

Memory in Text and Image (Syllabus Sketch)

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This course considers textual and image-based media as memories for individuals and cultures. From ephemeral notes that remind us to do something to archives of cultural production that establish cross-generational societies, human memory exists prominently outside the brain. Yet it is only in the past half-century or so that these “external” memories have been recognized to be equally as important as “internal” memories. Accordingly, we shall endeavor to understand the mediation between mental, subjective images and external, objective images primarily in a literary context. Which comes first? Or is another question entirely more appropriate to understand this relationship? Does this dynamic change with the advent of new technical media, and if so, then how? Our studies will involve a range of philosophical meditations, theoretical interventions, and historical reflections. Through close readings of recent prose and poetry, the course will consider what it means to treat texts as images—of thought, of experience, and especially of memory in the making. In some texts, this text-as-image equation is directly instantiated, such as Theresa Cha’s combination of words with images, Christian Bök’s spatially inventive poetry in *Crystallography*, and Alison Bechdel’s metafictional reflections in her autobiographical graphic novel *Fun Home*. In others—like William Gibson’s short story “Johnny Mnemonic,” China Miéville’s *Embassytown*, and Chuck Palahniuk’s fictional oral biography *Rant*—images exist as memories that participate in cross-cultural exchange, commodification, and storytelling. Taking memory as our mediating concept between text and image, then, the class will arrive at more a nuanced appreciation for the media ecology that sustains, structures, and is itself sustained by the creative activity of human expression.

Literary Texts:

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

William Gibson, “Johnny Mnemonic,” in *Burning Chrome* (1986/2003)

Christian Bök, *Crystallography* (1999)

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Exilée and Temps Morts: Selected Works* (2009, orig. 1976-1982)

Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2007)

Chuck Palahniuk, *Rant: An Oral Biography of Buster Casey* (2007)

Steven Hall, *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007)

China Miéville, *Embassytown* (2011)

Philosophy, Theory, and History:

W. J. T. Mitchell, “Image” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (2010).

Plato, excerpt from *Sophist* (the wax and birdcage metaphors for how human memory functions).

Plato, excerpt from *Meno* (the boy drawing out the geometric relationship).

René Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2, from *Meditations in First Philosophy* (1641).

Joshua Foer, “5. The Memory Palace,” in *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Memory* (2011).

- Bernard Stiegler, "Memory," with Mark Hansen's introduction, in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*.
- Vannevar Bush, on the "Memex" as a precursor to hypertext, "As We May Think" (*The Atlantic Monthly* 176, 1945), pp.101-108.
- Alan Kay, "User Interface: A Personal View" (1989), in *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*, pp.121-132.
- Lorraine Daston and Peter Gallison, excerpts from Ch.3 "Mechanical Objectivity," from *Objectivity* (2007), pp.115-160.
- Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "The Economy of the Scribble" in *Epistemologies of the Concrete: Twentieth-Century Histories of Life* (2010), pp.244-52.
- Jon Peterson, from *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures from Chess to Role-Playing Games* (San Diego: Unreason Press, 2012), pp.64-72, 72-75, 303-320.