Electronic Literature and the Future of Reading

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About the Course

This is an introduction to the study and practice of electronic literature, a word-based art that evolves (often though not exclusively) in conjunction with computing machines, software, digital networks, and the cultural effects of those technologies. Now at least 30 years old, this art form can now be studied as something other than a novelty, as a problematic and revealing encounter between forces of tradition (canon, genre, the archive) and those of disruption (iteration, object relations, network flow). The seminar assumes no prior experience with digital writing and should be valuable both to those interested in creative practice and those more inclined toward history and theory.

Texts and Technology

All readings and examples for the seminar are available at no charge online, either through the instructor's website or from other sites. You will need reader software for Portable Document Format (PDF) and a capable Web browser such as Firefox/Mozilla, Chrome, or Safari. You'll fare better with a laptop or desktop than a tablet or smart phone. If you have a laptop, please bring it to class.

Requirements

Your grade in the seminar will be based on the following components. The descriptions below are approximate. I will distribute more detailed assignments during the term. For the Final Project, I will suggest possible topics for the critical paper and ideas for creative projects. I am happy to discuss variations and alternatives as long as they fall within appropriate scope.

10% - Preparation and participation
> Do the readings and contribute to discussion. Interruptions, questions, and skeptical opinions are always welcome. Each week we will consider several examples of digital literature. Since these are works of software with often complex emergent behaviors, I do not expect you to exhaust their possibilities. Spend as much time with each example as you need in order to understand its contribution.

40% - Response papers (two @ 20% each)
> These are brief, non-researched thoughtful pieces of 500-1000 words written in response, respectively, to one of the assigned readings and one of the

assigned examples of work. Please sign up for a date for each paper. Response papers are to be distributed to the class via e-mail no later than the morning of the relevant meeting. Response papers begin in the second week.

50% - Final Project
There are two options for this component, which summarizes your work for the course. You may write a critical paper one or more examples of electronic literature, or on some concept related to or arising from the practice; or you may produce a creative, experimental, or conceptual piece of your own exploring techniques, technologies, and ideas presented in the examples. The critical paper must be at least 5,000 words and should include a reasonable number of scholarly citations. The creative project should reflect commensurate effort, though page and word counts do not apply. (I will supply some rough equivalents.)   You must submit an explanatory paper of at last 1,000 words with the creative project.

Policies

The summer term is brief, so please do not miss meetings or deadlines. I will of course excuse absences for legitimate need. You are allowed to use laptops and portable devices in class FOR APPROPRIATE PURPOSES, such as researching facts, looking up references, and correcting wrong things the instructor will inevitably say. If having your device available will prove distracting, leave it switched off.

You can reach me via e-mail at moulthro@uwm.edu or smoulthrop@gmail.com. I will announce time and location of office hours once the term begins. I am happy to meet outside scheduled hours if necessary.

About the Instructor

Stuart Moulthrop received his doctoral degree in English from Yale University and has served on the faculty there, at the University of Texas, and the Georgia Institute of Technology. He came to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2010 as Professor of English. Several of Moulthrop's efforts in electronic writing have received awards in international competitions. In 1992, the *New York Times Book Review* described his long-form hypertext fiction *Victory Garden* as a "benchmark" for digital writing. More recently, in collaboration with Dene Grigar of Washington State University Vancouver, Moulthrop has conducted a multi-year, grant-supported research project aimed at saving crucial early works from obsolescence. This work led to *Traversals: The Use of Preservation for Early Digital Writing* (MIT Press, 2017). Moulthrop has lately returned from the Republic of Korea, where he spoke on literature and media as part of the Daesan Foundation's 2017 International Forum on Literature.

Schedule

WEEK 1: *What Is…?*

Readings (to be read before we meet):
    1. N. Katherine Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?"
    www.eliterature.org/pad/elp.html

    2. Stuart Moulthrop, "Entity and Event" (PDF)
    www.smoulthrop.com/readings/entityAndEvent.pdf

    3. Kenneth Goldsmith, excerpt from *Uncreative Writing* (PDF)
    www.smoulthrop.com/readings/goldsmithRevenge.pdf

Examples: (browse at least; be ready to say something about them in seminar)
    1. Judy Malloy, "Uncle Roger"
    www.well.com/user/jmalloy/uncleroger/partytop.html
    Optional: dtc-wsuv.org/wp/pathfinders/authors-works/judy-malloy-uncle-roger-the-blue-notebook/

    2. Orteil, "Nested"
    www.orteil.dashnet.org/nested

    3. Inkle Studios, *80 Days* (game)
    Buy the game on Steam if you like; otherwise view the demo:
    www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqKPAR3-ifo

    4. Cleverbot
    www.cleverbot.com

Activities (undertaken in class each week; no preparation necessary):
    1. "The revenge of the text" (K. Goldsmith)
    2. A flarf experiment

WEEK 2: *Interactive Fiction(s)*

Readings:
    1. Nick Montfort, "Toward a Theory of Interactive Fiction" (PDF)
    www.smoulthrop.com/readings/montfortTheory.pdf

    2. Laura Hudson, "Twine, The Video Game Technology for All" (PDF)
    www.smoulthrop.com/readings/Hudson-Twine.pdf

Examples:
    1. Adam Cadre, "Photopia"

http://adamcadre.ac/if/photopia.html

2. Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*
View Part 1 of demo ("traversal") at:
scalar.usc.edu/works/pathfinders/traversals

3. Porpentine, "With Those We Love Alive"
aliendovecote.com/uploads/twine/empress/empress.html

Activity (in class): Introduction to Twine

WEEK 3: *Text, Time, Motion*

Readings:
1. Lev Manovich, excerpt from *Language of New Media*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/manovich.pdf

2. Markku Eskelinen, excerpt from *Cybertext Poetics*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/eskelinen.pdf

3. Jessica Pressman, "The Strategy of Digital Modernism: Young-hae
Chang Heavy Industries' *Dakota*"
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/pressman.pdf

Examples:
1. Young-hae Chang Heavy Industries, *Dakota*
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa17cehIcMQ

2. William Poundstone, "Project for Tachistoscope"
www.williampoundstone.net/Tachistoscope/

3. Jason Edward Lewis, "The World Was White"
(This is an app available through the AppStore; you are not required
to buy it.)

Activities:
1. HTML: "client pull"

2. Twine: timed effects using the <LIVE> macro

WEEK 4: *Generation(s)*

Readings:
1. Kenneth Goldsmith on *Issue 1*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/goldsmithIssue1.pdf

2. Noah Wardrip-Fruin, "Christopher Strachey: The First Digital Artist?"
grandtextauto.soe.ucsc.edu/2005/08/01/christopher-strachey-first-digital-artist/

3. Excerpt from J.R. Carpenter, *Generation(s)*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/carpenter.pdf

Examples:

1. McLaughlin and Carpenter, *Issue 1*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/issue1.pdf

2. Nick Montfort and many friends, "Taroko Gorge"
nickm.com/taroko_gorge/

3. Geniwaite, "Generative Poetry"
collection.eliterature.org/1/works/geniwate_generative_poetry.html

Activity:

Basics (and beyond) of text generation: building a Jabberworks

WEEK 5: *Next Generation(s)*

Readings:

1. Mark C. Marino and Rob Wittig, "Netprov: Elements of an Emerging Form"
www.dichtung-digital.de/en/journal/aktuelle-nummer/?postID=577

2. Mark Sample, "A Protest Bot is a Bot So Specific You Can't Mistake It for Bullshit"
medium.com/@samplereality/a-protest-bot-is-a-bot-so-specific-you-cant-mistake-it-for-bullshit-90fe10b7fbaa

3. John Cayley, "Aurature at the End(s) of Electronic Literature"
www.electronicbookreview.com/author/john-cayley

Examples:

1. Darius Kazemi, various bots on "Tiny Subversions"
www.tinysubversions.com

2. John Cayley et al., *The Listeners*
programmatology.shadoof.net/?thelisteners

3. Danny Cannizaro and Samantha Gorman, *PRY*
This is another iOs app; you are not required to purchase;

Youtube demo: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Zz8fv22cTg

Activity:

Readily Mistakable for Bullshit: a graphical tweet generator

WEEK 6: *The Dark Side (and Alternatives)*

Readings:

1. Sandy Baldwin, excerpt from *The Internet Unconscious*
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/baldwin.pdf

2. John Cayley, "Weapons of the Deconstructive Masses"
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/cayley_WDM.pdf

3. Stuart Moulthrop, "Just Not the Future"
www.smoulthrop.com/readings/notTheFuture.pdf

(Counter-?) Examples:
1. Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland, "Sea and Spar Between"
nickm.com/montfort_strickland/sea_and_spar_between/

2. Jason Nelson, "Sidney's Siberia"
www.secrettechnology.com/sydney/

3. Trailer for *Everything* game (with Alan Watts)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYHp8LwBUzo

Activity: Present projects (or) concept papers