English 391a:
Digital Literature

Yale University
Fall 2010

Professor Jessica Pressman

Wednesdays, 2:30-4:20 LC 203	Course Website: http://engl39101f10.commons.yale.edu/
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What happens to literature and its study when text moves from page to screen? This course examines works of digital literature (literature created on the computer to be read on the computer) to understand how this emergent literary form affects the way we read, study, and understand literature. The course situates digital literature within literary history, examining connections to print hypertextual narrative, concrete poetry, OULIPO constraint-driven experiments, and other lineages. However, we also consider 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, and kinetic poetry by such writers as Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, Erik Loyer, and Judd Morrissey. 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.

Writing assignments focus on the practice of close reading with an awareness of media-specific analysis, wherein critical analysis examines not only the formal techniques but also the material format of a literary work. To this end, the course culminates in a final essay (10-12 pages) which will be presented as a website whose interface, aesthetic, and navigational elements support the intellectual claims of the argument. This final essay will push you to

implement your learned critical methodology of medium-specific analysis in a creative-critical way.

Since our course examines how digital technologies inform literature, new media will also inform our critical responses to the works we read. To this end, all of your assignments will be presented in a digital format: online. You will be given a blogspace in which to explore ideas, collect notes, present assignments, and extend the boundaries of our seminar in an online portfolio. You will present ALL of your essays on your blog.

*No previous programming knowledge is required for the class; training will be provided on how to use the blogs and beyond. Technical instruction and assistance will be provided by the Instructional Technology Group. Visit their website for informative lessons in blogging (http://itgblog.commons.yale.edu) and other help-related pages (http://itg.yale.edu/help-pages). However, all students should be advised that they will be required to engaged with new media technologies.

REQUIREMENTS
Participation, including 1 in-class presentation (3-5 minutes): 20%
Weekly Blog Responses to a Writing Prompt (300-500 words): 20%
Midterm Essay, presented as a blog-post online (1000-1500 words): 20%
Final Web-based Essay Project (3,000-4,000): 40%

Participation: 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. Some of these works do not have traditional endings, and you cannot simply rely on a page number as a sign of completed reading, while some are deceptively simple or short. You must allocate enough time to get a deep sense of the text, perhaps even engaging in multiple readings. Adequate preparation includes not only reading the work but also being prepared to discuss it. You are expected to both talk *and* listen during each session. As this is a small seminar, you must attend *all* class meetings.

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. The purpose of this meeting is for us to get to know one another and to thoroughly address your questions about the course and topic. I encourage you to utilize my office hours or set up an appointment with me to discuss any ideas or concerns about the reading, the subject of the course, or even the very definition of literature!

        Presentation: During the semester, you will prepare a short (3-5 minute) presentation on **1** work of electronic literature that you have discovered and read that is *not* on the syllabus. You will introduce it to the class in a presentation that 1) presents and summarizes the work, 2) analyzes it in relation to the issues explored in class, and 3) provides a critical judgment on it as literature. The goal of this assignment is to practice your oral presentation skills while also providing an opportunity for you to explore the Web in search

of new literature.

Weekly Blog Responses: 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 thoughtful responses about the weekly reading to your blog by 6pm on the Monday before class. NO credit for late postings. You should plan to read everyone else's blog post before class as you prepare for our meeting.

Midterm Essay: This essay is an opportunity to explore a single work of digital literature through an in-depth analysis and to practice the kind of multimodal explication that you will extend for your final essay. The essay will be posted to your blog and must include certain elemental aspects of web-design (hyperlinks, images, mouse-over, pop-up, etc) that will be made explicit with the assignment details.

Final Web-based Essay Project: This longer (3,000-4,000) paper will be an analytical essay on at least one work from the course presented, and it will be presented in the form of a website. You will propose your own essay topic and website in a formal proposal, meet with me to discuss the structure and presentation of the argument, and receive technical support from ITG to implement the digital aspects of this creative-critical analysis. You will receive the necessary instruction for building the site and including these required elements in it during an *out-of-class* session by ITG. This final assignment serves to implement the learned methodology of media-specific analysis and to exhibit an understanding of how the relationship between form and content, the foundation of traditional literary study, expands to address the role of technologies in presenting and accessing literature.

REQUIRED WORKS (Available at the Yale Bookstore)
N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*
Steve Tomasula, *TOC* [DVD]

READING SCHEDULE
In order to create a critical context for reading the literature, we will often pair works of electronic literature with critical essays (denoted by ~). All readings are available from our website, unless otherwise noted.

September 1– Introduction

September 8– Hypertext
Deena Larsen, *Disappearing Rain* (2000)
~Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, Chapter 1 (1-42) [book]

September 15—Literary Tradition Redux
Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota* (2002)
Brian Kim Stefans, *The Dreamlife of Letters* (2000)
Judd Morrissey, *The Jew's Daughter/* (2000)
~Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, Chapter 2 (43-86) [Book]

September 22: Navigation and/as Reading
Jim Andrews, "Blue Hyacinth"
Jason Nelson, "Sydney's Siberia" (2010)
Ingrid Ankerson and Megan Sapnar "Cruising" (2001)
~Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press 2001): Chapter 1, "What is New Media?"
(27-48) [PDF]

September 29— Interactive Fiction. SPECIAL GUEST: Prof. NICK MONTFORT (MIT)
Nick Montfort, *Ad Verbum* (2000)
Andrew Plotkin, *Shade* (2000)
~Montfort, "Riddle Machines: The History and Nature of Interactive Fiction." *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens. Oxford: Blackwell (2008).

October 6– No Interaction Required: Flash-ing Animations
William Poundstone, "Project for the Tachistoscope [Bottomless Pit]" (2005)
Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, "Nippon"
~John Cayley, "Time Code Language: New Media Poetics and Programmed Signification" (*New Media Poetics*, pp. 307-333) [PDF]

October 13– Prof. Pressman away–ITG Presentation
In-class Midterm Essay exchange (DRAFT of essay due)
Guest lecturer: Robin Ladouceur (ITG)

October 20— Play
Jason Rohrer, "Passage" (2007)
Andrew Stern and Michael Mateas, *Façade* (2005)
~Jennie Gritz, "Beyond Space Invaders." Essay on *Façade* in *The Atlantic Monthly*

Friday, October 22: MIDTERM ESSAY DUE @ 6 pm online

October 27— The Cultural Politics of Access and Play
Natalie Bookchin, *The Intruder* (1999)
Erik Loyer, *Chroma* (2000)

November 3— Bodies and Embodiedness
David Jhave Johnston, *Sooth* (2006)
Noah Wardrip-Fruin, *Talking Cure* (2002)
Erik Loyer, "Ruben & Lullaby" (2009). (iphone app). Purchase at Opertoon and Video demonstration
~Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, Chapter 3 (87- 130) [book]

Proposal for Final Project Due

November 10— Elit 2.0
Kate Pullinger and Chris Joseph, *Flight Paths*
Mark C. Marino, *Marginalia in the Library of Babel*
~Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, Chapter 4 (131-159) [Book]

November 17— New Multimodal Storytelling
Steve Tomasula, *TOC* (2009) [DVD]
J.R. Carpenter, *"Entre Ville"* (2006)

THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1— Off the Screen
Caitlin Fisher, "Requiem"
Noah Wardrip-Fruin, et. al., Artists' Summary of VR Installation "Screen" (2003)
Quicktime movie of installation.
Interview with Noah Wardrip-Fruin, *The Iowa Review Web*

Possible class visit to Brown University's VR space, the CAVE

December 8 (Reading Week): Student Presentations of Projects

Final Project Due: Monday, December 13 @ 6:00 pm online