Digital Literature

Professor Jessica Pressman
English 527 | Spring 2015
SDSU

Class Meetings: T/Th 12-1:45pm, AH 1112	Course Website: spring2016-eng527.jessicapressman.com
Office hours: Th 10-12:00 and by appointment Professor's Office: AL 261	Email: jpressman@mail.sdsu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION
What happens to literature and its study when text moves from page to screen? This course examines works of born-digital literature (literature created on the computer to be read on the computer) to explore the latest cutting-edge of literary art and to understand how this emergent literary form affects the way we read, study, and understand literature. The course situates digital literature within literary history but also considers digital literature as a new form whose art "object" possesses computer-driven aesthetics— such as speed, animation, and multimodal semiotics— that produce decisively different literary effects and reading practices.

We will examine a varied collection of digital literature and genres including hypertext, interactive fiction, kinetic poetry, and augmented reality literature. Our study will be bolstered by readings in theory and criticism by Katherine Hayles, Lev Manovich, and others. Moving between creative and critical works in print and digital formats, we will strive to understand the state of this new literary field and its relation to print literature and traditional methods of literary study.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
This is a literature course: it focuses on analyzing literary works. This is also a writing-intensive course. You will sharpen your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills by applying them to multimodal, multimedia literature. The result will, hopefully, be an expansion of these abilities as well as your appreciation of literature as an evolving, emergent cultural form.

- To understand born-digital literature as part of literary history
- To be able to apply traditional (print-based) close reading practices to digital, multimodal, screen-based works
- To practice medium-specific analysis of digital literature in the form of a final, critical, and web-based essay

*No programming knowledge is required for the class; however, all students should be advised that they will be required to engage with new media technologies.

ASSIGNMENTS
Participation in class: 15%
Weekly Blog Responses: 25%
Midterm Essay (Close Reading Electronic Literature): 25%
Final Web-based Essay Project: 35%

Participation 15%: The success and productivity of the seminar depends upon the participation and preparation of each individual for each meeting. Together, we will collaboratively explore the subject of the class in depth, working together to pursue questions, analyze texts, and proffer critical connections and conclusions. In order to do so, you must **come to class ready to participate**. A full participation grade (an A grade) requires you to
1) attend *all* class meetings
2) come read to participate—meaning, ready to *talk and listen*
3) Your participation grade also includes a mandatory **conference**. You are required to meet with me at least once during the quarter, particularly in preparation for your final web-essay.

Weekly Blog Responses 25%:
As this is a class on digital literature and media, we will employ the technology of the Web to stimulate and extend our in-class discussions. You will be required to post short (300-500 words=1 page, single-spaced) thoughtful, analytical, and grammatically correct responses about the weekly reading to your blog by **6pm on the Monday before class**.
**Specific blog assignments will be posted to the course website.
-NO credit for late postings.
-You must also read and comment on at least one classmate's blog each week, before Thursday's class meeting.

Individual blog posts will *not* receive grades, but a holistic grade for completion *and* content will be presented at midterm and, again, at the end of the term. It will be determined based on the following:

Blog Grading Rubric	
Completion	**Content**
A= 10-12 posts	A= Contains a clear thesis and close
B= 7-9 posts	analysis of a specific quotation, visual
C= 5-6 posts	aspect, idea, etc. Displays thoughtful
D= 3-4 posts	reflection and a careful attempt to
F= 2 or less	communicate.
	Comment on peer's blog is thoughtful,
	polite, and substantial.

	B= Contains an attempt at a thesis or organizing insight but is largely summary of the reading or conjecture. Examines a specific quotation, visual aspect, etc. but does not develop an opinion about it. Comment on peer's blog lacks substance or insight. C= Reads as a hurried attempt to get the assignment done, perhaps with spelling mistakes. D= Brief or incoherent post with incomplete sentences lack of focus.

Midterm Essay (Close reading of a work of digital literature) 25%:
This short essay (1,500 words= 5-6 pages) is an opportunity to explore a single work of digital literature from our syllabus through an in-depth analysis and to practice multimodal explication. This essay will be posted to your blog under a new page, title "Midterm Essay."

Final Digital Project 35%:
The course culminates in a final essay which is presented as an electronic text--a website whose interface, aesthetic, and navigational elements *support* the intellectual claims of the argument. To repeat, as this is the main point of the assignment
(for all 3 options listed below) and the grading of it: the form and format of the essay must support the argument (content). This final essay will push you to implement your learned critical methodology of medium-specific analysis in a creative-critical way.
*You *must* meet with me, in person or by skype, to receive full credit on this project.

Options:
1) A thesis-driven close reading at *least two creative works* of digital literature (at least one from our syllabus, and not examined in your midterm) that uses *at least 2 critical sources*. (6-8 pages, 2000+ words)
-The essay builds upon the skills, guidelines, and goals of the midterm essay assignment but allows you more flexibility to explore a topic of your choosing and to engage with scholarship in addition to a primary text.
-Like the midterm essay, this final essay needs a strong thesis (a debatable argument) that is proved using the content of work, through explication.
-The grading rubrics for this critical, scholarly essay are similar to those for the midterm grading rubrics. However, this is a digital project, so a great part of the grade will be how form and format support argument.

2) A creative work of digital literature accompanied by a short (5 pg.) critical

analysis of your composition. You must use *at least 2 critical sources* to situate and explain your work.
-The creative work should be grounded in the course; it should pursue an idea, argument, or aesthetic aspect explored in class.
-The critical analysis should not describe your creative work but present an argument (thesis) about *what* the work attempts to achieve and *why* it matters (the So What).

3) A curated exhibition of electronic literature that includes an analytical introduction and rationale (5 pgs.) in the form of an overview or viewing guide for the collection you create. You must use *at least 2 critical sources* to situate your exhibition.
-The exhibition must include at least 4 works of literature and be viewable online.
-The analytical introduction should present a argument/thesis (rationale) for *what* the exhibition contains and *why* it matters (the So What).

***The project is due at the start of **the final exam period.** *You will present your project to the class during this Finals period.*

Extra Credit: Total of 1%
-Attend the campus lecture "The Future of the Humanities in a Digital Age" on January 26 and write a blog post that situates that event in the context of our class.
-Attend Electronic Literature Reading Event on February 17 and write a blog post that situates that event (the reading, the literature, the discussion) in the context of our class.

NOTE: Late work
--Blog posts receive no credit if turned in late.
--Midterm and Final Project are docked 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (for example, an A becomes an A- if turned in one day late).

NOTE: Disability Statement
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

Note: Possible Faculty Strike
The California Faculty Association is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with management. It is possible that the faculty union will call a strike or other work stoppage this term. I will inform the class as soon as possible of any disruption to our class meeting schedule.

REQUIRED READING
<u>Available in the SDSU Bookstore</u>
Jackson, Shelley. *Patchwork Girl* (Eastgate Systems)
Ryan, Marie-Laure, Lori Emerson, and Benjamin J. Robertson, eds. *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media* (2014)

READING SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introductions
January 21: Introduction to Born-Digital Literature

Week 2: Hypertext
January 26: "Hypertextuality" (JHGDM), "Electronic Literature" (JHGDM)
Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

Extra credit event: Lecture on "The Humanities in a Digital Age"
7pm in Aztec Student Union, Montezuma Hall

January 28: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

Week 3: Hypertext, *Patchwork Girl*
**first blog post due*
February 2: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*
"Storyspace" (JHGDM)
February 4: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

Week 4: Hypertext, *Patchwork Girl*
February 9: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*
~N. Katherine Hayles, "Flickering Connectivities in Shelley Jackson' Patchwork Girl: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis" (2000)
February 11: Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl*

Week 5: Augmented Reality Hypertext
February 16: Caitlin Fisher's "Circle" (2011)
 "Glitch Aesthetics" (JHGDM),
"Augmented Reality" (JHGDM),

**February 17: Extra Credit event: Electronic Literature Reading Caitlin Fisher
7pm in Love Library**

February 18: Guest speaker: Caitlin Fisher

Week 6: Kinetic Poetry
February 23: Brian Kim Stefans, "The Dreamlife of Letters" (2000),

-- Temporality of Digital Works" (JHGDM), "Animation/Kineticism" (JHGDM)
February 25: Thom Swiss, "Genius" and "Prologue"
-- "Digital Poetry" (JHGDM), "

Week 7: Flashing Fiction
March 1: Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota*
March 3: Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota*
Jessica Pressman's "The Strategy of Digital Modernism: Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries's *Dakota"*

Week 8: Interactive Fiction
March 8: Andrew Plotkin, *Shade*
--"Interactive Fiction" (JHGDM)
--"Role-Playing Games"
March 10: Andrew Plotkin, *Shade*
--Jeremy Douglass, "Enlightening Interactive Fiction: Andrew Plotkin's *Shade*

Week 9: Midterm—Professor Pressman in Abu Dhabi
March 15: Peer review in-class
March 17: No class meeting; midterm evaluation exercise online (see online prompt)

Midterm Due on Friday at midnight, posted to the blog

Week 10: Web 2.0 Literature
March 22: Amy Hoy and Thomas Fuchs, "Twistori"
        Netprov (TBD)
March 24: Elit-Making Workshop (meet in LARC Lab), 12:30-2:30

--Spring break—

Week 11: Critical Reading Strategies
April 7: *Project for Tachistoscope*
April 9: *Project for Tachistoscope*

Week 12: Critical Reading Strategies
April 12: *Reading Project*
"Reading Strategies" (JHGDM)
April 14: *Reading Project*
"Digital Humanities" (JHGDM)

Final Project Proposal Due—Monday @ 6pm. Posted to your blog under "Final Project" page

Week 13: Building projects
April 26: Peer Review of Final Project Proposals
April 28: Building projects

Week 14: Conclusion
May 3: Building projects
May 5: Concluding Discussion

Final Project and Presentation Due during Final Exam Session***