RESEARCH GROUP : INTERACTING WITH PRINT

Funding Agencies

Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (2007-2009) Centre canadien d’études allemandes et européennes Université de Montréal, Faculté des Arts et des Sciences McGill Faculty of Arts

Members

a) Investigators

- Susan Dalton, History, Université de Montréal
- Nikola von Merveldt, Modern Literatures and Languages, Université de Montréal
- Tom Mole, English Literature, Université McGill
- Andrew Piper, German Studies, Université McGill

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Project description

The long eighteenth-century witnessed dramatic transformations within the realm of print culture, from new technologies of printing (the iron printing press, the steam press), new methods for reproducing images (steel plate engraving, stereotypy), new distribution infrastructures (macadamized roads, railways, canals), and new understandings of intellectual property which crystallized into new copyright laws.

Within this historical context, the aim of our research group is twofold: to analyse, on the one hand, the way the medium of print shaped literary and social communities during this period, and, on the other hand, the way print itself was shaped by its relation to other influential eighteenth-century media such as handwriting, illustration, sculpture, the theatre, public readings and conversation. We are interested in exploring not only what print did to individuals and how it shaped their social interactions, but how print interacted and was shaped by its position within a larger media environment.

This project will draw on the particular strengths of two complementary fields, cultural history and the history of print, in order to understand better the mutual influences linking material production, circulation and reception of printed text to a larger media ecology.

With this in mind, our group would chart various sites of print interactivity:
1. How did eighteenth-century individuals interact with books, whether it was children learning to read or adults learning to write in their books (commonplace books, gift books, etc.)? What did they do with books and what did books do to them?

2. How did eighteenth-century individuals interact via books, either through translations, literary reviews, poetry or images? How did the printed book or the print serial allow for new social imaginaries to emerge that both transcended and reconfigured national, gender, or class boundaries?

3. How does the study of the influence of other media on print impact how we have traditionally understood "print culture"? How did the circulation of images undergird or supercede virtual print communities? How did women’s epistolary networks, for example, move into or work against printed texts?

4. And finally, how was writing or the book represented and rethought on the eighteenth-century stage? How did the intermedial experience of theatrical performance reflect back on book production? How did print seek to reproduce the intimacy of face to face encounters in an increasingly industrialised and alienating environment and what were the consequences of this transition into print in redefining public and private spheres?

The strength of the project is that it assembles an international and intermedia focused group that will study print interactivity in a European context. Tom Mole is a professor of English literature specialising in Romanticism and the cultural history of celebrity; Andrew Piper is a Germanist working on Goethe, women translators and the history of the book; Nikola von Merveldt is a comparatist focusing on French and German children’s literature; and Susan Dalton is a historian working on the published writings of Venetian salon women. Each researcher’s individual project explores the cultural practices of intermediality in different national, social and political contexts allowing for a comparative and interdisciplinary approach to the larger questions.

**Calendar of activities**

**2007**


**2006**