Digital Literary Studies

Instructor
Prof. Kathi Inman Berens
NH 411
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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10-12 & by appointment

Classroom and Dates
Mon./Wed. 2-3:50, NH 437

Overview
This class, Digital Literary Studies, examines four elements of the field.

- **Close reading, “deformance,” and remix.**
- **Distant & Surface Reading**: computers allow us to view the “surface” patterns of texts from the “distance” of large data sets rather than “close,” isolated passages.
- **Archives and Databases**: digital literary studies began with digital scholarly editions, which eventually became “unbound” from the book and were built as author- and theme-specific databases. We’ll study several, and contribute to some. We’ll learn how to “clean” data and do basic data visualizations.
- **Cultural Studies**: how search and metadata allow incredible facility in accessing information, but also can flatten lived human experience and render important details invisible. We’ll examine archives in the context of critical race theory and gender.

This course is both hands-on and theoretical. Student will write essays, build remix and collage, clean data, visualize data and aim to detect patterns. No prior knowledge of particular software is necessary. The course’s technical lessons adapt to the needs and prior experience of learners in the class. No pre-requisites are necessary.

Reading List
John Beer, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*
Amy Earhart, *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New: The Emergence of Digital Literary Studies*
T.S. Eliot, *The Wasteland* [app by Faber and Faber] and various versions accessible online
Jessica Pressman, *Digital Modernism: Making It New in New Media*
Various scholarly articles by digital humanists including Paul Benzon, Kathi Inman Berens, Lauren F. Klein, Alan Liu, Jerome McGann and Lisa Samuels, Tara McPherson, Miriam Posner, Mark Sample.
Various primary works of electronic ("digital-born") literature and electronic archives culled from our textbooks by Earhart and Pressman.

Learning Outcomes

Students in this class will:

• Engage remix and "deformance" as critical thinking interventions. This meets the UNST goal of critical thinking.
• Interrogate the ethical and social dimensions of knowledge construction in networked environments, such as database and software. This meets the UNST goal of "ethical and social responsibility."
• Learn how metadata is a human construction to the storage systems like databases and the Web. This meets the UNST goal of “methodological training and systems analysis.”
• Use critical race theory, gender and queer theory to examine the “neutrality” of digital “tools” and artifacts. This meets the UNST goal of diversity training and critical application.
• Engage in workshops focused on critical making and medium-specific analysis. This meets the USNT Design Cluster goal of “getting to the essence of human and environmental needs via field work.”
• Build digital skills in hands-on labs. This meets the UNST critical thinking goal of “Reflection and Transfer,” where students bring their entire skill sets into class, share them, and grow their capacities collectively.
• Understand books as durable, random-access storage devices. This defamiliarization meets the UNST goal of critical thinking goal of “methodology and risk taking” as part of the critical inquiry process.
• Historicize digital literary studies by drawing connection to what has come before. This meets the UNST Design Cluster goal of “engaging in an interpretation process to draw out themes and determine how to brainstorm ideas around those themes.”

Due Dates

Deadlines are firm. If you need an extension, seek one from me via email at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline. All work must be completed in order to receive credit for the course.

Oct. 24 “Deformed” The Waste Land(s) 20%
Oct. 24 Medium-specific close reading 20%
Nov. 10 Surface/Distant reading Lab 15%
Nov. 28 Archive/Database Lab 15%
Dec. 7 Final Project/Paper 30%

Disability Accommodation
Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty, and the Disability Resource Center. Students with accommodations approved through the DRC should see me during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through the DRC should contact the DRC immediately: http://www.pdx.edu/drc/; 503-725-4150; SMU 116.

Plagiarism

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for reading and understanding Portland State University’s policies on plagiarism. A student who plagiarizes in this course will receive, at minimum, a zero score for the assignment and may be subject to additional academic disciplinary sanctions.

Grade Scale

A 100-93%
A- 92-90%
B+ 89-87%
B 86-83%
B- 82-80%
C+ 79-77%
C 76-73%
C- 72-70%
D+ 69-67%
D 66-63%
D- 62-60%
F 59% and below

Course Schedule

Week One: Close Reading, then and now

Sept. 26
Course intro; The Waste Land; textual editing & the birth of digital literary studies
HW: Look up all allusions you don’t know in your assigned section of The Waste Land. Make a visual collage about one passage or moment in The Waste Land.

Sept 28
Discuss The Waste Land and A Visual Remix
Share visual collages
HW:
Read Pressman, Digital Modernism, Intro; Ramsay, “The Hermeneutics of Screwing Around” [pdf in D2L “course content” tab].

Week Two: The Digital Turn

Oct. 3 Discuss readings
Textual editing & TWL
Oct. 5  CHECK OUT iPADS FROM PSU LIBRARY and bring to class -- Discuss TWL app *The Waste Land* app (available for free on iPads at PSU Library. You may also buy the app [here](#). It's $13.99)

HW: John Beer, *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. You’re required to read only *The Waste Land* but I invite you to read more – it’s a terrific collection. Listen to Prof. Beer read the poem [here](#).

McGann and Samuels, *Deformance and Interpretation*

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**Week Three: Adaptation? Remix? Deformance?**

Oct. 10  Beer, *TWL and Other Poems*; McGann and Samuels

HW: Read [Paul Benzon’s brilliant deformation assignment here](#). Begin thinking of how you’ll deform *The Waste Land* (by Eliot or Beer, or both).

Mark Sample, *Notes Toward a Deformed Humanities*


Discuss assignment prompts for 1) medium-specific analysis and 2) deformance.

HW:  
1) read Pressman Chapter Three: “Speed Reading *Dakota*”  
2) Make your deformance of *TWL*

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**Week Four: Medium-Specific Analysis**

Oct. 17: Check in on deformance and passage from *TWL* you will write about. Discuss Pressman chapter 3 and *Dakota*

HW: Work on paper; edit your deformance

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Oct. 19  **Graded Workshop**

Come to class with 500 words of your close reading paper, and a completed first draft of your deformance.

HW:  
Pressman, chapter 4 & Coda: Rereading  
Edit your paper and deformance

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**Week Five: Reading the Database**

Oct. 24  Medium-specific close reading & Deformance are due at 10AM to Dropbox.  
*(If Deformance is a physical object, hand it in during class.)*

Present your deformances in class.

HW: *The Jew’s Daughter* and this documentation of *My Molly Departed* (both discussed in Pressman, ch. 4). A “deformed” database: *Kickended* by Silvio Lorusio; see also his paper and presentation, *The Competitive Aesthetics of Failure*, explaining his project.

Oct. 26  Discuss Pressman & Lorusio 
HW: Berens, “Surface Reading *The Upside Down Chandelier*: Interface “Mastery” and Feminism”; Paul Fyfe “How Not to Read a Victorian Novel” -- pdfs in D2L.

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**Week Six: Surface & Distant Reading**

Oct. 31: Lab Distant Reading

Nov. 2  Lab Distant Reading v. Surface Reading
HW: Earhart chapters 1 & 2; distant/surface reading response

**Week Seven: Archives & Databases**
Nov. 7: Your Surface Reading short response is due in D2L by 10AM
Discuss Earhart, chapters 1 & 2
Nov. 9 Examine databases: Walt Whitman Archive, NINES, Rosetti Archive, William Blake Archive, Electronic Beowulf
HW: Earhart chapters 3 and 4.

**Week Eight: Critical Race Theory & Databases**
Nov. 14: Discuss readings

Nov. 16: Discuss readings

**Week Nine: Database Lab**
Nov. 21: Lab
Nov. 23: Vectors essays and “Designing for Difference” by Tara McPherson.

**Week Ten: Tying it Together**
Nov. 28 Short database response paper is due in D2L by 10AM; Course Review
Nov. 30 Mandatory, graded workshop for your final project

**Final project or paper is due**
Wednesday 7 December, 12 noon