

# On the Capabilities of Media. Towards a Poetics.

## A Series of Fall Lectures

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Visiting Distinguished Professor in the Ivan Allen College Fall 2016

Research into 'historical' or 'early' media but also of pre- or non-digital modern media has been recognized as of genuine significance to the understanding of today's media-bound world. This lecture series both recognizes the important historical research that has already been conducted in this field and departs from its principal concerns, in the interest of what I propose to call a poetics of media. Consequently, it will engage in a series of close readings of works of literature and art but also of other artifacts, both past and present.

My approach builds upon both my initial training in the species of close reading long associated with 'Cambridge English' and my concern with the status of what is commonly termed 'theory, a corpus whose most stimulating instances (whether French or American) are in fact something rather different—works of philosophy developed in close proximity to art and literature. My contention is that the interaction of these two intellectual disciplines makes for an exploration of media that highlights the inventiveness enabled by their 'capabilities', or virtuality (as opposed, philosophically, to their possibilities). Not just the inventiveness of human subjects *in* media but the perpetual (re)invention of media themselves.

The poetics of media that I propose to sketch out decenters any tendency to establish a binary opposition between the human, social or cultural dimensions of media and their material substratum. Consequently, it narrows the gap between a medium and a genre and questions the technological determinism that at least loosely characterizes much work on media today. Infusing media artifacts with concerns deriving from a consideration of works of art, it insists on the significance both of a concept of modulation, for grasping the dynamics—or life—in or of media, and of a concept of acknowledgement, in the sense this acquires in philosophical pragmatism, where it is irreducible to a cognitive function. An alternative title to this series of lectures which thus seeks to conceptualize and celebrate the capabilities of media might be 'the felicity of media'.

### ***Lecture n° 1: Close Reading and the Capabilities of a Medium [Tuesday, October 18] 4:00-5:30 p.m. TSRB Auditorium***

The close reading of cultural artifacts—including texts, as is now increasingly recognized—requires that one pay explicit attention to their medium in its historicity, which also involves the interactions with other media that any given medium always implies. This proposition can usefully be explored by a detailed consideration of a reduced number of historical artifacts, political, artistic or literary, whose status in terms of media, which we tend to overlook, in part (at least) as a result of our overfamiliarity with them, is constitutive of their effect. The challenge for us is to acknowledge the capabilities of any new medium as it co-emerge with a new political or cultural formation, even if its actualization in history, in close proximity to questions of genre, turns out to have been only fleeting.

### ***Lecture n° 2: From Medium Specificity to Medium Technicity [Thursday, November 10] 4:00-5:30 p.m. Room 217 College of Design***

The notion of pure or 'specific' media, which was highly influential in defining the moment of modernism, had the effect of foregrounding the expressive possibilities of any given medium, beyond that of abstract painting to which the term medium specificity originally applied. Its continuing relevance is anything but obvious in a 'post-media' world in which digital media have developed the capacity to subsume all other technological media—and indeed

promise, in some readings, to provoke the disappearance of media (and the human) as such, in favor of the autonomous proliferation of self-sufficient data streams. A concept of medium technicity can, however, be derived from the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon's analysis of the history of technology, that allows for an intensification of the capabilities of media and underlines their continued relevance in an environment in which binary code is held to reign supreme.

**Lecture n° 3:            *Configurational Media [Tuesday, November 29]***  
**4:00-5:30 Room 125, TSRB**

Allied to the close reading of artworks and other artifacts, the concept of medium technicity argues for an approach that envisions media as configurational, rather than procedural. This is far from implying an opposition between work realized in computational and non-computational environments. The two previous lectures will accordingly have had recourse to a deliberately heterogeneous series of artworks and other artifacts: political documents, protocols from the social sciences, gardens or landscapes, paintings, architecture, film, fiction, poetry, digital art or literature, etc. from different periods. After exploring the tensions between configurational and procedural approaches in twentieth-century art, the final lecture will set out to show that the significance of specific contemporary artworks that explicitly proclaim their attachment to a form of media or code-bound determinism nonetheless derive their power and significance from the configurational capabilities of their materials.



**Yves Abrioux** is Professor Emeritus of English literature at the University of Paris 8. His research centers on art and literature in relation to philosophy, science and technology. His publications take in poetry and fiction, visual art, landscape and gardens. In addition to his work at Paris 8, he has taught at the École du Louvre (Paris). Abrioux has exhibited work made in collaboration with the artist Gianni Burattoni, in group exhibitions in France and Great Britain and in solo exhibitions and installations in galleries and institutional venues in France and Italy. In addition to his books and articles on the artists Ian Hamilton Finlay and Bill Culbert, he has written numerous catalogue essays and reviewed multiple exhibitions for a broad range of art journals and magazines throughout Europe. In addition to his role as Professor, he served as the Director of Graduate Studies for the humanities at the University of Paris 8, where he also helped shape new research and degree programs devoted to digital media, the arts and literature. He is interested in displacements between media, both traditional and modern, and continues to speculate on the future of the museum. He worked closely with the Graduate Program in Digital Media on projects related to Louvre-Atlanta. In 2014, He co-curated *Mapping Place: Africa Beyond Paper* at the Robert C. Williams Museum of Paper Making. Abrioux has worked closely with faculty and students at Georgia Tech for the past 20 years. He was a visiting professor in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication in Fall 2006 (see the selected list of publications and papers noted below).

## Selected Publications and Presentations by Yves Abrioux affiliated with Georgia Tech faculty and students

- Y. Abrioux, 'From Method to Medium. Mapping and/as Art,' [in conjunction with exhibition 'A Gathering of Continents: An Exhibition of Joannes Blaeus' *Grooten Atlas*, Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking, February 27-June 15, 2015 (Abrioux lecture April 16, 2015)
- 'Introduction to the Proceedings: *Africa Beyond Africa: The Future of Cultural, social, and Scientific Research*,' [with K. J. Knoespel] Africa-Atlanta Publications, Leading Edge (Ivan Allen College: Georgia Tech, 2015).
- Y. Abrioux, 'Collecting African Art: An Interview with Herbert Weiss,' November 15, 2014 [with K. J. Knoespel] (Leading Edge Publications: Atlanta, 2015)
- Y. Abrioux, 'Mapping Place: Africa Beyond Paper,' Introduction to exhibition catalog, *Mapping Place* an exhibition at the Robert C. Williams Museum of Papermaking, February 27 – June 15, 2014. [with K. J. Knoespel & Teri Williams] (Leading Edge Publications: Atlanta, 2015)
- Y. Abrioux, 'Pour un musée augmenté. Médias numériques et artefacts non « modernes »'. *Colloque international Patrimoines du Maghreb à l'ère numérique*, April 28-30, 2013 [with K. J. Knoespel]
- Y. Abrioux and K. J. Knoespel, 'Un musée à venir: What did we learn from the Louvre-Atlanta Exhibitions? *'Heritage in the Age of Digital Humanities : How should training practices evolve?'* 21-23 June 2012/French National Archives/Université Paris 8.
- Audrey Whitman (M.S. student, Digital Media, Georgia Tech), 'Semiotic Requirements for Procedural Narrative.' International Conference on Translating E-Literature, Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis, June 12-14, 2012.
- Jichen Zhu, Ph.D from Digital Media Program, Georgia Tech 'Machines, Memory and Reverie: The Matter of Digital Hermeneutics,' Seminar on 'Environnements numériques et Pratiques culturelles' Université de Paris 8, [June 3, 2011].
- Y. Abrioux, 'Conversation on Museums and the Work of Digital Media: Bernard Stiegler at the Centre Pompidou,' School of Literature, Media & Communication & Graduate Program in Digital Media (October 30, 2008)
- Y. Abrioux, 'Inventing Concepts for a New Museum: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Gilbert Simondon,' Lecture sponsored by High Museum of Art in conjunction with Louvre-Atlanta, (April 19, 2007)
- Y. Abrioux, 'Landscape and Memory,' for symposium on 'Architecture and Memory,' School of Architecture, Georgia Tech, February 26, 2005.
- K. J. Knoespel and Eduardo Lyon, 'Autopoesis and Emergence in Architecture,' 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Literature and Science, University of Paris 8, June 26, 2004

## Faculty and Students at Georgia Tech who have worked with Yves Abrioux

<b>FACULTY</b>	Sara Hornbacher	Gray Gunter
Carl DiSalvo	Teri Williams	Micah Horvat
Alexandra Mazalek	Evans M. Harrell	Al Matthews
K. J. Knoespel	Karen Head	Aimee Rydarowski
Barbara Stafford		Jichen Zhu
Doug Allen	<b>GRADUATE STUDENTS</b>	Weiling He
Sonit Bafna	Pegah Zimmani	Audrey Whitman
John Peponis	Arti Kanekar	Weiling
Ian Bogost	Hartmut Koenitz	He