

# ENGL 149: Micro / Macro / Reading (Media and Information Culture)

Instructors: Jeremy Douglass and Zach Horton  
Meetings: Tu/Th 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM, SH 2635 (South Hall)  
Contact: [jeremydouglass@english.ucsb.edu](mailto:jeremydouglass@english.ucsb.edu), [zhorton@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:zhorton@umail.ucsb.edu)  
Office: SH 2518 (Douglass) – Tu/Th 12:30-2p or by appt.  
SH 2509 (Horton) – Tu/Wed 12:30-2:30pm or by appt.

## Course Description

This course focuses on acts of reading at disparate distances and scales, from the very small to the very large. How do we confront difficult and even seemingly impossible-to-read objects and make sense of them?

In this course we examine objects that are challenging to read for a variety of reasons: things that are too large, too small, too slow, too fast, or too changeable for us to fully understand using conventional reading practices. We consider alternative modes of reading at different scales, evaluating these methods as well as the objects to be read by and through them. Our goal is simultaneously theoretical and practical: to develop a toolbox that enables an expanded form of literacy—a literacy of the unreadable.

We engage with works that exemplify multi-modal and trans-scalar reading including films such as *United 93* (Paul Greengrass), short stories such as “The Balloon” (Donald Barthelme), and theoretical works such as *Mythologies* and *S/Z* (Roland Barthes) and *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (Franco Moretti). We put theory into action in the form of collaborative interpretation and discussion of difficult objects which are multiply revised and remediated, including Tom Phillips’ *A Humument*, the constant flux of Wikipedia articles, and the torrent of Twitter feeds. A significant portion of the class is devoted to collectively mapping the complete archive of “The Simpsons,” one of the longest running television shows in history, which itself maps a quarter century of U.S. popular culture.

As final projects, students (alone or in groups) will produce their own readings of “impossible objects” utilizing the conceptual and literal tools deployed within the class. Students will learn basic data mining and information visualization skills as part of this process. From critical theory to interactive social media art pieces, this course will explore potentialities of reading at different scales, and their larger philosophical and cultural implications.

## Required Texts:

- *A Humument* (5th ed.) – Tom Phillips (~\$27, UCSB Bookstore)
- *Mythologies* – Roland Barthes (~\$27, UCSB Bookstore)
- One season of *The Simpsons* (DVD, to be ordered online).  
Students will be responsible for different seasons, with purchasing coordinated in-class.
- Course Reader, available from The Alternative on campus.

## Grade Breakdown

Participation:	19%	(includes Google Doc assignment)
Midterm (in class):	12%	
<i>Simpsons</i> Annotations:	24%	(4% per week, for 6 weeks)
Final Exam:	20%	
Final Project:	25%	

## Attendance

Please attend all class sessions and be on time. We will take roll at the beginning of each class. You may miss two classes without penalty. Your overall course grade will be lowered with each additional absence.

## Papers and Late Work

All papers and assignments are due before the start of class on the day indicated, via Google Docs. A hard copy of your final paper/project must also be handed in to Douglass' or Horton's mailbox. Any work submitted after its due date/time will be considered "late." Late work will be accepted up to 5 days after the original due date, with a 1/3 letter-grade-deduction per day late.

## Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, of all kinds, is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. Plagiarism includes the failure to acknowledge all secondary sources in your work, passing off another person's work as your own, or submitting a paper written for a previous class. Plagiarism can be obvious or subtle, intentional or a careless mistake. Take your work and documentation seriously: keep track of your sources as you read and take notes; document quotes and paraphrases as you write, not when you are finished, scrambling to find who said what and where. If you are ever in doubt about when and how to acknowledge a source, please ask! At the very least, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and a mark on your academic records, and may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

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### Unit 1: Intro to reading non-textual and difficult objects. (2 weeks)

#### WEEK 1

TU Jan 8

##### IN-CLASS

Introduction [H&D]

Charles and Ray Eames, "Powers of Ten" [film, in-class] [D]

*The Simpsons*: choose a season

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_The\\_Simpsons\\_episodes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_The_Simpsons_episodes)

TH Jan 10

##### ASSIGNMENT

Purchase books from bookstore

*The Simpsons*: ordering

##### READING

Donald Barthelme, "The Balloon" [handout] [H]

Roland Barthes, "In the Ring" ("The World of Wrestling") from *Mythologies* [H]

#### WEEK 2

TU Jan 15

##### ASSIGNMENT

Google Docs short paper [set-up handout]

##### READING

Roland Barthes, "Operation Astra" ("Operation Margarine"), "Plastic," from *Mythologies* [H]

William Gibson, "Johnny Mnemonic" [handout] [D]

TH Jan 17

##### READING

Roland Barthes, "Einstein's Brain," "Striptease," from *Mythologies* [H]

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* [excerpt, reader] [D]

Roland Barthes, *S/Z* [excerpt, reader] [D]

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### Unit 2: Too Big / Too Complex / Too Fragmentary (2 weeks)

Note: *The Simpsons* annotation homework for next 6 weeks (~4 episodes per week)

#### WEEK 3

TU Jan 22

##### ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (1-2)

##### READING

Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" [sections 24-27, reader] [H]

Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* ("Graphs") [reader] [D]

TH Jan 24

##### READING

Hans Rosling, "Gapminder" (Trendalyzer / Motion Chart) [website resources] [D]

<http://www.gapminder.org/>

<http://www.google.com/publicdata/directory>

<http://blogstats.wordpress.com/2008/04/13/trendalyzer-becomes-motion-chart/>

<https://developers.google.com/chart/interactive/docs/gallery/motionchart?hl=sv-SE>

<http://www.economist.com/node/17663585>

DISCUSSION

*The Simpsons*: introduction and example of analysis [H]

**WEEK 4**

TU Jan 29

ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (3-6)

IN-CLASS

Paul Greengrass, *United 93* [film, in-class] [H]

TH Jan 31

IN-CLASS

Paul Greengrass, *United 93* (film continued, in-class) [H]

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**Unit 3: Too Alien (1 week)**

**WEEK 5**

TU Feb 5

ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (7-10)

READING

Sharon Hopkins, "listen (a perl poem)"

[http://cultured.com/poem/listen\\_a\\_perl\\_poem\\_/534/#.UMaFe4PAd8E](http://cultured.com/poem/listen_a_perl_poem_/534/#.UMaFe4PAd8E)

Stanislaw Lem, *Solaris* (excerpt, reader) [H]

TH Feb 7

MIDTERM EXAM (in-class)

READING

"What is Critical Code Studies?" / SimCity

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**Unit 4: Too Unstable / Unfixed (2 weeks)**

**WEEK 6**

TU Feb 12

ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (11-14)

READING

Wikipedia -- Viégas and Wattenberg, "History Flow" [D]

TH Feb 14

READING

Twitter and Twistori [D]

**WEEK 7**

TU Feb 19

ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (15-18)

READING

Tom Philips, *A Humument* [D]

TH Feb 21  
READING  
Tom Philips, *A Humument* [H]

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## Unit 5: Too Distributed (3 weeks)

### WEEK 8

TU Feb 26

#### ASSIGNMENT

*The Simpsons*: episode annotations due in your Google Spreadsheet (19-22) FINAL

#### READING

OuLiPo Primer piece on "The Story Story of the Three Little Peas" Queneau (already graphed)

+ [short narrative piece to be graphed]

yEd, Gephi

examples of graphed narratives

[D]

TH Feb 28

Collective graphing of narrative

### WEEK 9

TU Mar 5

Digital Humanities Lab: aggregating Simpsons Data

Visualizing Simpsons Data 1

TH Mar 7

Visualizing Simpsons Data 2

### WEEK 10

TU Mar 12

Final Projects Lab

TH Mar 14

Final Projects Lab