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September 2013

ENGL 668C/HUM 888: Distant Reading and Related Methods

Thursdays 1:15–4:30
LB 646

This course will introduce students to a range of contemporary critical and philosophical approaches whose focus is contextual and discursive rather than textual and hermeneutic. Franco Moretti's term "distant reading" might serve a convenient shorthand for this range of approaches, though we'll be looking at a wider range of texts than this term alone would suggest.

The course is designed to encourage students to think about culture in terms of a set of interrelated concepts: assemblages and networks, materiality, and circulation. Will Straw's article "The Circulatory Turn" provides an accessible overview of major texts dealing with these concepts, and a convincing narrative about the necessity of considering them in concert. Many of the texts we'll be looking at consider some or all of these concepts simultaneously, but they each have their particular strengths. The overall structure of the course, then, will itself be a survey that will provide students with enough information to pursue particular trajectories of their own devising later in their studies.

Course Objectives

1. Expose students to key introductory texts in the intellectual trajectories that make the concept of distant reading possible (circulation theory, archaeology and discourse analysis, Actor-Network Theory, Articulation Theory, Materialities of Communication, Object-Oriented Ontology, etc.)
2. Provide students with the opportunity to develop an effective scholarly online writing style
3. Provide a low-risk opportunity for students to test out some of the methods of distant reading other than writing
4. Involve students in the collaborative production of interdisciplinary knowledge
5. Provide some basic training in textual markup and blogging practice

Course Requirements

Class participation (20%)

Class participation includes attendance, discussion, in-class writing and contributions to class website other than the Probes (see below). All students are responsible for doing all readings, period. I expect you to be in class on time, and ready to contribute to discussion. I also encourage you to locate media examples and objects to bring to the class to broaden our discussion. If you can find time to post them to the class website before we meet, even better.

Probes (2 probes x 25% = 50%)

Each class member will be responsible for producing a minimum of two short "probes" over the course of the term (you'll be marked on your best two). These probes will focus on the relationship between some aspect of the theoretical readings for a particular week and one or more cultural objects relevant to the subject at hand. Students are encouraged to select their own objects, in consultation with me; I'm also happy to make suggestions. All probes must include some visual element, and will be about 1500 words in length.

Note that *there is no term paper for this course.* Consider your probes as the starting point for papers that you might write after the course is over. Though the tone of a probe can be more casual than the tone of a formal paper, you are still responsible for providing a List of Works Cited for your probe (MLA style, please), with web links where appropriate for online sources.

Each week, there'll be two or three students presenting probes as a device for stimulating in-class discussion. In class itself, you'll have 10 minutes to present your probe (not read it). Slides or other audiovisual aids are helpful. Part of your mark will depend on how successful you are in this respect.

Note that you will be responsible for posting your probes to the class website *a full week before their due date.* All class members will treat all probes as part of the required course readings. The people writing probes for a particular week will be responsible for beginning discussion, but everyone else must be ready to engage with the issues that the probes raise.

Distant Reading Boot Camp (2 x 15% = 30%)

From October 17 to November 21, each week has a Distant Reading Boot Camp exercise associated with it. You are required to complete any two of these exercises, and post the results to the class website by the appropriate date, with a short explanation and assessment of the relative success (or failure) of the exercise.

If you wish, your boot camp exercise can be associated with one of your probes, or not. Whether you choose to do both in a given week will depend on your individual working style and available time.

You may use whatever tools you wish to complete these exercises, from crayons to sophisticated software, as long as your stylistic choice is somehow appropriate to the critical approach you take to your subject (this should be a topic of discussion in your explanatory text).

Schedule

September 5: Introduction

September 12: Toward an Ethnography of Forms

Circulation
Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar, and Elizabeth A. Povinelli. "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition." *Public Culture* 15.3 (2003): 385–97.

Straw, Will. "The Circulatory Turn." *The Wireless Spectrum: The Politics, Practices and Poetics of Mobile Media*. Eds. Crow, Barbara, Michael Longford and Kim Sawchuk. Digital Futures. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 17–28.

September 19: Mess, and What To Do With It

Actor-Network Theory and Messy Methodology
Law, John. "Notes on the Theory of the Actor Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity." Lancaster: The Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, , 1999. Revised 2003. http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Notes-on-ANT.pdf

—. "Making a Mess with Method." Lancaster: The Centre for Science Studies, Lancaster University, 2003.
http://www.comp.lancs.ac.uk/sociology/papers/Law-Making-a-Mess-with-Method.pdf

September 26: To Interpret or Not?

Materialities of Communication and Media Historiography
Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. "A Farewell to Interpretation." Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer, eds. *Materialities of Communication*. Writing Science. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994. 389–402. Print.

—. "Materialities/The Nonhermeneutic/Presence: An Anecdotal Account of Epistemological Shifts." *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004. 1–20. Print.

Sterne, Jonathan. "Rearranging the Files: On Interpretation in Media History." *The Communication Review* 13:1 (2010): 75–87.

October 3: Relative Beginnings and Surface Relations

Foucauldian Archaeology and Discourse Analysis
Deleuze, Gilles. "A New Archivist," "Strata or Historical Formations: The Visible and the Articulable". *Foucault*. Trans. Hand, Seán. London: Athlone, 1988. 1–22; 47–69. Print.

Foucault, Michel. "The Archeology of Knowledge." *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1961–1984*. Semiotext(E) Double Agents Series. Ed. Lotringer, Sylvère. New York: Semiotext(e), Columbia U., 1996. 45–56. Print.

—. "The Order of Things," "On the Ways of Writing History," "On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle". *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984. Vol. 2. New York: New Press, 1998. 261–68; 279–96; 297–332. Print.

October 10: Drawing Things Together

Articulation, Assemblages and Actor-Network Theory
Grossberg, Lawrence. "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall." _Journal of Communication Inquiry _10 (1986): 45–60.

Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and J. Macgregor Wise. "Causality," "Agency," "Articulation and Assemblage." *Culture + Technology: A Primer*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 101–33. Print.

Latour, Bruno. "A New Separation of Powers." *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. 91–127. Print.

October 17: Writing About Objects

Object-Oriented Ontology and Actor-Network Theory
Bogost, Ian. "Carpentry." *Alien Phenomenology, or, What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Posthumanities. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Print. 85–111.

Harman, Graham. Selections from *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. Winchester/Washington: Zero Books, 2012. [with accompanying selections from Lovecraft]

Law, John. "Objects and Spaces." *Theory, Culture & Society* 19.5/6 (2002): 91–105.

BOOT CAMP: write a brief probe (500–1000 words) about an object of your choice … in Markdown (see http://daringfireball.net/projects/markdown/). Convert the Markdown to HTML using one of the many available tools to do so. Post the HTML version of your probe to the site, and email both the Markdown and the HTML to me as separate documents.

October 24: Graphs

Distant Reading
Moretti, Franco. "GRAPHS, MAPS, TREES: Abstract Models for Literary History — 1". *New Left Review* 24 (Nov-Dec 2003): 67–93.

Piper, Andrew. "Reading's Refrain: From Bibliography to Topology." *English Literary History* 80 (2013): 373–399.

BOOT CAMP: Produce a graph or information visualization (any style) of a text or small corpus of texts that provides some new insight into it, and post it to the website. Include a short explanatory text (>500 words) outlining the appropriateness of your choice of graph or visualization style, tools (if any), and textual object.

October 31: Maps

Distant Reading
Selections from Guldi, Jo. "What Is the Spatial Turn?" *Scholars' Lab*. Spatial Humanities: A Project of the Institute for Enabling Geospatial Scholarship. http://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/

Harley, Jacob. "Deconstructing the Map." *Cartographica* 26.2 (summer 1989): 1–20.

Moretti, Franco. "GRAPHS, MAPS, TREES: Abstract Models for Literary History — 2". *New Left Review* 26 (Mar-Apr 2004): 79–103.

Siegert, Bernhard. "The Map *Is* the Territory." *Radical Philosophy* 169 (September/October 2011): 13–16.

BOOT CAMP: Produce a map (any style) of a text that provides some new insight into it, and post it to the website. Include a short explanatory text (>500 words) outlining the appropriateness of your choice of mapping style, tools (if any), and textual object.

November 7: Trees

Distant Reading
Moretti, Franco. "GRAPHS, MAPS, TREES: Abstract Models for Literary History — 3". *New Left Review* 28 (Jul-Aug 2004): 43–63.

Shalizi, Cosma. "Graphs, Trees, Materialism, Fishing." *Reading Graphs, Maps, Trees: Responses to Franco Moretti*. Ed. Jonathan Goodwin & John Holbo. Anderson: Parlor Press, 2011. 115–39.

Additional readings TBA

BOOT CAMP: Produce a tree diagram (any style) of a text or texts that provides some new insight into it/them, and post it to the website. Include a short explanatory text (>500 words) outlining the appropriateness of your choice of diagram style, tools (if any), and textual object(s).

November 14: Networks

Distant Reading
Selections from *Amodern* 2: Network Archaeology (fall 2013).
http://www.amodern.net/

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Massumi, Brian. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 3–25. Print.

Moretti, Franco. "Network Theory, Plot Analysis." Literary Lab Pamphlet 2. May 1, 2011. [Orig. pub. *New Left Review* 68, March-April 2011]. http://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet2.pdf

BOOT CAMP: Produce a network diagram (any style) of a text or texts that provides some new insight into it/them, and post it to the website. Include a short explanatory text (>500 words) outlining the appropriateness of your choice of network visualization style, tools (if any), and textual object(s).

November 21: Fucking Things Up

Deformance and Glitch Theory
Menkman, Rosa. "Glitch Studies Manifesto." *Video Vortex Reader II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2011. 336–47. http://art310-f12-hoy.wikispaces.umb.edu/file/view/Glitch+Studies+Manifesto+rewrite+for+Video+Vortex+2+reader.pdf/379639572/Glitch%20Studies%20Manifesto%20rewrite%20for%20Video%20Vortex%202%20reader.pdf

Sample, Mark. "Notes Towards a Deformed Humanities." *Sample Reality* May 2, 2012. http://www.samplereality.com/2012/05/02/notes-towards-a-deformed-humanities/

Samuels, Lisa, and Jerome McGann. "Deformance and Interpretation." *New Literary History* 30.1 (1999): 25–56.

BOOT CAMP: Fuck something up and post it to the website. Your approach can be digital or analog. Include a short explanatory text (>500 words) outlining the appropriateness of your choice of glitching or deformation style, what the glitch or deformation reveals about the object, and the tools you used (if any).

November 28: Conclusions, Before Beginning Again

Bennett, Tony. "Counting and Seeing the Social Action of Literary Form: Franco Moretti and the Sociology of Literature." *Cultural Sociology* 3 (July 2009): 277–297.

Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225–48.

Liu, Alan. "Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?" *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Ed. Matthew K. Gold. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 490–509. http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/debates/text/20