ENG-UA 731.001

Digital Literary Studies: Does It Work?

http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/does-it-work-2016/

Moacir P. de Sá Pereira
moacir@nyu.edu

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Mondays & Wednesdays, 15:30–16:45
Office hours: Tuesdays, 15:00–16:30, 244 Greene, 506

Course description

Over the past decade, literary study has become increasingly, reflexively interested in investigating the methods that it generates. At the same time, the digital humanities have emerged to claim a part of growing English departments. This course serves as an introduction to both of these currents in contemporary literary study. We will consider both familiar forms of reading as well as new, different forms that have broadened the way we interpret texts, and we will then look to how the digital humanities, as an especially method-oriented subfield, brings these questions of interpretation into even sharper contrast. Students will, then, see how debates about interpretation are lived and experienced within the digital humanities, both in theory and practice. Finally, students will learn to use digital methodologies in their interpretation, with possible projects in text analysis, topic modeling, and geospatial analysis.

Goals of the course

- to introduce you to historical trends in literary criticism from the 20th and 21st centuries;
- to develop skills in
  - reading analytical and literary texts;
  - writing analyses that are cogent and syncretic, making use of the various methods on hand;
  - creating (as well as using and distributing) geospatial datasets, GISes, and cartographic visualizations of the former;
  - creating (as well as using and distributing) datasets in `Python`;
  - using `NLTK` to investigate the properties of a text;
  - researching popular and scholarly writing on a topic;
  - presenting the results of research and scholarly analysis; and
- to develop, refine, and present scholarship that exists, spatially and temporally, beyond the boundaries of the course.

Novels available at NYU BookCenter (hardcopies required)

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 1925 (Scribner).

Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, 1965 (Harper Perennial).

Dana Spiotta, *Eat the Document*, 2006 (Scribner).

Nicolas Treddel, ed., *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Great Gatsby*, 1999 (Columbia University Press).

Course requirements & policies

Assessment

Class participation (16–26%): The success of any course is directly related to the levels of engagement brought both by the instructor and the students. As such, class participation is vitally important. Similarly, though attendance is logically required for class participation, it is not sufficient. This class requires active participation both inside the classroom and outside. No "passive consumers," as a professor of mine put it.

You can miss up to three meetings without penalty, and you can use these opportunities tactically, to provide space and time to either fulfill other obligations or recuperate from the previous night. I don't care why you didn't come. I start to care with the fourth absence, and I start to require documentation. Repeated unexcused absence quickly gobbles up the class participation component of the grade and begins to threaten your ability to even *pass* the course.

Because this course is discussion-oriented, active participation means, most importantly, participating in the discussions in class. But useful and engaged participation in discussions also depends on good preparation, which includes doing the reading for the course. I encourage you to think of one or two points of entry into a discussion of a text for each meeting. This could be a point of confusion (don't be shy!), a point of comparison/contrast between passages to another work, or a useful parallel to something outside the coursework. Come to class with questions, in other words, and writing them out as mini-prompts may be especially helpful.

Critical presentation (16–26%): While reading the critical history of *The Great Gatsby*, each of you will give a short (8–10 minutes) presentation that introduces either one of the essays cited in the reading for that day or an essay you have found via JSTOR contemporary with that day's reading. You will get to sign up for a time period on the first day of class. The presentation will also have a short (1 page) written component that you will turn in. The goal of the presentation is to introduce new knowledge to the class that it has not already had, thereby facilitating that day's discussion. This presentation cannot make use of the computer in the classroom, and you should email the subject of your presentation to me 24 hours in advance.

Digital presentation (16–26%): During the digital section of the course, each of you will give a short (8–10 minutes) presentation on a digital tool or project you have found online, possibly even making some quick use of the *Gatsby* dataset. The tool or project should be appropriate to that day's work, meaning statistical analysis tools and projects fit for the `Python` days, while spatial analysis tools and projects fit better for the `Carto` days. You can sign up on the first day for these presentations. Your presentation will also have a short (1 page) written component that you will turn in. The goal of the presentation is to introduce a new form of digital reading to the class that may spark new ideas for final projects. This presentation can make use of the computer in the classroom, and you should email the subject of your presentation to me 24 hours in advance.

Novel presentation (16–26%): While reading the two more "recent" notels, each of you will give a short (8–10 minutes) presentation that introduces secondary materials to the novel at hand, be it scholarly writing found via JSTOR or popular writing found online or in other publications. You will get to sign up for a day on the first day of class. The presentation will also have a short (1 page) written component that you will turn in. The goal of the presentation is to introduce new sources to the class that it has not already had, thereby facilitating that day's discussion. This presentation cannot make use of the computer in the classroom, and you should email the subject of your presentation to me 24 hours in advance.

Final project (26–36%): The final project is an extension of the work you have been doing all semester. It has two obvious components, as do the previous assignments, both an in-class presentation and a written component. The goal is for you to synthesize the different methods of reading we have learned over the semester to provide the foundation of a new, mixed reading of one of the semester's novels. As such, you are encouraged to make use of the digital tools (and expand on your knowledge of them) while also keeping in mind the various secondary materials to which you have been exposed. Remember the question guiding this course—"does it work?"—when considering how to develop the argument of your project.

The presentation, for which you will sign up on the first day, will be longer (18–20 minutes) than the previous presentations, and there will be time for Q&A with your classmates afterward. You will be able to make use of the computer in the classroom to visualize or guide your findings.

In addition to the presentation, you will submit a longer (7 pages) written component that provides a more in-depth view of your project.

You are *strongly* encouraged to be thinking about the project all semester long, and you should have a good sense of at least the topic by the time we return after Thanksgiving. Making use of office hours is a great way to help your project take shape in the rushed final weeks of the semester.

Both the presentation and the write-up should follow standard scholarly guidlines regarding citation.

Policies

Assignments: The assignment instructions, though detailed in the syllabus, may be enhanced or supplemented during the course. If you have any questions about an assignment, you should ask for clarification early. The assignments are due on the dates noted in the syllabus.

All of the writing can be submitted electronically.

Late assignments jeopardize both your and my rhythms in the class, so they will be penalized. I will give you feedback and will happily discuss any work with you, but grades should be considered final.

Additionally, grading is variable based on what you feel your strengths are. Each assignment will be worth at least 16% of your final grade, but the upper limit of the grade is set by you. You should email me how you slice up the pie by late October.

Attendance: As indicated above, attendance is required. Three absences will be excused without supplemental documentation, and I encourage you to use these tactically. Catching up is your responsibility.

Subsequent absence requires formal documentation. Otherwise it begins to harm your final grade. Though class participation is only part of the final grade, extreme absenteeism (more than six meetings missed) may put your ability to pass the course at risk.

Please show up on time to class, as well.

Digital learning: I will be exposing you to a lot of new tools and concepts. Our class will have digitally-focused classes in our classroom, where we will learn new skills. These skills are difficult, and I will try to help as much as possible.

Electronics: Despite the presence of the digital, especially as the class gets deeper into the semester, our time in class is meant as a sanctuary from the distractions of the rest of the world. Furthermore, the class relies on discussion and engagement, and the front of a laptop screen is a brilliant shield behind which a student can hide, even unintentionally. During our meetings, then, there can be no use of electronic devices. Please also set whatever devices you have but aren't using to silent mode.

Course website: A public website, mostly including this syllabus but with richer bibliographic detail and assignment descriptions, is available at `http://moacir.com/courses-nyu/does-it-work-2016/`.

Communication: Communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process, and this course depends on clear communication in both directions. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, the best course of action is to come visit me during my office hours (Tuesdays, 15:00–16:30, 244 Greene, 506). If your questions, etc., cannot wait until then, then clearly you can also email me at `moacir@nyu.edu`. I should respond within 48 hours.

This is a new course, meaning that there will be even more unfinished edges ready to scratch someone than in a typical course. We have a collective goal of learning, however, so if the unfinished edges get to be overwhelming, I'll adjust the parameters of the course appropriately. I'm not out to catch you, nor is this course a process of grotesque punishment. Please don't treat it as such.

Once more, with feeling: *communication is vitally important to the pedagogical process.* If you have concerns or worries, please let me know about them sooner rather than later.

Disabilities: If you have a disability, you should register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (mosescsd@nyu.edu; 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, 212.998.4980), which can arrange for things like extra time for assignments. Please inform me *at the beginning of the semester* if you need any special accommodations regarding the assignments.

Academic integrity: Please look at NYU's full statement on academic integrity, available at `http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity`. Any instance of academic dishonesty will result in an F and will be reported to the relevant dean for disciplinary action. Remember that plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intention. Know what it is, and don't do it.

This document: This source code and documentation for this syllabus is available at `https://github.com/muziejus/does-it-work`.

Readings & classes schedule

Readings that are not the four books listed above will be available via the course website. See the list of references at the end for details.

1. That Old *Gatsby*, That Critique *Gatsby*

In the first section of this course, we'll be returning to a familiar, canonical work of American 20th century literature, *The Great Gatsby*. Next, we will follow our own reading of the novel with a look at the novel's critical history.

1. Monday, 5 Sep: **No Class.**

   Wednesday, 7 Sep: Introductions and a snippet from Massumi's "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy."

2. Monday, 12 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,

   Wednesday, 14 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,

3. Monday, 19 Sep: Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*,

   Wednesday, 21 Sep: **Critical presentations begin**, Tredell, intro & ch. 1.

4. Monday, 26 Sep: Tredell, chs. 2 & 3.

   Wednesday, 28 Sep: Tredell, chs. 4 & 5.

2. A Theoretical Break

Next, we take a short break to learn about the stresses offered by these more critique-driven forms of reading.

5. Monday, 3 Oct: Bersani, "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature" and Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern."

   Wednesday, 5 Oct: Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You" and selections from Felski, *The Limits of Critique*.

3. The New *Gatsby*, The Digital *Gatsby*

These five weeks serve as an opportunity to learn new methods of literary criticism, now based in digital tools. We will learn how to use `Voyant` to quickly see patterns in the text of *The Great Gatsby*, `Python` and its `NLTK` to analyze the text with a high-level programming language,[1] and, finally, `NYWalker` and `Carto` to learn how to make maps to analyse the geographical space of *The Great Gatsby*.

6. Monday, 10 Oct: **No Class.**

   Wednesday, 12 Oct: Ramsay, "Algorithmic Criticism" and `Voyant` and *The Great Gatsby*

7. Monday, 17 Oct: Introduction to `Python`

   Wednesday, 19 Oct: **Digital presentations begin**, `Python` and *The Great Gatsby*

8. Monday, 24 Oct: `Python` and *The Great Gatsby*

   Wednesday, 26 Oct: `Python` and *The Great Gatsby*

9. Monday, 31 Oct: `NYWalker` and *The Great Gatsby*

   Wednesday, 2 Nov: `Carto` and *The Great Gatsby*

10. Monday, 7 Nov: `Carto` and *The Great Gatsby*

    Wednesday, 9 Nov: `Carto` and *The Great Gatsby*

[1] The unit on `Python` is adapted from Reeve, Perkins, and Bird et al.

4. The New Novels, The New Systems

The semester closes with reading two new(er) novels that invite a systematic, totalized reading. We close with student presentations on their final projects.

11. Monday, 14 Nov: **Novel presentations begin**, Pynchon, chs. 1 – 3.
    Wednesday, 16 Nov: Pynchon, chs. 4 & 5.
12. Monday, 21 Nov: Pynchon, ch. 6.
    Wednesday, 23 Nov: **No Class.**
13. Monday, 28 Nov: Spiotta, pts. 1 & 2.
    Wednesday, 30 Nov: Spiotta, pts. 3 & 4.
14. Monday, 5 Dec: Spiotta, pts. 5 – 7.
    Wednesday, 7 Dec: Spiotta, pts. 8 & 9.
15. Monday, 12 Dec: **Final presentations**
    Wednesday, 14 Dec: **Final presentations**

Calendar for "Digital Literary Studies: Does It Work?," Fall 2016

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1. 5.9, 7.9	**No class**	Introductions, Massumi
2. 12.9, 14.9	Fitzgerald	Fitzgerald
3. 19.9, 21.9	Fitzgerald	Tredell (Critical presentations begin)
4. 26.9, 28.9	Tredell	Tredell
5. 3.10, 5.10	Bersani, Latour	Sedgwick, Felski
6. 10.10, 12.10	**No class**	Ramsay / `Voyant` and *Gatsby*
7. 17.10, 19.10	Intro to `Python`	`Python` and *Gatsby* (Digital presentations begin)
8. 24.10, 26.10	`Python` and *Gatsby*	`Python` and *Gatsby*
9. 31.10, 2.11	`NYWalker` and *Gatsby*	`Carto` and *Gatsby*
10. 7.11, 9.11	`Carto` and *Gatsby*	`Carto` and *Gatsby*
11. 14.11, 16.11	Pynchon (Novel presentations begin)	Pynchon
12. 21.11, 23.11	Pynchon	**No class**
13. 28.11, 30.11	Spiotta	Spiotta
14. 5.12, 7.12	Spiotta	Spiotta
15. 12.12, 14.12	**Project presentations**	**Project presentations**

References

Bersani, Leo. "Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature." *Representations*, no. 25 (1989): 99–118. doi:10.2307/2928469.

Bird, Steven, Ewan Klein, and Edward Loper. *Natural Language Processing with Python*. Second edition. NLTK Project, 2016. http://www.nltk.org/book/.

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Scribner, 2004.

Latour, Bruno. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225–248. doi:10.1086/421123.

Massumi, Brian. "Translator's Foreword: Pleasures of Philosophy." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi, ix–xv. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

Perkins, Jacob. *Python 3 Text Processing with NLTK 3 Cookbook*. Second edition. Birmingham, UK: Packt Publishing, 2014.

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. 1965. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.

Ramsay, Stephen. *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Reeve, Jonathan. "Text Analysis and Visualization with Python and the NLTK." *GitHub*, 2016-04-13. https://github.com/JonathanReeve/dataviz-workshop/blob/master/dataviz-workshop.ipynb.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, 123–152. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Spiotta, Dana. *Eat the Document*. New York: Scribner, 2006.

Tredell, Nicolas, ed. *F. Scott Fitzegerald: The Great Gatsby*. Columbia Critical Guides. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.