

German 01:470:390:01; cross-listed with Comparative Literature 01:195:396:01  
Spring 2019, 3 credits  
Mon/Wed, 1:10pm-2:30pm  
Scott Hall 205 (CAC)

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

## Literature and Media Art

### **Description:**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russian literary scholars set out to spread a new understanding of what constituted the nature of literature. Now known as Russian formalism, the movement coined the notion of “literariness” to account for the qualities of literary language, distinct from its habitualized uses. It envisioned literature as renewing a perception that had become numbed by automatization. To describe the ways in which literature deviates from conventionalized norms of language use, they referred to the notion of *ostranenie*, of “making strange.” Formalism and later movements such as structuralism and neoformalism (in film studies) are the theoretical frames of this undergraduate seminar, which is based on the observation that aesthetic features attributed to literature can also be valid for other forms of artistic expression.

The seminar proposes that literary elements play a significant role in many media artworks by renowned artists such as Tracey Emin, Mona Hatoum, Gary Hill, Jenny Holzer, Nalini Malani or Bruce Nauman. Media art often uses language to produce a strong sensorial stimulus. It not only manipulates language as a material in itself but also manipulates the viewer’s perceptual channels. In the seminar, “literariness” will be employed as a heuristic tool to analyze the aesthetics of oral and written language in video art, experimental film, video performance and moving image installation art.

While intermedial research has been on the rise, media art is an often neglected area due to its challenging nature. So far, no comprehensive investigation of the similarities between literary aesthetics and the different guises of media art has been published. The book *The Literariness of Media Art* (2019, Benthien/Lau/Marxsen) addresses this gap. In the seminar, we will use its structure and theoretical overview to discuss media artworks: Firstly, the modalities of language will be investigated in their artistic fashioning – as the aesthetic of (kinetic) script or as the performance of voice. Secondly, media artworks are analyzed that refer to literary genres: poetry, prose, drama. Thirdly, we will look at media art that alludes to, quotes from, or appropriates concrete literary works, such as Maurice Blanchot’s *Thomas the Obscure*, Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* or poems by Oskar Wilde and Charles Bukowski. Such diverse references occur in media artworks that are fundamentally different aesthetic objects than conventional feature film adaptations.

The seminar will include a sponsored visit to MoMA for all participants and MoMa PS1 as well as an on-campus event with acclaimed New York based media artist Sung Kwan Kim.

*Taught in English; no prerequisites.*