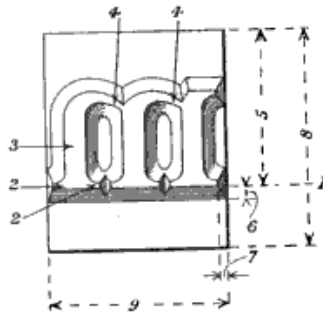


eng630—“Digital Humanities”: Emerging Debates in Literary Study

Thursday, 3:30–6:15pm

Location: Tolley 204



Detail from *Typographical Printing-Surfaces: The Technology and Mechanism of Their Production* (1916)

Instructor

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Hall of Languages 423

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00am–12:00 and by Appointment

Course Description and Objectives

How does the becoming digital of textuality (of the very medium of most literary study) alter the character of what we do with texts? To judge from some accounts, digital technology promises to radically change the study of literature and culture. At one extreme, some critics have suggested that such technologies can enable new modes of “distant reading”: literary criticism as data mining. In this class we will explore these claims by reading some of the key works in the

field/discipline/methodology which currently parades under the banner *digital humanities*.¹

This class will invite students to consider and to explore (though not uncritically) the promises of these new methodologies. Our focus will be chiefly on using new tools to understand (old) texts. Rather than theorize new media or read digital poetry, we will be considering the nature of literary study in a digital age. Readings will include work by Jerome McGann, Franco Moretti, Stephen Ramsay, and others. We will also be trying out hands at a few of these tools to try to explore the sorts of questions such methodologies allow us to ask (and, perhaps, answer); we will also try to remain sensitive to whether the questions we now explore are, in fact, questions worth exploring.

Course Policies

- **Attendance:** You may miss 1 class without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will lower your final grade by one third of a letter grade (e.g. a B becomes a B-, a C+ becomes a C, *etc*).
- **Lateness:** Do not be late. Routine lateness will impact your class participation grade.
- **Plagiarism:** Turning in another person's work as your own (whether it is scraped off wikipedia, bought from a web site, or copied from another student) is unacceptable. *Any instances of plagiarism will result in a failing grade on the assignment and may be reported to the University's Academic Integrity Office (see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/> for details).*
- **Participation:** Class discussion is at the heart of this class. Active, regular participation is absolutely necessary.
- **Religious Observances:** Syracuse University recognizes the diverse faith traditions represented among its campus community and supports the rights of faculty, staff, and students to observe according to these traditions. According to SU's religious observances policy, students will be provided with the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided that they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes.
- **Statement on Disability Accommodations:** If you believe you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services

¹While *digital humanities* has received an increased attention starting around 2009; it can be traced back through "humanities computing" to a first wave of interest in the 1990s, and even further to the earliest uses of computers for humanistic scholarship—an origin frequently identified with Father Roberto Busa, who used computers to generate his lemmatized index to the work of Thomas Aquinas. You can find that index online at <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/>.

(ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located at 804 University Avenue, room 309, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities “Accommodation Authorization Letters” as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.

Grade

Class Participation	30%
Blogging and Bibliography	30%
Final Project	40%

Course Assignments

- **Blogging & Commenting:** As part of this course you will set up a blog (or use an existing personal blog) and regularly write short posts (500–1000 words) in response to the material we read. You will be required to post once every two weeks, and to comment on at least one of your peer’s posts every week.

You are strongly encouraged to write more frequently (even short, perhaps *very short* entries) in addition to these required entries, and to comment more frequently than is required.

Indeed, these “requirements” are merely a scaffold intended to jumpstart² our small community. (Just as a *grade* is not the goal of a class, but merely a way to help “incentivize”³ learning.)

- **Group Bibliography:** As we read we will also be compiling a shared Zotero bibliography⁴ of relevant materials. Weeks that you are not blogging, you are required to find and read (or examine) at least one relevant resource and add it to our shared bibliography. This may be a relevant article, resource, archive, or blog post you find on your own; it may be tracking down an item cited in some of the material we’re reading (or a response thereto). Whatever it is, you should add it to our shared group bibliography with a brief annotation (3–5 sentences) summarizing the item and explaining the item.

²Mixed metaphor; do not attempt to literally jumpstart literal scaffolds.

³Is it meaningful that my spellchecker lacks this bit of neoliberal jargon?

⁴Details forthcoming.

I hope this shared bibliography will provide a benefit to everyone by providing some avenues (lines of flight?) to move beyond the assigned readings.

- **Final Project:** The concluding weeks of this class will be dedicated to a “final project” which we will begin thinking about collectively from the first class. The exact contours of this project will be determined collectively. This project may take the form of a conventional looking seminar paper on issues of digitization, quantitative analysis, the epistemology of humanistic inquiry (or something other relevant topic). It may be an essay on a particular text or corpus which makes its argument using some of the methods we have discussed. It might also be a digital project of some kind (something, to invoke a favorite DH term, *built*⁵) (conducted individually or, more likely if individual are interested in pursuing such a thing, as a group).

I understand that the open-endedness of this project can be somewhat frightening. This open-endedness is an invitation to try to understand the virtues (and challenges) of digital projects. That opportunity, of necessity, must also include the possibility of trying something which doesn’t completely work out—that is, it must include the possibility of *failure*.⁶ Be assured, a project which fails in its initial goals will not necessarily fail as an assignment for this class.

Schedule of Readings

Please note that this schedule is especially *tentative* of readings. It is my hope that there is enough freedom that we can.

Texts on Blackboard are indicated by BB; in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* by *DitDH*.

- **January 17: Introduction to the Class**

Read:

- C. P. Snow, “The Two Cultures” (BB)
- Stephen Marche, “Literature is Not Data: Against Digital Humanities” (*LARB*)

⁵To see an extended conversation on this topic, see Stephen Ramsay’s “On Building” <http://stephenramsay.us/text/2011/01/11/on-building.html> and the lively discussion it produced.

⁶Like *building*, there is a reasonable case that *failure* is one of the keywords of *digital humanites*. It is also, for better or worse, a keyword for silicon-valley entrepreneurs. See, for instance: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/nyuentrepreneurschallenge/2012/10/16/fail-fast-succeed-faster/>. Whether a connection exists between these two notions of failure and its importance is an exercise left to the reader.

- “In Defense of Data: Responses to Stephen Marche’s ‘Literature is not Data’” by Scott Selisker and Holger S. Syme (*LARB*)

Also Relevant:

- Matthew Kirschenbaum, “What is ‘digital humanities’ and what is it doing in our English departments?”
- Patrik Svensson, “Beyond the Big Tent” (*DitDH*)

Digitization and Consequences

- January 24: What does digitization change? *Anything?*

Read:

- Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe, “The Migration of the Aura” (from *Switching Codes* (BB))
- Matthew Kirschenbaum, selection from *Mechanisms*
- Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, selection from *Redmediation*

Please find and look at Three Digital Editions of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*:

- [Project Gutenberg](#)
- [Google Books](#) or [the Internet Archive](#)
- The Blake Archive

- January 31: How to Encode Texts? (And *why?*)

Read:

- Stéfan Sinclair and Geoffery Rockwell, “The Measured Words: How Computers Can Analyze a Text” (BB, by kind permission of the authors)
- Gregory Crane, David Bamman, and Alison Jones, “ePhilology: When Books Talk to their Readers” *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*
- James Cummings, “The Text Encoding Initiative and the Study of Literature” *Companion to Digital Literary Studies*
- David Golumbia, selection from *The Cultural Logic of Computation*

Do:

- Look at <http://tbe.kantl.be/TBE/> to familiarize yourself with the practicalities of TEI encoding. Look at the introductory and common structures/elements examples, as well as browsing elements for a particular genre (prose, poetry, etc).

- February 7: McGann, *Radiant Textuality*

- February 14: Algorithmic Criticism and Speculative Computing

Read:

- Ramsay, *Reading Machines*
- Drucker and Nowviskie, “[Speculative Computing: Aesthetic Provocations in Humanities Computing](#)” from *Companion to Digital Humanities*

Scale: Reading Distantly and Reading Distance

- February 21: Franco Moretti (and Critics)

Read:

- Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees* chapters on “Graphs” and “Trees” (and “Afterword”)
- Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” (BB)
- Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature” (BB)
- Moretti, “Clues” from *Signs Taken for Wonders*
- Earhart, “Can Information be Unfettered? Race and the New Digital Humanities Canon” [DitDH](#)
- Tsuda, “Academicians of Lagado?” (BB)
- Prendergast, “Evolution and Literary History” (BB)
- Selections from [Reading “Graphs, Maps and Trees”](#)

- February 28: “Mining”

Read:

- “Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books” (i.e. the Google nGrams Paper, BB)
- [Forum on Evidence and Interpretation in the Digital Age](#) of *Victorian Studies* 54.1 (BB)
- Underwood and Sellers, “[Emergence of Literary Diction](#)”, *Journal of Digital Humanities*
- Underwood, “[Topic Modeling Made Just Simple Enough](#)”
- Goldstone and Underwood, “[What can topic models of PMLA teach us about the history of literary scholarship?](#)”
- Schmidt, “[When you have a MALLET, everything looks like a nail](#)”
- Pasanek and Sculley, “Mining Millions of Metaphors” (BB)

Use and compare each of the following resources:

- * [Google nGrams](#)
- * [Bookworm](#)
- * [BYU Historical Corpus of English](#)

- March 7: Maps

Read

- Moretti, “Maps” in *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*
- Wilkens, “Canons, Close Reading, and the Evolution of Method” (*DitDH*)
- Guldi, “What is the Spatial Turn?” and “The Spatial Turn in Literature”
- Benzon, “Maps, Iconic and Abstract” from *Reading “Graphs, Maps and Trees”*

Look at:

- [Paper Machines](#)—A Zotero plugin for visualizing Zotero libraries.
- [Mapping the Republic of Letters Project](#)
- [Hypercities](#)

- March 21: Other Distances

Read:

- Heftberger, “Do Computers Dream of Cinema? Film Data for Computer Analysis and Visualization”
- Manovich, “How to Compare One Million Images?”
- Manovich, “Media Visualization: Visual Techniques for Exploring Large Media Collections”
- Manovich, “Visualizing Vertov”

- March 28: “Where is the theory?” and other (uncomfortable?) Questions

Read:

- Schienfeldt, “Sunset for Ideology, Sunrise for Methodology” (and comments) at *Found History* blog (also in *DitDH*—but the comments on the original post are key here)
- Liu, “Where is the Cultural Criticism in Digital Humanities?” *DitDH*
- Drucker, “Humanistic Theory and Digital Scholarship” *DitDH*
- Ramsay and Rockwell, “Developing Things: Notes Toward an Epistemology of Building in the Digital Humanities” *DitDH*
- *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1.1: “Conversations” Section on Theory and Digital Humanities
- McPherson, “Why are the Digital Humanities So White?” *DitDH*
- Golumbia, “Why Digital Humanities Hates Literary and Cultural Studies” (BB, by kind permission of the author)

- April 4: “Reading in the Digital Age”
 - PMLA, *The Changing Profession: Reading in the Digital Age*
 - Alan Liu, “From Reading to Social Computing” (from *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*)
 - Julia Flaners, “The Literary, the Humanistic, the Digital: Toward a Research Agenda for Digital Literary Studies” (from *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*)
 - Flanders and Jockers, “A Matter of Scale”
- April 11: Student Selected Readings
 - Jerome McGann, “Philology in a New Key”
 - Section on “Digital Scholarship and Pedagogy” [Muse] edited by Tara McPherson from *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2009).
 - David Ciccoricco, “The Materialities of Close Reading: 1942, 1959, 2009” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (2012)
- April 18: Optional Workshop Class
- April 25: Final Meeting, Presentation of Projects in Progress