HL4044: The Literary History of Virtual Reality

Academic Year	2021-22	**Semester**	1
Course Coordinator	Dr Timothy Gao		
Course Code	HL4044		
Course Title	The Literary History of Virtual Reality		
Pre-requisites	HL1001 Introduction to the Study of Literature		
No of AUs	4		
Contact Hours	52 (weekly seminars)		

Course Aims
In this course, we will trace a history of virtual reality before the computer, drawing on non-digital texts and artworks from the early nineteenth century onwards, and their evocation of virtual experience or immersive effects. By doing so, we will form individual definitions of virtual reality and discuss its past, present, and future role in our culture. Each week we will examine one or more case studies, organised broadly into three literary genres or periods bearing different contextual relationships to representation and reality: the Romantic poem and essay, the realist novel, and postmodern narrative. In each case study, we will (1) evaluate whether the literary work meets our or other definitions of virtual reality, (2) analyse how the work generates its particular immersive effects, and (3) discuss the significance of immersive experience both to the work's specific aims and contexts, and to our modern understandings of virtuality.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)
By the end of this course, you (as a student) would be able to: 1. Analyse and write critically about experiences of virtual reality and immersion, their historical and literary genres, and their artistic techniques and effects. 2. Discuss the role of immersive media in exploring social, ethical, and philosophical questions throughout history. 3. Explain the need for dialogue between the humanities and technological innovation.

Course Content
Each week, we will close read one to three texts or extracts. Please refer to the planned weekly schedule below for the list of key topics. What is Virtuality? Visual Immersion Verbal Immersion Parasocial Immersion Virtual Worlds The Ethics of Virtuality

Assessment (includes both continuous and summative assessment)

Component	Course LO Tested	Related Programme LO or Graduate Attributes (See English's LOs)	Weighting	Team/ Individual	Assessment Rubrics

					(See English's assessment rubrics)
1. SA1: Research Essay	1, 2, 3	2, 3, 4, 8	40%	Individual	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13
2. SA2: Personal Essay	2, 3	5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14	40%	Individual	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13
3. CA1: Essay Pitches	1, 2, 3	5, 6, 7, 9, 13	10%	Individual	1, 5, 10, 13
4. CA2: Weekly Reflection	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3, 7, 13, 15	10 %	Individual	2, 4, 5, 10
Total			100%		

Summative Assessment 1 (SA1): Research Essay (40%):
In this essay, you will engage critically with a literary work, visual artwork, film, digital media, or other cultural object of your own choice – in consultation with me – applying the same methodology we practice during seminars. You will describe the immersive or virtual quality of the work, analyse the techniques which produce it, and discuss how its experience expresses or the work's contextual concerns.

Summative Assessment 2 (SA2): Personal Essay (40%):
In this informal and first-person essay, you will describe and reflect on an experience of immersion or virtuality from your own life – in consultation with me – drawing on the structure and style of the personal essays we study during seminar. You will give an account of the experience/object/encounter, make a persuasive argument for why it represents an example of virtual reality, and discuss its significance to yourself or others.

Continuous Assessment 1 (CA1): Essay Proposals (10%):
In Week 7, you will complete a structured proposal or 'pitch' for both your essay projects, and make an appointment with me to present and workshop them. This will be an opportunity to consult with me on your choices of text and topic. You will be evaluated on the feasibility and preparedness of your plans.

Continuous Assessment 2 (CA2): Weekly Reflection (10%)
Every week, prepare a short commentary, reflection, or response on the week's prescribed readings to share during the seminar. Use the following questions as a guide or prompt for possible responses:
1. What is immersive about this work? What is its context?
2. What are other objects/experiences I could compare to this work?
3. Is there anything I don't understand about this material?
4. Does this material challenge my definitions of the virtual?

Formative feedback

Written feedback will be given when I return your essays to you. Verbal feedback on your essay proposals and progress will also be provided in the workshop week. Feedback from me and your peers generated during your weekly reflections and in-class discussions will also be helpful to checking your understanding.

Learning and Teaching approach

Approach	How does this approach support you in achieving the learning outcomes?
Seminar	The seminar will introduce author background and key ideas in the prescribed texts.
Research Essay	The research essay will require you to practice the analytical methodology you learn during each seminar, and to demonstrate your knowledge and perception of artistic and literary techniques of immersion. It will require you to engage with context and secondary materials for your chosen text.
Personal Essay	The personal essay will require you to absorb and deploy the literary devices and structures you encounter in the prescribed readings of Romantic and personal essays. By describing and making a case for your personal experience, you will demonstrate your abilities to structure and communicate a persuasive argument to a non-specialist audience.
Essay Proposals	Completing and presenting essay proposals will require you consciously to develop, plan, defend, and execute original project ideas.
Weekly Reflection	The weekly reflections will allow you and me to check your progress, specifically your understanding of the prescribed readings and your development of key ideas.

Reading and References

Primary Texts:

Novels
Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*
William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (excerpt)
Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (excerpt)
Jasper Fforde, *The Eyre Affair*
Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark*

Poems
William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Garden of Boccacio', 'This Lime-tree Bower My Prison'

Essays
G. H. Lewes, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism'
Charles Lamb, 'Dream Children'
William Makepeace Thackeray, 'De Finibus'
Thomas De Quincey, *Autobiographical Sketches* (excerpt)

Short Stories
Charles Dickens, *Mudfog Papers* (excerpt)
Charlotte Bronte, juvenilia archive (excerpt)
Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'

Artwork

Various 19th-century panorama images

Board Game
Buried Without Ceremony, 'The Quiet Year' (https://buriedwithoutceremony.com/the-quiet-year)

Theory
Peter Otto, *Romanticism, Modernity, and the Emergence of Virtual Reality*. Oxford UP, 2011.
Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming By The Book*. Princeton UP, 1999.
Lennard Davis, *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction*. Routledge, 1987.
David Lewis, 'Truth in Fiction', American Philosophical Quarterly (1978: 15.1), 37-46.
J David Velleman, 'Bodies, Selves', American Imago (2008: 65.3), 405-26.
Julian Dibbel, 'A Rape in Cyberspace', The Village Voice (1993)
Jean Baudrillard, 'The Virtual Illusion: Or the Automatic Writing of the World', Theory, Culture & Society (1995:12.4), 97-107.
Jonathan Cohen, 'Parasocial Breakups: Measuring Individual Differences in Responses to the Dissolution of Parasocial Relationships', Mass Communication & Society (2003: 6), 191-202.
The Living Handbook of Narratology, 'Metalepsis' (https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/51.html)

Course Policies and Student Responsibilities

(1) General
You are expected to complete all assigned pre-class readings and weekly reflections. You will attend all seminar classes punctually. If you must miss a seminar session, you are responsible for following up with course notes, assignments and course related announcements. Since Engagement is one of the assessment components, you are expected to participate actively in all seminar discussions and activities.

(2) Absenteeism
Attendance will be taken each week. Absence from class without a valid reason can affect your course grade significantly. Valid reasons include falling sick supported by a medical certificate and participation in NTU's approved activities supported by an excuse letter from the relevant bodies. If you must miss a seminar, you must inform me (the course instructor) via email prior to the start of the class.

Academic Integrity

Good academic work depends on honesty and ethical behaviour. The quality of your work as a student relies on adhering to the principles of academic integrity and to the NTU Honour Code, a set of values shared by the whole university community. Truth, Trust and Justice are at the core of NTU's shared values.

As a student, it is important that you recognize your responsibilities in understanding and applying the principles of academic integrity in all the work you do at NTU. Not knowing what is involved in maintaining academic integrity does not excuse academic dishonesty. You need to actively equip yourself with strategies to avoid all forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, academic fraud, collusion and cheating. If you are uncertain of the definitions of any of these terms, you should go to the academic integrity website for more information. Consult your instructor(s) if you need any clarification about the requirements of academic integrity in the course.

Course Instructors

Instructor	Office Location	Email
Dr Timothy Gao	SOH-03-20	timothy.gao@ntu.edu.sg

Planned Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic	Course LO	Readings/ Activities
1	Introduction What is Virtuality?	3	Peter Otto, 'Introduction', *Multiplying Worlds* Oliver Grau, 'Introduction', *Virtual Art* J David Velleman, 'Bodies, Selves'
2	Verbal Immersion – Romantic Vision	1, 2	19th-century Panoramic Images William Wordsworth, 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud', 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' S. T. Coleridge, 'The Garden of Boccacio', 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison'
3	Verbal Immersion – Realist Illusion	1, 2	Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming By the Book* (excerpt)
4	Verbal Immersion – Realist Illusion II	1, 2	Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* G. H. Lewes, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism'
5	Parasocial Immersion – Essays	1, 2	Charles Lamb, 'Dream Children' William Thackeray, 'De Finibus'
6	Parasocial Immersion – Novels	1, 2	William Thackeray, *The Newcomes* (excerpt) Anthony Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (excerpt) Jonathan Cohen, 'Parasocial Breakups'
7	Essay Workshops	1, 2, 3	Discussion of your plans and ideas for both the personal and research essay – by appointment.
8	Virtual Worlds – Victorian Play	1, 2	Charlotte Bronte, juvenilia (excerpts)

			Thomas De Quincey, *Autobiographical Sketches* (excerpt)
9	Virtual Worlds – Postmodern Narrative	1, 2	Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' David Lewis, 'Truth in Fiction'
10	Virtual Worlds – Postmodern Narrative II	1, 2	*The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 'Metalepsis' (https://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/51.html) Jasper Fforde, *The Eyre Affair*
11	The Ethics of Virtuality – Reality vs Immersion	2, 3	Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark* Jean Baudrillard, 'The Virtual Illusion' Lennard Davis, 'Introduction', *Resisting Novels*
12	The Ethics of Virtuality – Sex and Violence	1, 2, 3	Richard Powers, *Plowing the Dark* Charles Dickens, *Mudfog Papers* (excerpt) Julian Dibbel, 'A Rape in Cyberspace'
13	Conclusion	3	Buried Without Ceremony, 'The Quiet Year' Essay Submission