology have become deeply significant to the discourse of aesthetics. In the face of computer-generated virtual reality, the term immersion is most readily defined as the collapse of critical distance between the subject and object of the gaze by force of the subject's sensual involvement with the given object. According to media theorists, the question that needs to be asked is whether there is still any place for distanced, critical reflection in this new world of immersive aesthetics and virtual-reality illusion spaces. Theorists worry that the intellectually-creative mechanism of distance is threatened by the immediate proximity of immersive art.

This preoccupation with the question of what distance (or not) we should assume toward art, and to what degree enjoyment is predicated on distance/proximity are not, however, new questions. This course will study the various ways in which philosophy, literary theory, and artworks themselves have addressed the issue of *encounter* and *relationship* between reader/viewer/consumer and artwork. This class will give students the opportunity to take the time to think carefully about the dynamic of text/reader — how we fantasize about that relationship, theorize it, and experience it. Carefully study of the relationships among technology, media, and genre will inform our work, such that students can learn to ask questions such as the following: Does it matter whether I consider myself a reader or a viewer or a consumer? Does it matter whether I am reading lyric poetry, a Shakespeare play, a science fiction novel, watching a film, viewing a painting, reading a graphic novel, or playing a video game? What does it mean to be absorbed by an artwork? What does it mean to be immersed? What does it mean to “lose oneself” in an artwork, and do I want to be lost? What is the pleasure of reading, viewing, or playing? Does an encounter with an artwork become more, or less, pleasurable when the critical act of thinking about that encounter disappears, or is imagined to disappear? Can I love an artwork? What might that look like, feel like?

### REQUIRED TEXTS

Editor Caroline A. Jones, *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art* (MIT Press 2006) ISBN: 0262101173

DVD: *Bladerunner: The Final Cut*. Dir. Ridley Scott. Starring Harrison Ford, Sean Young (2007)

Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age; or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (Spectra 2000)  
ISBN: 0553380966

William Shakespeare / Editor Peter Holland, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Oxford UP 1998)  
ISBN: 0192834207

Neil Gaiman / Introduction Samuel R. Delaney, *The Sandman, Vol. 5: A Game of You* (Vertigo 1993)  
ISBN: 1563890895

Plato / Translator Robin Waterfield, *Phaedrus* (Oxford 2002) ISBN: 0192802771

John Sunderland, *John Constable*. (Phaidon 1993) ISBN: 9780714827544

William Gaunt, *Turner* (Phaidon 1994) ISBN: 9780714832333

Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (Thames & Hudson 2006) ISBN: 0500286337

DVD: *Dancer in the Dark*. Dir. Lars Von Trier. Starring Björk, Catherine Deneuve, 2000.

Diana Hacker. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th Sprl edition. Bedford/St. Martin's P, 2003.  
ISBN: 0312412622

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Every member of Honors 319 will be responsible to perform in four principle ways -- through class participation, the composition of three short essays, the giving of a formal presentation, and the composition of a final research paper -- that, cumulatively, will enable each individual member both to learn from texts, peers, and professor as well as to share knowledge and insight of texts and ideas with this community.

### Participation (20%)

Participation includes studying the assigned texts for each given seminar meeting and coming to class prepared to discuss them. At minimum, you should have studied the primary texts carefully enough to have a working sense of their principle arguments and forms, as well as a sense of how form and content work together to produce the overall effects of the given texts. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate in general discussion and to respond to both peers and professor, to articulate specific aspects of the texts you find particularly interesting and/or troubling, and to bring questions, concerns, and critiques to the table. It is worth remembering in this regard that listening well to others is as valuable a part of participation in a group dynamic as any other component. Listening well will enable you to be responsive to the thoughts of others as well as to push your own thinking further.

Please note that more than two absences from class (that are not officially excused by URI) are unacceptable.

### The Short Essay (30%)

You will write three short essays, each to be no more than three pages, over the course of this seminar. All formal essays you submit in this class must be formatted according the standards of MLA documentation and must be polished arguments that include a thesis, relevant textual evidence to support the thesis, and analysis of that evidence as a means of demonstrating the significance of the evidence to the thesis and in turn the veracity of the thesis itself. If you submit your work on time and it is clear that you worked to the best of your ability, you will earn the right to revise your essays over the course of the term. In an idea world, you and I will establish a dialogue based on your writing that will be on-going throughout the semester.

Each short essay is worth 10% of the overall course grade for a total of 30%. Essays are due via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm on the given dates they are due (February 28; March 25; and April 17).

### Formal Presentation (10%)

Each member of Honors 319 is responsible for giving a formal presentation during the semester. This presentation should be thought of as an "opening" for the given day of discussion. Your presentation, which should consist of no less than 10 minutes and no more than 15 minutes, should be a provocative and lucid means of introducing a central text that is up for discussion on the day of your presentation. Your goal is to teach this text to the best of your ability. As such, you are required to outline its main argument(s). You are also welcome to offer claims/theses you may have formed as you studied the text and/or questions you find particularly useful to bring to bear on the text. You may also implicate other texts from the syllabus in your presentation as long as you clearly articulate their relevance.

If you would like to take things one step further for extra credit, please produce a document to accompany your presentation to be posted to our course web site. This document might be a formal critical essay; a creative work; a web document of some sort (a wiki, a blog, an HTML page, etc.); and may make use of any media and technology you wish. Please submit this work no later than the Tuesday following your presentation.

Students will sign up for a presentation date during the first week of class. Once a student has made a commitment to that date, it must be fulfilled. Missed presentations cannot be made up.

### Final Research Paper (40%)

Your final paper is the culmination of your work in this class. You may write on any topic you wish as long as it incorporates at least one text from the course and grapples with the concept of the immersion in some way. This paper should comprise original thought, by which I mean a position articulated through close reading, analysis, and argumentation; and it should be supported by scrupulous research of the topic on which you choose to write. Whether your research turns out to be critical, theoretical, historical, or a combination will be up to you and will be a matter of judging what is useful to your topic. Please append an Annotated Bibliography to your final paper. An Annotated Bibliography is a bibliography in which each citation that you include is followed by an annotation containing a brief descriptive and evaluative summary of the given work. Please include at least five annotations in this bibliography even if you do not end up using seven sources in your final paper. In the spirit of this course, you may be as interdisciplinary as you like in your topic and your thinking as long as you bring scholarly integrity to the texts and concepts about which you choose to meditate and write.

Specifications:

- 10-20 pages
- Includes at least one text from our course readings
- Considers the concept of *immersion* in some way
- Annotated Bibliography that includes at least five sources
- MLA Format

Seminar Papers are due on Friday, May 9 via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm.

### READING SCHEDULE

Note: The texts assigned in this course will be available in one of three possible forms: texts you have purchased; online texts, which are linked from the syllabus available on the "Schedule" page of our course web site; and E-Reserve, which is located in our WebCT portal.

## Unit I: *IMMERSION*

### What is it? Have I had it? Do I want it? Where can I get it?

OED **Immerse** 1 b. *transf.* To plunge into, to bury, imbed, involve, or include in other things. **Immersion** 1.a. Dipping or plunging into water or other liquid, and *transf.* into other things; 2. *transf.* and *fig.* a. Absorption in some condition, action, interest, etc.; 3. *Astron.* The disappearance of a celestial body behind another or in its shadow, as in an occultation or eclipse: opp. to *emersion*;

January 24: Alan Liu, "Imagining the New Media Encounter" from *Blackwell Companion to Digital Literary Studies* (2008) [E-Reserve]; Adalaide Morris, "New Media Poetics: As We May Think/Write" from *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories* [E-Reserve]; Mark B. N. Hansen, Part II: "The Affect Body" (Chapters 4 & 5) from *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004) [E-Reserve]; Caroline A. Jones, "The Mediated Sensorium," from *Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art* (2006)

Please read the above texts prior to our first class meeting to familiarize yourself with this most recent of interdisciplinary sub-fields in English studies, New Media Studies. Come to class prepared to point to moments of particular interest to you and to ask at least one question. It will help us to become familiar with one another as a group to have artifacts to discuss right away and to do so in as specific a manner as possible.

January 29: *Bladerunner: The Final Cut* (Dir. Ridley Scott); Jean Francois Lyotard, from *The Differend* [E-Reserve]; Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations" [E-Reserve]; Slavoj Žižek, from *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* [E-Reserve]; Jerry Aline Flieger, "Review: The Listening Eye" [online]

Note: A glossary of Žižekian terms is available on E-Reserve

January 31: **fIOw** ; Jenova Chen, **Flow in Games**

February 5: Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age; or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (1995)

February 7: Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age; or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (1995)

February 12: Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age; or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (1995)

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

## UNIT II: *MANIPULATION and ART(fulness)*

### Is Immersion the Product of Manipulation, of art or artfulness? Does Manipulation Make Something More or Less Real? What Does Being Real Have to Do With It?

OED **Art** 2. a. Human skill as an agent, human workmanship. Opposed to *nature*. b. Artifice, artificial expedient. 3.b. *gen.* Scholarship, learning; **Artful** 3. Skilful in adapting means to ends, so as to secure the accomplishment of a purpose, adroit; passing gradually into: Skilful in taking an unfair advantage; using stratagem, wily; cunning, crafty, deceitful. **Manipulation** 4. The action or an act of managing or directing a person, etc., esp. in a skilful manner; the exercise of subtle, underhand, or devious influence or control over a person, organization, etc.; interference, tampering.

February 14: Longinus, *On the Sublime* (1 AD) [E-Reserve]

February 19: Denis Diderot, from *Paradox of the Actor* (1757-1758) [E-Reserve]; Michael Fried, "The Primacy of Absorption" from *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980)[E-Reserve]

February 21: Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" (1891) [E-Reserve]; Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936)[E-Reserve]

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

February 26: Shakespeare, sonnet 138, 199; *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595-1596)

February 28: Shakespeare, sonnet 138 (1599), 199 (1609); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (c. 1595-1596)

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

Formal Essay 1 DUE: Compose an essay of no more than three pages on one or more texts that we have studied in Units I and II: open topic. Due via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm

### **UNIT III: *SUBLIME***

#### **Is Sublimity Immersive, or . . . ?**

OED **Sublime 1**. Set or raised aloft, high up. *arch.* **c.** Of flight; only in fig. context with implication of senses; **d.** *Anat.* Of muscles: Lying near the surface, superficial. Also applied to the branch of anatomy treating of superficial muscles. **4.** Of ideas, truths, subjects, etc.: Belonging to the highest regions of thought, reality, or human activity. Also *occas.* said of the thinker. **6.** Of language, style, or a writer: Expressing lofty ideas in a grand and elevated manner. **7.** Of things in nature and art: Affecting the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; calculated to inspire awe, deep reverence, or lofty emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur.

March 4: Edmund Burke, from *The Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Feelings of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) [E-Reserve]; Immanuel Kant, from *The Critique of Judgment* (1790) [E-Reserve]; Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (from *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* 1979/1984)[E-Reserve]

March 6: J. M. W. Turner, *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812); *Sunrise, with a Boat Between Headlands* (1835-40); *Slavers Throwing the Dead and Dying Overboard, Typhoon Coming On* (1840); *Rain, Steam, and Speed: The Great Western Railway* (1844); *Snow Storm — Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth Making Signals in Shallow Water, and Going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich* (1842); *Rain, Steam, and Speed — the Great Western Railway* (1844)

March 11: NO Class -- Read: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798/1816)[E-Reserve]

March 13: NO Class -- Post a meditation on Coleridge's poem to our class listserv (1-page minimum). Include a thesis, a piece of textual evidence, and a close reading of your evidence as a means to support your claim. Please respond to at least one of your classmates' posts via "Mail" on WebCT. Due via electronic submission through our two of our WebCT portals: "Essay Submissions" (my private copy) AND "Mail" (so that you can see one another's work). Due by 2pm.

March 18: Spring Break

March 20: Spring Break

March 25: Informal presentations of, and responses to, meditations on Coleridge.

Formal Essay 2 DUE: Compose an essay of no more than three pages on one or more texts that we have studied in Unit III: open topic. Due via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm

Read ahead: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Sonnet to the River Otter"; "Frost at Midnight"; "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison"; Coleridge, selections from *Biographia Literaria* [E-Reserve]

#### **UNIT IV: IMAGINATION**

**What Are the Possibilities of Imagination? What Are the Limits? Is imagination immersive?**

**OED Imagination** 1. The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses (cf. sense 3); the result of this process, a mental image or idea (often with implication that the conception does not correspond to the reality of things, hence freq. *vain* (*false*, etc.) *imagination* ). 2. The mental consideration of actions or events not yet in existence. **a.** Scheming or devising; a device, contrivance, plan, scheme, plot; a fanciful project. **3.** That faculty of the mind by which are formed images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses, and of their relations (to each other or to the subject); hence frequently including memory. **4.** The power which the mind has of forming concepts beyond those derived from external objects. **a.** The operation of fantastic thought; fancy. **b.** The creative faculty of the mind in its highest aspect; the power of framing new and striking intellectual conceptions; poetic genius.

March 27: *Guest Lecture:* Professor David L. Clark (McMaster University)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Sonnet to the River Otter"; "Frost at Midnight"; "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison"; Coleridge, selections from *Biographia Literaria* [E-Reserve]

April 1: William Wordsworth, "Old Man Travelling"; "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"; "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*; "The Leech-Gatherer; or, Resolution and Independence"; John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale" [All E-Reserve]; William Gibson, "**Agrippa (A Book of the Dead)**"; The Transcriptions Project, **The Agrippa Files**

April 3: John Constable, *The White Horse* (1819); *The Haywain* (1821) and Detail from *The Haywain*; *Cloud Study* (1822); *Seascape Study with Rain Clouds (near Brighton?)* (1824-5); *The Leaping Horse* (1824-1825) and Detail from *The Leaping Horse*

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

#### **UNIT V: EROS**

**Is Immersion a Form of Love? What Are the Terms of Ecstasy? Can I Control My Immersion? Can I Be Immersed and Seduce? Must I be Immersed to be Seduced?**

**OED Erotic** 1 *A. adj.* Of or pertaining to the passion of love; concerned with or treating of love; amatory. **Love** 1. a. That disposition or state of feeling with regard to a person which (arising from recognition of attractive qualities, from instincts of

natural relationship, or from sympathy) manifests itself in solicitude for the welfare of the object, and usually also in delight in his or her presence and desire for his or her approval; warm affection, attachment. Const. *of, for, to, towards*. **Passion** **I.** Senses relating to physical suffering and pain. **II.** Senses relating to emotional or mental states. **6. a.** any strong, controlling, or overpowering emotion, as desire, hate, fear, etc.; an intense feeling or impulse.

April 8: Gianlorenzo Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1647-1652); Georges Bataille, from *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* and *Visions of Excess* [E-Reserve]

April 10: John Keats, "The Eve of St. Agnes"; William Wordsworth, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal"; Keats, selections of the Letters [E-Reserve]

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

April 15: Plato, *Phaedrus* (370 BC)

April 17: Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Christabel" [E-Reserve]

Formal Essay 3 DUE: Compose an essay of no more than three pages on one or more texts that we have studied in Units IV and V: open topic. Due via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm

## **UNIT VI: DREAM**

### **What Are Dreams? Do Dreams Immerse Me? What About My Interpretation of Them?**

OED **Dream** 1. Joy, pleasure, gladness, mirth, rejoicing. 2. The sound of a musical instrument; music, minstrelsy, melody; noise, sound. **1. a.** A train of thoughts, images, or fancies passing through the mind during sleep; a vision during sleep; the state in which this occurs. **2. fig.** A vision of the fancy voluntarily or consciously indulged in when awake (esp. as being unreal or idle); a visionary anticipation, reverie, castle-in-the-air; **c.** An ideal or aspiration; *spec.* a national aspiration or ambition; a way of life considered to be ideal by a particular nation or group of people.

April 22: Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman Vol. 5: A Game of You*; Sigmund Freud, from *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) [E-Reserve]; Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" [E-Reserve]

April 24: Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman Vol. 5: A Game of You*

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

April 29: *Dancer in the Dark*, Director Lars von Trier

*Presentation:* \_\_\_\_\_

May 9: Final Research Paper DUE: 10-20 pages with appended Annotated Bibliography. Due via electronic submission through our WebCT portal under "Essay Submissions" by 11:55pm