

[Instructor]: Jesse Stommel

[Sections]: ENGL 1101 (MTWTh 2:45 - 4:20)

[Title]: “The Haptic Interface”

[Course Description]: A haptic interface is one that engages our skin before our intellect, our body before our brain. Certain media devices could be described as peculiarly haptic (e.g., the Xbox Kinect or Apple’s iPad), but there is a way in which all media have the potential to be (or necessarily are) haptic.

A printed book has weight, odor, a certain texture in our hands. Roland Barthes writes in *The Pleasure of the Text*, “Text means Tissue” (64), a nod to the literal substances from which books are made (pulp, rag, and animal hide), while also alluding to the materiality of language. When we read, we engage the physical object of the book in an intimate way, and the words themselves have physical character through the typographical choices that govern how they appear on the page. Further, each word has shape as we say it, a part of our mouths, lungs, throat, or gut it tickles into action. Film emulsion is also a sort of tissue, one that can literally degrade or dissolve. The practice of film spectatorship, especially with genres like horror, engages us viscerally, taking control of us (and our bodies) in an immediate (and sometimes inescapable) way. Finally, digital texts command even more deliberate physical attention by being increasingly interactive. They invite us to (or even demand that we) do multiple things with our eyes, brains, and bodies as we (and in order to) experience them.

This course will look back even as it looks forward, considering conventional media like printed texts and 35mm film, in addition to examining more revolutionary digital media. Throughout the course, we will ask the following sorts of questions: What influence does the container for a text have on its content? To what degree does immersion in a text depend upon the physicality of its interface? How are evolving technologies (like the iPad or Kinect) helping to enliven (or disengage us from) the materiality of digital texts? We will engage our subjects through discussion of primary and secondary texts but also through our own experiments in multimodal composition. We will work in unfamiliar media, coming to an understanding of varied interfaces by creating with and for them.

Required Texts:

N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* [ISBN: 970-0-262-58215-5]

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* [ISBN: 978-0-374-70376-8]

Film: *Helvetica*

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (excerpt)

Frank Rose, *The Art of Immersion* (excerpt)

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (excerpt)

Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess”

Philip K. Dick, “How to Build a Universe That Doesn’t Fall Apart Two Days Later”

Bill Brown, “Materiality”

Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

Ray Bradbury, “The Veldt”

Mod, “Books in the Age of the iPad”

Bissell, “Grand Thefts”