ENGL 293: Introduction to Digital Media Studies

Version 1.2: Sept 14, 2020

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Fall Term 2020 (virtual)

Video lectures and relevant URLs: Uploaded to Learn every Tuesday
Readings: Linked in syllabus or on Learn
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 3 – 4pm, by appointment; all other times by appointment

Course Description:
“Digital media” can seem so pervasive and all-encompassing in our lives that it is often difficult to see the ways in which they influence our education, our culture, and our lifestyles. Yet, from our small habits such as the specific medium we use to read the news, to our increasing investments in topics such as environmental change, do-it-yourself hobbies, and economics in an information age, digital media can play a key role in how—and which—creative and cultural industries, trends, and objects rise and fall.

This course introduces students to a more critical approach to something they encounter every day: digital media. Students will ask themselves such questions as: how has the development of digital media in the last few decades affected how we live our lives? As students, how do digital media affect our attention and our productivity? Where do digital media objects come from and where do they go when we’re done with them? In what ways have newer technologies allowed unique cultures and industries to emerge? How can various media forms and tools shape the ways we understand information? How do digital media implicate each of us differently, depending on factors such as our identities and locations?

Grade Evaluation:
Assignment 1 30%
Assignment 2 30%
Assignment 3 40%

CLASS SCHEDULE

I. DIGITAL MEDIA: INTRODUCTION

Week 1: INTRODUCTION (Sept 8)
- overview of the class, assignments, virtual office hours, and meeting by appointment
- discussing the concept of “techne”
Week 2: HOW DO DIGITAL MEDIA AFFECT YOUR ATTENTION, PRODUCTIVITY, AND PROCRASTINATION? (Sept 15)
- https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/
- discussion on productivity tools: Notion, bullet journaling, to do lists, dopamine detox
  - Notion (free with your UW e-mail): https://www.notion.so/product
  - Dopamine detox or fasting: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dopamine_fasting

II. WHAT?: HISTORY AND FUNDAMENTALS

Week 3: WHAT’S THE HISTORY OF DIGITAL MEDIA? (Sept 22)
Lev Manovich – pgs 45-48, The Language of New Media

Week 4: WHAT ARE THE 5 PRINCIPLES OF DIGITAL MEDIA? (Sept 29)
Lev Manovich – pgs 49-65, The Language of New Media

III. HOW?: DATA, CONTENT, AND CREATIVE PRODUCTION

Week 5: HOW CAN DIGITAL MEDIA HELP YOU WITH RESEARCH? (Oct 6)
- discussion of info overload
- workshop: how to use research databases through U Waterloo’s library
- workshop: how to use Zotero
  - https://www.zotero.org/

ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9

READING WEEK (OCT 10 – 18)
[+ Mid-way assessment of how the course is going for everyone.]

Week 6: WHAT ARE THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES? HOW DO ALGORITHMS & MACHINE LEARNING WORK IN LITERARY STUDIES? (Oct 20)
Jhave Johnston’s ReRites
  - http://glia.ca/rerites/ (just read about the project)
- text tool for collaborative analysis:
  - Prism: http://prism.scholarslab.org/pages/about?locale=en
- text tool for fun:
  - N+7: http://www.spoonbill.org/n+7/
- workshop: how to use Voyant
In memory of the inventor of Voyant, my friend, Stéfan Sinclair:

Week 7: WHAT IS ELECTRONIC LITERATURE? (Oct 27)
N. Katherine Hayles – “Electronic Literature: What is it?”
- http://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html

Sample texts:
If you have problems with Flash, please let me know. You are also welcome to have a look at any of the texts from the Electronic Literature Collections 1, 2, and 3:
http://collection.eliterature.org/

- Shelley Jackson – Patchwork Girl (1995) // #adaptation #Frankenstein #feminism
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHUR6phuOrc
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21YxTeV1t1c
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnKbegz050
- Annie Abrahams – Separation (2002) // #bodyawareness #meditation #feminism
  - https://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/abrahams_separation/separation/
- Caitlin Fisher - These Waves of Girls (2001) // #LGBTQ+ #feminism
  - http://www.yorku.ca/caitlin/waves/
- Margaret Rhee – Kimchi Poetry Machine (2014) // #activism #creativity #fermentation

IV. WHO?: DIGITAL CULTURES

Week 8: HOW IS TECHNOLOGY GENDERED? (Nov 3)
UNESCO – pgs 4-5, 88-102 “I’d Blush if I Could: Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills through Education” (2019)
  - https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367416.page=1

Week 9: HOW IS RACE IMPLICATED BY TECHNOLOGY? (Nov 10)
Anna Everett: “Pokéwalking while Black: Pokémon GO and America’s ‘e-quality’ of Life” (2017)

ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13

V. WHERE? WHY? SO WHAT?: INFRASTRUCTURE, POLITICS, PLAY

Week 10: WHAT ABOUT THE ETHICS? WHAT ABOUT RESOURCES AND WASTE? (Nov 17)
- Kate Crawford – Anatomy of an AI System #mediaarchaeology #materiality #AI #infrastructure
  - https://anatomyof.ai/
- “E-Waste in India” short documentary #economy #technocapital #ethics #globalSouth
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFfaYc_pIx8


- Sample text: [murmur] (2003) #locativemedia #Toronto #urbanhistory
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vd5GFFolhz0

Week 12: WHAT ABOUT REMIX & SAMPLING CULTURE? WHAT ABOUT COPYRIGHT? (Dec 1)
Henry Jenkins – “Worship at the Altar of Convergence,” Convergence Culture
Linda Hutcheon – “How? (Audiences),” Adaptation

- Bad Lip Reading – Game of Thrones #comedy
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Krz-dyD-UQ
- The Shining recut #trailer #comedy
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmkVWuP_sO0
- Girltalk – “Oh No” (2010) #Ludacris #BlackSabbath #mashup
  - CW: swearing! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bMM7tGV9MI
- Pop Danthology – 2012 mashup
  - CW: swearing! Some adult content in music videos!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE5DiniY45w
- Yabanci Müzilker – 2020 mashup
- CW: swearing! Some adult content in music videos!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FYZyvLqnY

ASSIGNMENT #3 DUE MONDAY, DEC 7 (deadlines are somewhat flexible ^_^)

ASSIGNMENTS

Formatting requirements for all submitted documents
- 1-inch margins all around, 12-point font, Times New Roman, double spaced.
- MS Word preferred, but let me know if it’s not possible
- Citation style: up to you, as long as it’s consistent. Google “Owl Purdue” for a helpful guide.
- All assignments will be submitted electronically to my e-mail: L29fan@uwaterloo.ca
Please put your name in the document/file name.

Content restrictions
- When asked to incorporate content or create your own content, please omit any of the following: porn, content of a violent or potentially triggering nature
- If a content warning (CW) is needed for sensitive material, please include it at the very beginning
- If you’re not sure if something is considered sensitive material, please write to me directly, not to the class

OCT 9: ASSIGNMENT 1 – Choose 1 of 3:

Respond to Nicholas Carr (3-4 pages, double spaced)
- Hello, journalist. The Atlantic has hired you to publish a 2020 response or/and an update to Carr. What do you have to say? What does your audience need to know?
- Be sure to make direct reference to Carr’s article, including by quoting Carr
- Keep your tone professional. The Atlantic isn’t going to publish something that looks like a rant or a blog post~

Write an essay on the principles of new media (3-4 pages, double spaced)
- Focus on an example of digital media (Instagram? Photoshop? YouTube? Mac vs. PC vs. Linux? TikTok? Learn? Your choice!)
- Make direct reference to the Manovich reading, including by quoting Manovich

Write summaries of Carr, Manovich 1, Manovich 2, and Bolter/Grusin (1 page each, double spaced)
- Summarize the readings for their main arguments, key terms (and what they mean), and
offer your thoughts on why these texts are important to understanding digital media

**NOV 13: ASSIGNMENT 2 – Choose 1 of 3:**

**Analyze 2-3 texts using Voyant (4-5 pages, double spaced, not including charts)**
- Hello, data analyst. You’ve been asked to select 2-3 texts of your choice (maybe a novel you’ve read before, a long poem, a newspaper article, an essay, a public speech, etc.), and analyze them for patterns and details using the Voyant platform to show what Voyant can do!
- Example: in the past, a student input PDFs of all three *Lord of the Rings* books to trace the changes in linguistic and metaphorical representations of friendship from the first book to the last book
- Some questions you could answer (optional): What does this macro-level form of text analysis allow you to notice about your chosen text that you might not see from traditional methods of literary analysis? How is your understanding of the text enhanced by digital text analysis?

**Analyze 2-3 works of e-lit (4-5 pages, double spaced, not including images)**
- Write a literary analysis that compares these works with a central thesis
- Choose works discussed in class or from one of the Electronic Literature Collections.

**Write an essay on gendered technology (4-5 pages, double spaced)**
- Focus on an example of gendered technology, either one discussed in class or one of your choosing (Virtual assistants like Alexa or Cortana? Feminized GPS bots? Joi from the movie *Bladerunner 2049*? Your choice!)
- Make direct reference to the UNESCO reading AND one other scholarly reading on gendered technology, making sure to quote both texts

**DEC 7: ASSIGNMENT 3 – Choose 1 of 4:**

**Write an essay on race and media/technology (4-5 pages, double spaced)**
- Focus on an example of the relationship between race and media/technology, either discussed in class or one of your choosing (facial recognition? Digital media and avatars? Site-specific media? Race and digital activism? Digital divide? Your choice!)
- Make direct reference to at least one of the class readings AND one other scholarly reading on race and media/technology, making sure to quote all your texts

**Write an essay on remix/convergence (4-5 pages, double spaced)**
- Focus on an example of remix culture or convergence culture (mashup music? Sampled content? Adaptations in films, video games, graphic novels, etc.? Your choice!)
- You may focus on issues of any of the following: copyright, ownership, appropriation, sampling culture, or something else or relevance
- Make direct reference to at least one of the class readings AND one other scholarly reading that is relevant to the topic, making sure to quote all your texts

**DIY remix/convergence work (max 5-min play time + 3-page reflection, double spaced)**
- Hello, contemporary artist. You’ve been asked to remix 3-5 works of cultural content, whether old or new, underground or mainstream popular. Combine them in a way that allows your spectator to understand their connections, whether historical, thematic, aesthetic, auditory, and so forth. Your work can be based on images, sounds, videos, text, objects, a combination of these things, or wherever your imagination takes you.
- In addition to your work, write a 3-page (double spaced) reflection on any of the following: copyright, ownership, appropriation, or sampling culture.
- In your reflection, make direct reference to at least one of the class readings AND one other scholarly reading that is relevant to the topic, making sure to quote all your texts

**Chart the “anatomy” of your device (visual chart + 2-page reflection, double spaced)**
- Hello, archaeologist. You’ve been asked to do a version of Kate Crawford’s chart *Anatomy of an AI System*, focusing on another technological device of your choosing (that doesn’t have to be digital). See how far back you can trace the parts of your device, or how detailed you can make your own chart. Yes, this is will be a visual chart or image.
- In addition to the chart, write a 2-page (double spaced) reflection on the significance of mapping these technological resources. Who, what, where are implicated and how/why? Why does this matter? How does it connect back to you?
- In your reflection, make direct reference to at least one of the class readings AND one other scholarly reading that is relevant to the topic, making sure to quote all your texts