

English 236: Literature, Technology, Mass Creativity

Course Description and Book List: Not a Syllabus

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Tuesdays 6:00 PM - 8:50 PM SH 2714

Fall 2011

This course combines two parallel yet largely non-communicating streams of contemporary thought on creativity and innovation. It is designed to see what happens when they are brought into collision with one another.

The first consists of some masterpieces of contemporary fiction from the U.S, Mexico, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the U.K. We will pay particular attention to what these books say about societies in *crisis*, and about the nature of *creativity* as a response to crisis. Of special interest will be what we can learn from contemporary literature about *mass* creativity, defined initially as creativity that is both widely distributed in the population and not centrally governable. (Iain M. Banks' hyper-technological SF society that calls itself the Culture rests on mass creativity without bounds.) *Mass* creativity matches the enormous scale of contemporary challenges like climate change, sustainable development, transnational race relations, or the disappearance of small languages.

The second stream of reading and research consists of selected contemporary *theories of technological innovation*. These have been developed in economics, law, and related social sciences, and dominate public policy discussions. They have been of interest to humanities scholars in media studies, the digital humanities, and cognate fields, but rest on methodologies and assumptions that are quite different from those in literary and cultural studies (LCS) overall. We will be specifying the main currents of innovation theory, and looking at its strengths and weaknesses as a framework for understanding the current, turbulent transition away from an Anglo-American centered form of corporate capitalism.

As we identify the main features of these distinct traditions and put them into dialogue with each other, our major goal will be to identify key contributions of literature and literary study to general public debates about whether and how high-income nations like the U.S. can create and/or innovate their way out of the current crisis. What can LCS scholars say that is not already being said in other fields? By the end of the course we will have specified some LCS contributions and linked them to the current mainstream discourses of innovation.

Participants will master the meanings of the following terms as they shape our core debates:

California Ideology
Creative class
Creative destruction
Cognotariat
Communist Hypothesis
Craft labor
Digital Humanities
Disruptive innovation
Human development
Imagination (literary)

Machine Heteroglossia
Multitude
Nanotechnology
Narrative
Network Society
New Italian Epic
Nonlinear Creativity
Shock Doctrine
Technology Transfer
University

Course practice will further develop doctoral skills that include seminar leading, analytical condensation, hermeneutics of ambiguity, research question formulation, research organization, and the construction of complex argument. We will also focus on how to create a direct, focused argument in a world where there is *always too much material* (see below)

Readings: the course library is listed below. These books will be ordered. How will we possibly read all this? We won't! We will have some common texts and the rest will be divided up.

We will read a subset of the following works of fiction:

Banks, Iain M., *Excession* (A Culture Novel) (Orbit, 1996). 185723-3948
Bolano, Roberto, *2666* (Picador, 2009) 0312429218
Delillo, Don, *Falling Man* (Scribner's 2007) 1416546023
Egan, Jennifer, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (Anchor, 2011) 0307477477
Murakami, Harari, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (Vintage, 1998) 0679775430
Robinson, Kim Stanley *Red Mars* (Spectra, 1993) 0553560732
Sorokin, Vladimir, *Day of the Oprichnik* (FS&G, 2011) 0374134754
Whitehead, Colin, *The Intuitionist* (Anchor, 2000), 0385493000

We will read parts of the following works of non-fiction:

Gauntlett, David, *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, from DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0* (Polity, 2011) 0745650029
Laird, Frank N., *Solar Energy, Technology Policy, and Institutional Values* (2001: Cambridge UP, 2006) 0521034296
Nussbaum, Martha, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard UP, 0674050549
Schumpeter, Joseph, *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy* (1947; Harper 2008) 0061561610
Sennett, Richard, *The Craftsman* (Yale UP, 2009) 0300151190
Vaughn, Diane, *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* (Chicago, 1997) 0226851761

We will read articles pertaining to the list of terms noted above.

The course is linked to the Solar Cultures project at the Center for Nanotechnology in Society's Innovation Group, whose [site](#) has been developed by Zach Horton in the English Department's graduate program.