Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MA (Loyola University of Chicago, 2012)
BA (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010)

“Machine Writing Modernism: A Literary History of Computation and Media, 1897-1953”

Department of English

Monday, June 13, 2016
10:30 A.M.
Clearihue Building
Room A314

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Stephen Ross, Department of English, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Ray Siemens, Department of English, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Emile de Rosnay, Department of French, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, Department of English, University of Maryland

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. John Dower, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

In response to early technologies of seeing, hearing, and moving at the turn of the twentieth century, modernist authors, poets, and artists experimented with forms of textual production enmeshed in mechanical technologies of the time. Unfolding a literary history of such mechanical forms, this dissertation sees modern manuscripts as blueprints for literary production, whose specific rules of assembly model historical mechanisms of cultural production in practice during their period of composition. Central to this analysis is the concept of the inscriptive procedure, defined as a systematic series of strategies for composing, revising, and arranging a literary text that emerge in the context of that text’s specific political and technological environment; in so doing, inscriptive procedures use composition as a material act that works through a set of political circumstances by incorporating them into the signifying process of the physical text. As such, procedurally authored texts do not neatly instantiate in the form of the print book. Reading modern manuscripts instead as media objects, this dissertation applies the physical operation of a given old media mechanism as a hermeneutic strategy for interpreting an author’s inscriptive procedure. It unspools the spectacular vignettes of Raymond Roussel, plays back the celluloid fragments of Marcel Proust, decrypts the concordances of Samuel Beckett, and processes a digital history of Djuna Barnes’s editorial collaboration with T.S. Eliot. Rather than plotting a positivist literary genealogy, this dissertation instead traces an ouroboros mode of literary critique that emerges in its own wake, as digital experiments with textual manipulation reveal analog bibliographic arrangement procedures. Using the methods of contemporary scholarly editing to undertake a procedural archaeology of experimental literature, this dissertation unearths an analog prehistory of digital humanities practice, one that evolves alongside the mechanisms of old media as they lead to the advent of the digital age. In so doing, it unfolds a historicity of cultural form, one whose mechanical and ideological apparatuses participate in the development of early methods in humanities computing.