Syllabus Updated: November 4, 2012

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Course Description

Digital media art and electronic literature are often regarded as two distinct discourses. They are assumed to have separate institutional authorities, historical genealogies, theoretical interests, critical audiences, and market values. Yet the cultural and formal differences between literary and artistic new media objects are underwritten by similar procedural logics and are produced using the same technologies. As much as they reflect a convergence of aural, visual, textual, and haptic forms, how do these constantly transforming disciplines stand apart yet mutually inform one another? How does Christiane Paul's account of digital art, for example, relate to N. Katherine Hayles's history of electronic literature? This course incorporates a general history of computational media (e.g. Bush, Nelson, Engelbart, Sutherland, Berners-Lee) with the investigation of some literary and artistic precedents. We will apply this historical framework to the study of contemporary experimental production in networked and programmable media. Works examined will include netart, hypertext fiction, generative poetry, codework, interactive fiction, ARGs, bioart, database art, critical interface design, installation art, videogames, and more.

Course Requirements:

- Class Blog/Mini-Assignments (25%)
- Midterm Project (20%)
- Final Project (25%)
- Presentation (10%)
- Participation and Attendance (15%)
- Playing Speculation (5%)

Blog

The blog is located at: http://stephanieboluk.com/teaching/MEDS250F12/blog/
Students are expected to post at least one thoughtful entry per week that demonstrate comprehension and engagement with readings and issues discussed in class. First post due Thursday Sept. 8 and last post due Thursday Dec. 8 before class meets. These posts can be of varying length (aim for a 250 word minimum/week) and should be useful contributions to our discussions. You will be expected to respond to topics and issues raised by your colleagues as well as the professor. Please feel free to embed links, images and videos into your entries if relevant. Make sure to copyedit your grammar and syntax for clarity. Format your posts and any links or embedded media in a clean, well-organized fashion. I expect articulate, insightful, well-written posts that demonstrate a deep engagement with the readings, issues, and games we are studying. Consistent failure to follow these guidelines will result in penalties to the grade.

You cannot ‘bank’ posts or catch up if you miss multiple weeks.

Please read the Blog Guidelines

**Assignment Format for Written Work**

Failure to follow guidelines will result in a lowered grade.
- Any essays must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spaced with 1” margins.
- Sources must be documented according to MLA conventions (in-text, parenthetical citations and a Works Cited page).
- Cite your sources in blog writing as well.
- Late projects will be penalized one grade level for every day the paper is late. Computer/printer malfunctions and access difficulties do not excuse late work.

*Remember you can always come either to my office hours or make an appointment to discuss any issues or questions you may have about your research project or the course in general.*

**Grading**
- All work, including blogs, must be copyedited for spelling, grammar, and proper citation. Failure to do so will result in a significantly lowered grade.
- Schedule an appointment to discuss your progress at any time. I will not discuss grade issues during class time.
- Students are responsible for retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a re-submission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is your responsibility to have and make this material available.

**Grade System**
- A indicates achievement of distinction. It involves conspicuous excellence in several aspects of the work.
- B indicates general achievement of a high order. It also involves excellence in some aspects of the work, such as the following:
  - Completeness and accuracy of knowledge
  - Sustained and effective use of knowledge
  - Independence of work
Originality
C indicates the acceptable standard for graduation from Vassar College. It involves in each course such work as may fairly be expected of any Vassar student of normal ability who gives to the course a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention. Such acceptable attainment should include the following factors:

- Familiarity with the content of the course
- Familiarity with the methods of study of the course
- Evidence of growth in actual use both of content and method
- Full participation in the work of the class
- Evidence of an open, active, and discriminating mind
- Ability to express oneself in intelligible English

C–, D+, and D indicate degrees of unsatisfactory work, below standard grade. They signify work which in one or more important respects falls below the minimum acceptable standard for graduation, but which is of sufficient quality and quantity to be counted in the units required for graduation.

Work evaluated as F may not be counted toward the degree.

Classroom Behavior

- Students come from diverse cultural, economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diverse student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. Offering constructive critique for your colleagues (and professor!) is encouraged, but please remember to always be respectful.
- Cell phones and headphones must be turned off and properly stored before class begins. Do not text message in class. Do not use Facebook. Do not email/IM, etc. If you bring a computer, please refrain from the use of any other social networking (e.g. Twitter) software or casual web surfing/gaming not relevant to class (e.g., upvoting on Reddit will get you downvoted in class). Computers are for class-purposes only. If you are “virtually absent,” I will count this as a real absence. If temptation is too great, revert to a paper notebook or turn off your wireless. Both your participation and attendance will be affected if you fail to observe these rules.
- Students who violate these rules will be asked to leave and will incur an absence. Your participation and attendance grade will be affected. Be attentive towards your colleagues and professor by listening and treating everyone with respect.

Attendance Policy

MEDS 250 is a participation-driven course thus, if you miss more than 6 periods, you will fail the entire course. You are permitted a maximum of 3 unexcused absences before your participation grade is reduced 1 letter grade/per absence. Absences are counted from the first day a student is registered. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to make yourself aware of all class news and content (e.g., don’t email me to find out what was missed, get notes, etc). You are responsible for turning assignments in on
time.

If you will be absent, it is not necessary to contact me with a reason unless you have exceeded the 3 class period absence and wish to provide official documentation.

**Arriving Late**

Please do not come late to class; arriving late disrupts the entire class. If you enter class after roll has been taken, you are late. Tardiness will also lower your participation grade. *Three late arrivals result in an absence.*

**Students with Disabilities**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course that have been approved by the Office for Accessibility and Educational Opportunity, as indicated in your AEO accommodation letter.

**Late Policy**

Deadlines are **non-negotiable**. If the midterm or final project are submitted after the deadline, one letter grade per day will be deducted. No excuses or bargaining. This policy will be strictly enforced and no extensions will be permitted without proper documentation.

Failure to post to the **blog** by the weekly deadline will result in the post not being counted for a grade. **So don’t forget!**

**Email Policy**

Although this is a course on networked and programmable media, I do live offline occasionally. Do not expect an immediate same-day reply to emails. I will try to respond to emails within 72 hours. If your question requests that I reply with something lengthy or substantive (e.g., a question related to your research project), I may suggest a face-to-face meeting in lieu of email exchange (or I may take longer than 72 hours to get back to you).

**Computer Access**

All the material we will look at online is available on either Mac or PC and should work on most computers. You are responsible for posting on the blog and using the software which has certain hardware requirements. Make sure you have a way to access all the material (either your own computer, the school’s computers, from a friend, etc.).

**Required Textbooks to Buy:**


Christiane Paul, *Digital Art*

Catherine Malabou, *What Should We do with our Brain?*
Required Works to Buy:
Steven Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*
Tale of Tales, *The Path*, http://tale-of-tales.com/ThePath/buy.html (also available via Steam)

Resources (under construction):
Interactive Fiction: InForm 7 (http://inform7.com/) [programs in natural language]
Augmented Reality: Layar (http://www.layar.com/)
3D Videogames: Unity (http://unity3d.com/)
Archive of Concrete Poetry (http://mechanicalbrides.com/concretepoetryfigureground.html)
Electronic Literature Volume 1 (http://collection.eliterature.org/1/)
Electronic Literature Volume 2 (http://collection.eliterature.org/2/)

Course Schedule

*NB: The course schedule is subject to change at any time. I will give as much advance notification as possible for those of you who might want to do the readings well in advance of class. The online syllabus will always be updated with the most recent version*

All readings can be downloaded from the course blog via the Class Texts tool bar.

Week 1: Hello World!
Sept. 4 (T) First Day of Class
Sept. 6 (Th) Nick Montfort’s *Taroko Gorge* and *ppg256*

Week 2: Surveys

*The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.* - Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media

Sept 11 (T) Christiane Paul, *Digital Art*, “Introduction” and “Chapter 2: Digital Technologies as Medium”

Sept. 13 (Th) Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think” (1945). Read version from *Atlantic Monthly* or *LIFE* (which includes illustrations)

Week 3: Historical Precedents
Since a three-dimensional object casts a two-dimensional shadow, we should be able to imagine the unknown four-dimensional object whose shadow we are. I for my part am fascinated by the search for a one-dimensional object that casts no shadow at all.

- Attributed to Marcel Duchamp by the poet Octavio Paz

Sept 18 (T)  Marcel Duchamp, *Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, “The Green Box” (pp. 26-71)

“The Large Glass”
“The Green Box” (sculpture)
Facsimile of a note
“The Large Glass” juxtaposed to pages from “The Green Box” (text)

Tristan Tzara: “Seven Dada Manifestos” pp. 74-98 (“How to Write a Dada Poem,”)

Sept 20 (Th)  Raymond Queneau, “A Story As You Like It”

Jorge Borges, “The Book of Sand”
The Oulipo, *selections from The New Media Reader*

Week 4: Early Hypertext

I’m not sure that I have a story. And if I do, I’m not sure that everything isn't my story.”

- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon*, a story

Sept 25 (T)  Douglas Engelbart, “Mother of all Demos” (1968)

Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (long)


Sept 27 (Th)  NO CLASS

Week 5: Net.Art

“Ugly, commercial sons of bitches”

- Jodi’s five-word acceptance speech at 1999 Webby Awards


Jodi (Dirk Pesmans and Joan Meemskirk), Jodi.org

Mini-assignment: Make your own net.flag with an explanation of why you selected the particular elements. Take a screenshot and post on blog: try to post immediately after you generate the image as the piece will reflect the history of prior user’s inscriptions.

Oct 4  NO CLASS

Week 6: Interactive Fiction

You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door.

There is a small mailbox here. - From Infocom’s Zork
Oct. 9 (T)  Noah Wardrip-Fruin, *Reading Digital Literature*
Emily Short, *Galatea*, [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/short_galatea.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/short_galatea.html)

Oct. 11 (Th) Speculation prep,

**Week 7 October Break**

NO CLASSES

**Week 8: Speculation: Ultrafast Black Swans and Finance Capitalism**

“I’m hardwired to lie.” - NEX, Speculation

“My mind is going. There is no question about it. I can feel it.” - HAL, 2001

Oct 23       Play and analyze Speculation, an alternate reality game (ARG), in conjunction with Patrick Jagoda’s Transmedia class at U. Chicago

Oct 25       Speculation, cont.

**Week 9: What Should We Do With Our Brain?**

“Humans make their own brain but they do not know that they make it”

- Catherine Malabou

Oct 30 (T)    Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With our Brain?*

Nov 1      Malabou (cont.)

**Week 10: Database Aesthetics & Analytics**

its the undefinable the they mud
line there tongue that another vistas
and gets happen that can vistas
image clogged straight last a happen
wide with stability

- John Cayley, a zero-count stiching poem

Nov. 6 (T)  Readings:  Lev Manovich, *“Database as Symbolic Form,”*
excerpts from *The Language of New Media*
N. Katherine Hayles, *“Narrative and Database: Natural Symbionts”*
Lev Manovich, *“Cultural Analytics: Analysis and Visualization of Large Cultural Data Sets”*

Works:  Nancy Patterson, *“Stockmarket Skirt”*
Nick Montfort and Stephanie Strickland, *Sea and Spar Between We Feel Fine*
Bicycle Built for 2000 [using Mechanical Turk]
Clement Valla, Seed Drawings [using Mechanical Turk]

Nov 8 (Th) Database, cont.

Week 11: Orality, Literacy, Visuality, Digitality

Long ago
There was a strange deception:
A wolf dressed in frills
- Anne Sexton

Nov 13 (T) Case Study: Red Riding Hood
Tale of Tales, The Path
Charles Perreault, “Little Red Cap”
Grimm Brothers, “Red Riding Hood”
Nick Montfort, “Wolf and Girl”

Nov 15 (Th) Red Riding Hood, cont

Week 12: Bioart/ Biopoetry (Xenotext vs. Genesis)

If I am a representative of any ideology, it leans towards appreciation of Full Breadth Genetic Altery. - Adam Zaretsky

Nov 20 (T) Burroughs: The cut-up method
Adam Zaretsky and Tony Allard, “Burroughs Biotechnological Bestiary”
Christian Bök, Xenotext Experiment
Eduardo Kac, Genesis (click to read “detailed description”)
Rob Mitchell, Bioart:
Eduardo Kac, Introduction to Signs of Life,
Eduardo Kac, Bioart:

Week 13: Bookishness

Robert Coover, The End of Books
Steven Hall, The Raw Shark Texts

Nov 29 Bookishness, cont

Week 14: Workshops

Dec 4 Project Presentations
Dec 6 Project Presentations

Week 15: Workshops