> "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 (Fall 2006)

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Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, drop-in at or by appointment at MITH. You may also request an AIM or GoogleChat session with me—"mkirschenbaum" for both—but I can't promise I'll always be available to talk, even if I'm visible online.

Description

At a moment when the World Wide Web is estimated to consist of some four billion "sites" with fifty times the content of the Library of Congress, 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 this situation, all of which we will examine this semester. Digital studies is an emerging interdisciplinary field that encompasses literary studies, cultural studies, media studies, textual studies, science and technology studies, writing and rhetoric, even linguistics, cognitive science, and bioinformatics. 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; close readings of hypertext and cybertext literature; theories of media, old and new; networks and globalization; and the state of the discipline (and profession) of literary studies, which has its trajectory in what Robert Scholes has called the rise and fall of English. The ultimate aim of the course is to equip you with the tools and ideas essential for graduate study 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 advanced topics in digital studies at the master's or doctoral level.

Texts

All of the following are available for purchase at the University Book Center. *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.
- Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (MIT Press, 2000). ISBN: 0262522799.
- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon: A Story* (Eastgate Systems, 1990). ISBN: 1884511015.
- Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (Plume, 2005). ISBN: 0452286514.
- Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Routledge, 1988). ISBN: 0415027969.

Finally, there is a mandatory **course packet** available from the Maryland Book Exchange.

Requirements and Grading

All grading will use the plus/minus system. The class blog (see below) will serve as the focal point for your written work this semester. I will demonstrate how to use the blog, so no reason to worry if this is new to you. Here is the breakdown of requirements and grading:

- **Responses postings**. The course schedule (see below) is divided into five units. You are required to complete three response postings over the course of the semester, no more than one per unit, and you choose which of the units you wish to skip. The responses will be about 1000 words each, consisting of a critical response to some aspect of the readings or discussion for that course unit, posted to the blog under the Responses category. <u>15% each, 45% total</u>. Responses to a unit posted more than 24 hours after the last class of that unit will be considered late. Late work without prior arrangement will be demoted up to one full letter grade and not accepted at all if more than a week overdue.
- **Participation**. There are four distinct components to this section of your grade, together constituting <u>30%</u> of your total course grade:
    - *Comments* on other people's response postings. I will look at your commenting activity over the course of the semester. Discursive/critical comments will carry more weight than merely posting URLs or other shorthand comments. Responding to a diverse assortment of people is more desirable than responding to the same individuals over and over; likewise, a record of consistent comment activity over the course of the semester is (much) more desirable and impressive than a flurry of comments in the last

couple of weeks. Comments that themselves generate further comments will also be rewarded.

- *Probes*. After McLuhan, these can take one of two forms, both to be posted to the blog under the Probes category before that week's class: either a passage from the week's assigned reading you wish to discuss in class, or a fully developed question you wish the class to consider. Each class meeting I will select one or more probes from those that are posted to the blog for that week. If your probe is one I select, you must then be prepared to carry class discussion for 5-10 minutes, either by taking the lead in a critical consideration of the passage, or by taking the lead in helping us work through whatever question you've posed. Failure to post at least two probes over the course of the semester, and at least one by Oct. 18, will result in an automatic drop in your participation grade by one full level (in other words, a "B" would be the highest participation grade possible for you to earn). Posting more than two probes will be rewarded, particularly if they are spaced out over the semester instead of bunched at the end. You will not be penalized if you never have a probe selected by me for class discussion, though I would hope everyone will have had one selected at least once.
- *In class participation*. As with blog comments, I will look for a steady record of quality class participation throughout the semester.
- *Attendance*. Attendance is expected and required. More than a single unexecused absence for the semester will result in automatic failure of the participation portion of your grade. Absences will typically only be excused for documented medical or personal emergencies, or for religious or cultural observation.

- **Final exam.** This will be a take-home final in which you choose one of your earlier response postings and use it as the basis for a reply to an exam question which I will provide. The exam question will be constructed in such a way as to require you to synthesize the particulars of your individual response with broader issues which have emerged throughout the course. 25%.

Electronic Resources

The class blog is located here:

http://www.mith2.umd.edu/teaching/courses/f06/engl668k/

Please bookmark this address and get into the habit of checking the blog regularly, several times a week at least.

The class also has an electronic mailing list, to which subscription is mandatory:

engl668kf06@listserv.umd.edu

The list will be used primarily for announcements (as opposed to discussion). You will be held responsible for the content of all email announcements 24 hours after they have been

posted.

MITH and Digital Dialogues

The Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) is located in B0131 on the basement level of McKeldin Library. MITH holds its weekly Digital Dialogues seminar series every Tuesday, 12:30-1:45, often with a guest from outside the University. The fall line up is posted here: http:/www.mith.umd.edu. Schedule permitting, I would encourage you to make every effort to attend and consider Digital Dialogues an extension of the resources and discussion available to you in ENGL 668K.

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

All readings and assignments are due on the dates given below. Please note that there are two days (10.11 and 11.29) when we meet in the New Media Classroom, SQH 2112. CP = course pack. (Note: all links should be clickable in electronic versions of this document.)

0. Logging On

8.30: Introduction; William Gibson, "Agrippa"; see also *The Agrippa Files*: http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/.

1. Technologizing the Word

9.6:

- Ong, *Orality and Literacy*: 5-15, 31-36, 49-57, 69-74, 75-77, 78-138;
- WordPerhect: http://www.wordperhect.net/.

9.13:

- McCaffery and Nichol, "The Book as Machine" (CP);
- Allen Renear, et al., "Refining Our Notion of What Text Really Is": http://www.stg.brown.edu/resources/stg/monographs/ohco.html;
- "Reading at Risk": http://www.nea.gov/news/news04/ReadingAtRisk.html (also video archive from MITH symposium: http://www.mith2.umd.edu/archive/rar/videos/);
- "The Battle Over Books" (read transcript, watch some of the video): http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/pep/pepdesc.cfm?id=1661;
- Shakespeare Quartos Online: http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html;
- Textarc: http://www.textarc.org/.
- Nora: http://www.noraproject.org (browse).

9.20:

- Knuth, “Basic Concepts” (CP);
- Mathews, “Mathews’ Algorithm” (CP).
- Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” (CP);
- Queneau, “Story As You Like It” (CP);
- Coover, “The Babysitter” (CP);
- Atwood,“Happy Endings” (CP);
- Ryan, “The Structures of Interactive Narrativity” (CP);
- Richard Powers, “Literary Devices” (to be distributed).

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2. Cybertexts and Procedural Literacy

9.27:

- Aarseth, *Cybertext*: 1-75; 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;

10.4:

- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon: a Story*;
- Aarseth: 76-96;
- Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think” (sections 6, 7, 8 especially): http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/flashbks/computer/bushf.htm.

10.11 (Meet in SQH 2112):

- Aarseth: 142-83;
- Julian Dibbell, “A Rape in Cyberspace”: http://www.juliandibbell.com/texts/bungle.html;
- Introduction to the MOO: http://lingua.utdallas.edu/guide.html.

3. (Re)Mediations

10.18:

- Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*: 3-88.

10.25:

- Bolter and Grusin: 88-130, 147-67, 185-210;
- Borges, “The Interloper” (CP);
- Natalie Bookchin, *The Intruder*: http://www.calarts.edu/~bookchin/intruder/.

11.1:

- Bolter and Grusin: 233-65;
- Shelley Jackson, “Skin”: http://www.ineradicablestain.com/skin.html;
- Nick Montfort and Scott Rettberg, “Implementation”:

http://nickm.com/implementation/;
- Poems by Jason Nelson: http://www.heliozoa.com/. (Nelson will be in class as guest.)

4. Networks and Webs

11.8:
- Kunzru, *Transmission*: 1-205;
- Johnson, from *Emergence* (CP);
- An Atlas of Cyberspaces: http://www.cybergeography.org/atlas/ (browse).

11.15:
- Kunzru: 206-end;
- Rheingold, from *Smart Mobs* (CP);
- "Location Aware Fiction": http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/Opinion/index.cfm?article=83;
- UnFiction: http://unfiction.com/ (browse);
- *Flight Risk*: http://shes.aflightrisk.org/ (browse).
;

11.22 TBA

5. English, the Once and Future Discipline

11.29 (Meet in SQH 2112):
- "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;
- Willard McCarty, ""Knowing true things by what their mockeries be: modelling in the humanities": http://www.cch.kcl.ac.uk/legacy/staff/wlm/essays/knowing/Knowing.html;
- John Unsworth, "Forms of Attention: Digital Humanities Beyond Representation": http://www3.isrl.uiuc.edu/~unsworth/FOA/;
- IATH and MITH projects: http://www.iath.virginia.edu and http://www.mith.umd.edu (browse).

12.6:
- Robert Scholes, from *The Rise and Fall of English* (to be distributed);
- Marjorie Perloff, "Crisis in the Humanities": http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/articles/crisis.html;
- Jerome McGann, "Textonics: Literary and Cultural Studies in a Quantum World": http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/%7Ejjm2f/old/textonics.html;
- Kathleen Fitzpatrick, "Introducing MediaCommons" and follow up discussion: http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/archives/2006/07/introducing_mediacommons_or_ti.html.