

“People who say that the last battles of the computer revolution in English departments have been fought and won don’t know what they’re talking about. If our current use of computers in English studies is marked by any common theme at all, it is experimentation at the most basic level. As a profession we are just learning how to live with computers, just beginning to integrate these machines effectively into writing- and reading-intensive courses, just starting to consider the implications of the multilayered literacy associated with computers. In our departments, we have only begun to see possibilities for using computers to encourage collaboration and communication among colleagues . . . to support research and publication projects, to make scholarship accessible.” –Cynthia L. Selfe, *MLA Handbook on Computers and Writing*, 1990

ENGL 668K: Readings in Digital Studies (Spring 2004)

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Description

Digital studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field coalescing at the intersection of literary studies, cultural studies, and traditional media studies. Given that the World Wide Web is estimated to consist of some four billion “sites” with fifty times the content of the Library of Congress, little wonder many now speculate openly about the future of books, literature, and the academic humanities. Digital studies offers a set of critical, theoretical, pedagogical, and practical responses to such speculation, all of which we will examine this semester. The course is designed to be broadly relevant to students of texts, language, and literature, regardless of area or specialty. Major themes of the course will include: writing and/as technology; comparative studies of different genres and forms of new (and old) media; close readings of hypertext and cybertext literature; and the state of the art of digital projects and initiatives in the humanities today. We will also pay some attention to other topics, including: the digital divide and the politics of access; intellectual property and new media; the preservation of digital content (some forecast a looming “digital dark ages”); teaching and technology; and the role of digital technologies in addressing what is widely perceived as a crisis in scholarly publishing. The ultimate aim of the course is to equip you with the tools and ideas essential for graduate study in English in a world where the printed word is no longer an unrivaled textual form, as well as to lay practical and intellectual groundwork for students who wish to go on to pursue more advanced topics in digital studies (there are now academic jobs which list this as their primary area of specialization, both in English departments as well as various interdisciplinary programs).

There are no technical pre-requisites, but obviously at least a basic familiarity with personal computers and the internet will be useful.

Texts

All of the following are available for purchase at the University Book Center. You may also, of course, purchase them from online vendors. *Afternoon* is also available direct from Eastgate Systems: <http://www.eastgate.com/catalog/Afternoon.html>.

- Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (Johns Hopkins, 1997). ISBN: 0901855799.
- N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, 1999). ISBN: 0226321460.
- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon: A Story* (Eastgate Systems, Macintosh or PC). ISBN: 1884511015.
- Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (MIT 2003). ISBN: 0262632551.
- Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge, 1988). ISBN: 0415027969.
- Ellen Ullman, *The Bug* (Doubleday, 2003). ISBN: 0385508603.

There is also a required course packet from Beljean Printing, available at the Maryland Book Exchange (*not* at the University Book Center, sorry). Please purchase the packet ASAP as it contains some of our very earliest readings.

Requirements and Grading

All grading will use the university's plus/minus system. The requirements for the course, and their weight in determining your final grade, are as follows:

- **Pedagogy assignment.** You will be asked to construct an exercise suitable for undergraduate English majors that demonstrates the nature of writing as a technology. 15%.
- **5-7 page paper.** A close reading of a piece of electronic literature. If the papers are of sufficiently high quality we will publish them here: <http://wordcircuits.com/comment/umd/>. 20%.
- **Digital humanities exercise.** You will use online resources to conduct both traditional and non-traditional scholarly research in the digital environment. 15%.
- **Discussion leading.** Once during the semester (and probably with a partner) you will be required to take responsibility for semi-formal discussion leading. This is not a presentation *per se*; rather, you should prepare some combination of questions, quotations, and additional references or resources to structure and focus our engagement with the readings. Partners will normally be assessed as a team, but I reserve the right to split grades if I have reason to think there has been significant asymmetry of effort. 15%.

- **Final exam.** This will be a take-home final in which you will be asked to write a comprehensive essay synthesizing various issues and readings from throughout the semester. 35%.
- **Active preparation and class participation.** Active preparation means not only doing the reading, but also coming to class with questions and ideas to discuss.
- **Regular attendance.** Weekly attendance is expected and required. I will confer with anyone who seems to be having trouble meeting the attendance requirement, and may ask such persons to drop the course. Missing more than two classes will be regarded as an especially grave development.

Participation and attendance will not be graded, but I will use them to adjust final course grades if either proves conspicuously unsatisfactory.

Auditors:

Auditors are expected to conform to the attendance policy above, to come to class prepared, and to participate in discussion leading.

Late Work

All assigned work is due on the date given on the course calendar, unless you have made a specific prior arrangement with me. Late work without prior arrangement will be demoted up to one full letter grade (or not accepted at all if more than a week overdue).

Electronic Resources

This class has a blog:

<http://www.otal.umd.edu/~mgk/courses/spring2004/668k/>

Please bookmark this address and get into the habit of checking the blog regularly, at least several times per week. I will use the blog to post announcements, assignments, updates to the calendar, and other administrative items. I will also post questions, provocations, and items related to our current reading and discussions. You may respond to these in the comments section of each entry. I will take blog comments into account when evaluating class participation.

The class also has an electronic coursemail list. Subscription is mandatory. All students who have a valid email address in Testudo should be automatically subscribed. If you prefer to read mail at another address you must let me know. I will use the list to post announcements, assignments, updates to the calendar, and other administrative items (just like the blog). The email list will not, however, function as a discussion medium (that's what the blog is for). You should get into the habit of checking your email at least once a day. You will be held responsible for the content of all email announcements 24 hours after they have been posted.

Finally, all of you must open a WAM (or GLUE) account, which you will learn to use as part of the course. All online work *must be done on WAM/GLUE*, and not on a private ISP. (This policy will help me to help you troubleshoot if and when problems arise.) Further information on opening WAM/GLUE accounts is available here: <http://www.helpdesk.umd.edu/documents/1/1302/>.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to abide by the University's code of academic integrity: <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html>.

Course Calendar

Please note that there are two days (3.17 and 4.21) when we meet in the department's New Media Classroom, SQH 2112. All readings and assignments are due on the dates given below. Abbreviations used: CP = course pack. Readings in **[brackets]** are recommended but not required.

Week One: Logging On

W 1.28: Introduction; William Gibson, "Agrippa" (Google for the text).

Week Two: Technologizing the Word

W 2.4: Ong, *Orality and Literacy*: 5-15, 31-36, 49-57, 69-74, 75-77, 78-138;
McCaffery and Nichol, "The Book as Machine" (CP).

Week Three: Procedural Texts

W 2.11: Aarseth, 1-23, [24-57], 58-75;
Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths" (CP);
Knuth, "Basic Concepts" (CP);
Mathews, "Mathews' Algorithm" (CP).

Week Four: Twisty Little Passages

W 2.18: Queneau, "Story As You Like It" (CP);
Coover, "The Babysitter" (CP);
Atwood, "Happy Endings" (CP);
Ryan, "The Structures of Interactive Narrativity" (CP);
Aarseth, 97-141;
Will Crowther and Don Woods *Adventure*,
<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/gallery/adventure/index.html>;
Andrew Plotkin, "Shade": <http://www.eblong.com/zarf/zplet/shade.html>.
Pedagogy Assignment Due.

Week Five: *New Media and its Discontents*

W 2.25: Manovich, *Language of New Media*: 3-48, [94-115], 117-135, [177-211].

Week Six: *The Posthuman Condition*

W 3.3: Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*: 1-24, [25-49], 50-112, [131-159], [192-221].

Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto”:

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/Haraway/CyborgManifesto.html>.

Week Seven: *Narrative and Database*

W 3.10: Manovich, *Language of New Media*: 213-285;

William Gibson, “Burning Chrome”:

<http://comp.uark.edu/~jcl08/lit/burningchrome.html>.

Week Eight: *Embodied Virtuality: MUDs and MOOs*

W 3.17 (**Meet in SQH 2112**):

Aarseth, 142-161;

Hayles, 283-291.

Julian Dibbell, “A Rape in Cyberspace”:

<http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle.html>.

Introduction to the MOO: <http://www.rc.umd.edu:7000>.

Week Nine: *Spring Break*

W 3.24: No Class.

Week Ten: *Writing and/as Code*

W 3.31: Ullman, *The Bug* (in its entirety);

Steve Ramsay and Geoffrey Rockwell, “Writing as Programming as Writing”:

<http://cantor.english.uga.edu/docs/u4.3.pdf> (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader).

Week Eleven: *Hypertext Then and Now*

W 4.7: Aarseth, 76-96;

Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think” (sections 6, 7, 8 especially):

<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/flashbks/computer/bushf.htm>;

Michael Joyce’s *Afternoon*;

Poems by Jason Nelson: <http://www.heliozoa.com> (requires Flash);

Stuart Moulthrop, *Pax*: <http://iat.ubalt.edu/moulthrop/hypertexts/pax/>;

[Interview with Moulthrop by Noah Wardrip-Fruin:

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/tirweb/feature/moulthrop/>].

Week Twelve: *Emergence: Literary Games and Smart Texts*

W 4.14: Johnson, from *Emergence* (CP);
 Rheingold, from *Smart Mobs* (CP);
 Borges, “The Interloper” (CP);
 Natalie Bookchin, *The Intruder*: <http://dian-network.com/con/intruder/>;
 “Literary Games” issue of PoemsThatGo: <http://poemsthatgo.com/> (just browse);
 Richard Powers, “Literary Devices” (to be distributed);
 “Location Aware Narrative”:
<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/Opinion/index.cfm?article=83>;
 Onesixty: <http://www.centrifugalforces.co.uk/onesixty01/pages/main.html>
 (just browse);
 UniFiction: <http://unfiction.com/> (just browse);
Flight Risk: <http://shes.aflightrisk.org/> (just browse).
Short Paper Due.

Week Thirteen: *Markup (Twisty Little Brackets)*

W 4.21 (**Meet in SQH 2112**): Readings TBA.

Week Fourteen: *Humanities Computing and Digital Libraries*

W 4.28: “A Conversation with Allen Renear”:
<http://www.stg.brown.edu/pub/local/foxinterview.htm>;
 Jerome McGann, “The Rationale of Hypertext”:
<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/public/jjm2f/rationale.html>;
 John Unsworth, “The Scholar in the Digital Library”:
<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/~jmu2m/sdl.html>;
 IATH and MITH projects: <http://www.iath.virginia.edu> and
<http://www.mith.umd.edu> (browse).

Week Fifteen: *English: The Once and Future Discipline*

W 5.5: Marjorie Perloff, “Crisis in the Humanities”:
<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/articles/crisis.html>
 Jerome McGann, “Textonics: Literary and Cultural Studies in a Quantum World”:
<http://www.nhc.rtp.nc.us/news/mcgannwebcast.htm>;
 The IVANHOE Game:
<http://eotpaci.clas.virginia.edu/speclab/ivanhoe/index.html>.
Digital Humanities Assignment Due.

Take Home Final Exam (due date TBA).