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國立臺灣大學 115 學年度碩士班招生考試試題

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Literary studies has become more and more imbricated with media studies these days. It is partially a return to McLuhan's (in)famous pronouncement that "the medium is the message." The inscribed words on a page are less important than literature as a *technological* form enabled by the mass production of the printing press and its wide dissemination. It is also partially a crisis of human subjectivity, inaugurated by (post-)structuralism and epitomized by Fredrich Kittler's famous idiom: "the so-called man," who thinks he has agency to make history but is only an appendix of media evolution. Both perspectives ask us to confront the medium specificity as well as use of literature.

The following passages come from *No Medium* (2013), in which Craig Dworkin provides an etymological explanation of "medium" and his take on what his book title means. For this exam, **analyze why Dworkin would think there is no medium**. After carefully and perhaps speculatively reconstructing his reasoning, **write a coherent and argument-driven essay in which you reflect on how your approach—not necessarily media studies—can respond to these important questions in your analysis of literature and/or other artistic media**.

※ 注意：請於試卷內之「非選擇題作答區」作答

Historically, the word medium has denoted a number of related, mutually reinforcing, and by now probably inextricable, ideas. Following its origins in the Latin adjective *medius* ("in the middle"), medium takes on the sense of an instrumental intermediary from the late sixteenth century on. One can track the general sense of the word in the Oxford English Dictionary, which records its role in designating three kinds of transmitters. First, broad classes or modes: "but yet is not of necessitie, that Cogitations bee expressed by the Medium of Wordes [i.e., as opposed to a gestural sign language]," as one of the earliest examples, from Francis Bacon, attests. Second, conduits: for Thomas Pecke, a reflective looking glass becomes "the Medium to let you see / A wonder," just as the marine seal's sense of touch is gained "through the medium of his whiskers" (the spiritualist sense of medium predominated over the nineteenth century). Third, venues: one eighteenth-century reader comments to a journal on the useful information expected from "the medium of your curious Publication"; a late-twentieth-century financial report notes that "foreigners could deal anonymously in British markets via the medium of a Swiss bank." That sense of venue expanded to denote what used to be called "mass communication," whether as a mode (radio, television, magazines) or an institution (often with the definite article: "the media," who are thought variously to distort or report, to inform or dumb down, to influence or ignore their audience). All three senses, furthermore, come together in what might be a synonym for genre or discipline: "any of the varieties of painting or drawing as determined by the material or technique used." From there, the word came to denote the materials or techniques themselves, eventually moving beyond the bureaucratic departments of the fine arts academy to signify "any physical material (as tape, disk, paper, etc.) used for recording or reproducing data, images, or sound." More recently, of course, the word has come to connote certain kinds of electronics, or "new media."

First, one can never locate a medium in isolation. Media—if there are such things—are only recognizable as collectives. Inscription, obviously, requires material impingement, but the act of reading, despite being so often figured as disembodied, also always involves a material interaction.

The second lesson of the predicament of media is that we are misled when we think of media as objects. Indeed, the closer one looks at the materiality of a work—at the brute fact of its physical composition—the more sharply a social context is brought into focus. To begin with, materials can only be legible as media under certain circumstances; they only make sense in specific contexts.

Media, from this perspective, consist of analyses of networked objects in specific social settings. As much acts of interpretation as material things, as much processes as objects, media are not merely storage mechanisms somehow independent of the acts of reading or recognizing the signs they record.

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