DIGITAL LITERARY STUDIES: PROTOTYPING TEXTS

English 508 | UVic | Spring 2017 | CRN: 21332 | R 2:30-5:20 | CLE C316
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jentery.github.io/508v2/ (HTML) | jentery.github.io/508v2/syllabus.pdf (PDF)

Questioning the face value of texts. Prototyping what else they could be.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. —Karl Marx

In both theory and practice, this seminar brushes against four popular assumptions about digital humanities: 1) as a service to researchers, the field merely develops digital resources for online discovery and builds computational tools for end-users; it does not interpret texts or meaningfully engage with "pre-digital" traditions in literary and cultural criticism; 2) digital humanities is not concerned with the literary or aesthetic character of texts; it is a techno-solutionist by-product of instrumentalism and big data; 3) digital humanities practitioners replace cultural perspectives with uncritical computer vision; instead of privileging irony or ambivalence, they use computers to "prove" reductive claims about literature and culture, usually through graphs and totalizing visualizations; and 4) to participate in the field, you must be fluent in computer programming, or at least be willing to treat literature and culture quantitatively; if you are not a programmer, then you are not doing digital humanities.

During our seminar meetings, we will counter these four assumptions by considering "design fictions," which Bruce Sterling defines as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change." Design fictions typically have a futurist bent to them. They speculate about bleeding edge technologies and emerging dynamics, or they project whiz-bang worlds seemingly ripped from films such as *Minority Report*. But we'll refrain from much futurism. Instead, we will use technologies to look backwards and prototype versions of texts that facilitate interpretative practice. Inspired by Kari Kraus's conjectural criticism, Fred Moten's second iconicity, Bethany Nowviskie and Johanna Drucker's speculative computing, Karen Barad's notion of diffraction, Jeffrey Schnapp's small data, Anne Balsamo's hermeneutic reverse-engineering, and deformations by Lisa Samuels, Jerome McGann, and Mark Sample, we will conduct "what if" analyses of texts already at hand, in electronic format (e.g., page images in a library's digital collections).

Doing so will involve something peculiar: *interpreting our primary sources by altering them*. We'll substitute words, change formats, rearrange poems, remediate manifestos, create forms, bend data, and build bots. To be sure, such approaches have vexed legacies in the arts and humanities. Consider cut-ups, constrained writing, story-making machines, exquisite corpses, remixes, tactical media, Fluxkits,

or détournement. Today, these avant-garde traditions are ubiquitous in a banal or depoliticized form, the default features of algorithmic culture and social networks. But we will refresh them, with a difference, by integrating our alterations into criticism and prompting questions about the composition of art and history today.

AIMS AND -ISMS

For this seminar, we will focus on texts with charged design elements (experiments with fonts, typefaces, arrangement, simultaneity, synesthesia, space, time, and automation, to name a few) that were published between the 1870s and 1970s. These texts correspond with various "-isms" from the period: Symbolism, Cubism, Nowism, Futurism, Dada, Minimalism, Expressionism, Imagism, Vorticism, Constructivism, Realism, Surrealism, Thingism, Concretism, Verticalism, Plasticism, and more. Early in the seminar, we will survey the aesthetics and politics of these -isms, and you will be asked to research one -ism in particular for a majority of the term. This research will involve bibliography and close reading together with deliberate alterations of an –ism to foreground what made that -ism compelling, or not so compelling, in the first place. Our aim, then, will not be to "prove" anything about literature and culture, or to build tools, reveal networks, learn some code, or create whiz-bang visualizations, either. It will be to design and make texts differently, *to better understand their significance by not only refusing to take them at face value (a hermeneutic impulse) but also prototyping what else they could be (a design impulse)*.

A Low-Tech Approach to Digital Studies

No experience with digital studies is required for this seminar. Assumed technical competence: you know how to send an email. Please note, too, that this course involves a low-tech approach to digital studies, with an emphasis on art, design, aesthetics, and tactile media over computation, networks, distant reading, and big data. You will not be required to do any programming.

FORMAT

This seminar is project-based, meaning you will iteratively develop your own research in response to a series of prompts. You will periodically share this research with me and your peers, present it at the term's end, and integrate it into a scholarly portfolio of your work.

Each of our seminar meetings will usually involve the following:
- *Workshop*: We will collectively experiment with a particular technique for altering texts. You will be asked to apply what you learned during these workshops and document your work in a notebook.
Discussion: We will chat as a group about the workshop and readings. During these discussions, I may decide to listen, without much (if any) intervention in the conversation. I may also decide to briefly lecture about a given topic or ask you to present material from your notebook.

You should arrive to each meeting having read the assigned texts and completed the assigned exercises, all of which are listed in the course outline.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

For this seminar, you will be required to keep entries in a notebook, create your own prototypes of a historical text (as part of the notebook), give a presentation, and compile a portfolio, which will integrate your prototypes into a collection of observations about your selected -ism. These portfolios will treat prototypes as evocative objects for describing your text, reflecting on your work, and conducting future research. They will not act as seminar papers or follow the conventions of academic journal articles. For our purposes during seminar, "prototype" will be synonymous with a "physical alteration" or "version."

Below is a list of the assignments, together with a description of what is expected for each and how each will be assessed. Please note that the requirements are subject to minor changes as the seminar progresses. If I do make a change to any of the assignments, then I will notify you in writing and well in advance.

The portfolio and presentation are essential to passing the course. Failure to complete these two requirements will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA). Please also note: I do not post marks outside my office, and I do not use plagiarism detection software.

Notebook (30%, due by 12pm on 20 April 2016)
Throughout the term, you will keep a notebook documenting your alterations to an -ism. Consisting of several simple experiments across digital and tactile media, your notebook will be shared frequently during seminar, and you will be expected to comment on experiments and prototypes by your peers. Your notebook will be assessed holistically, meaning your work will be given one grade (at the term's end) based on its: 1) consistency, 2) development over time, 3) reflexive character, 4) integration of seminar discussions and workshops, 5) quality (including its combination of critique with creativity), and 6) attention to change. There will be a prompt for each entry in your notebook, and it will be related to a particular workshop, seminar discussion, and reading. The prompt will be circulated at least one week prior to the entry's due date. Entries should be completed before seminar on the day they are due. Near our sixth meeting of the term, I will circulate an interim mark for your notebook. My intention for holistically assessing your notebook is not to keep you in the dark about your academic progress. It is to treat a notebook as it should be treated: as a genre that develops and increases in complexity over time. Please note that the tone and style of your notebooks should be less formal than, say, a seminar essay intended for an academic audience. Where applicable, entries should be self-aware and reflexive. In the notebook, please feel free to reference work being conducted by your peers or to spark dialogue with them. Please also feel free to combine your preferred modes of composition: writing, drawing, collage, outlining, sketching, graphing, etc. In so doing, you'll likely need to create an online folder, site, or repository (e.g., GitHub, Drive, or Tumblr) to share digital files, and then point your peers and me to its URL. In fact, for our purposes during seminar, *your notebook should be considered a*

composition across digital and tactile media, with source material available offline and on.

For the notebook, grades will be assigned based on the following scale:
- 90-100 = A+: Notebooks in this range are incredibly detailed, rife with documentation, and demonstrate new or innovative uses of specific methods or techniques. They respond to seminar discussions, engage assigned readings, are reflexive, and exhibit a combination of critical thinking, creativity, and awareness of media/materiality.
- 85-89 = A: Notebooks in this range are incredibly detailed and rife with documentation. They respond to seminar discussions, engage assigned readings, are reflexive, and exhibit a combination of critical thinking, creativity, and awareness of media/materiality.
- 80-84 = A-: Notebooks in this range are incredibly detailed and rife with documentation. They respond to seminar discussions, engage assigned readings, and are reflexive.
- 77-79 = B+: Notebooks in this range are rife with documentation. They respond to seminar discussions and are reflexive.
- 73-76 = B: Research logs in this range are rife with documentation and respond to seminar discussions.

Please submit your notebook by 20 April 2016.

Portfolio (40%, due by 12pm on 20 April 2016)
Your portfolio should collect the best work you have done during seminar and contextualize it with a cover statement. The portfolio can be digital, tactile, or both, and it can be submitted online, by hand, or both. It should *not* be treated as a seminar paper. Its primary function is to exhibit your work as a collection of critical and creative takes on an -ism, with attention to fine-grained details. Awareness of these details should emerge from your prototyping as a form of research and inquiry, and where possible you should stress how prototyping demonstrates the ways in which meaning is articulated with matter, context, and use. Across the materials, but especially in the cover statement, you should demonstrate knowledge of the history, aesthetics, politics, *and* material composition of your selected -ism and text(s). To do so, *you will need to thoroughly research your -ism as and after you prototype versions of it*.

In your cover statement, I recommend treating your prototypes as evidence for understanding or interpreting your -ism as a form of "action writing," or a way to prompt specific behaviours. You may find it helpful to articulate a conceptual thread and run it through your cover statement (for the purposes of coherence), even if you don't make an explicit, academic argument about your -ism. You may also want to position your prototypes as situations or contexts for interpretation (as opposed to stable objects or exact replicas). What kinds of interactions, alternatives, feelings, negotiations, or interpretations do they encourage? What and how do they conjecture? Are they interested in the probable, or the preferable, or the possible, or the plausible, or . . . ? How do they use time, space, and ephemerality as media? How and under what assumptions do they alter your primary source, and to what effects on how we

define primary sources in the first place? How do they perform your selected text(s) differently than in the past, and ultimately which differences make a difference?

Due by 20 April 2016, your portfolio should include:
- A cover statement (1000-2000 words, which should focus on the prototypes included in your portfolio and their relation to the historical, aesthetic, political, and material elements of your -ism),
- Four (and *only four*) prototypes from your notebook (prototypes can and probably should be revised since your notebook; one of the prototypes must be your "capstone" prototype, which is due on 30 March 2016),
- A title for each prototype,
- A description (~50 words) of each prototype (you may include between three and five descriptive keywords, too, if you wish), and
- References and further reading (MLA format; not just a works cited; should include primary sources for your -ism but also secondary sources about your -ism).

For the portfolio, grades will be assigned based on the following scale:
- 90-100 = A+: Portfolios in this range are especially sophisticated and perceptive pieces of work that make an original contribution to scholarly thinking about a particular -ism. They could be published in a multimodal journal or exhibited in an academic venue.
- 85-89 = A: Portfolios in this range are perceptive and original, but may require substantial revision for public circulation. They could act as core material for a conference presentation.
- 80-84 = A-: Portfolios in this range are adequate at the graduate level with regard to the research, presentation, and quality of content.
- 77-79 = B+: Portfolios in this range have significant flaws in some areas, but they still meet graduate standards.
- 73-76 = B: Portfolios in this range are marginally acceptable at the graduate level.

Presentation (15%, scheduled for 2:30pm on 30 March 2016)
Scheduled for 2:30pm on Thursday, March 30th, your final presentation should include the following elements:
- Your "capstone" prototype, based on a prototyping exercise of your own design, responding to the final prompt, "_____ It";
- Tactile material to present and circulate (on a table, stand, or the like; your capstone prototype should not be displayed *solely* on a screen);
- A five-minute talk about your selected text, prototype, prototyping method, and findings/interpretations (this talk should stress interesting details emerging from prototyping as a form of inquiry; please practice this talk in advance; your audience includes other people in this seminar but also faculty and peers in the arts and humanities at UVic); and

- A tagline following this convention: A ____ of ____ist ____ (e.g., a ruination of Cubist emotion, an imitation of Expressionist linocuts, and a model of Orphist simultaneity). This tagline will be included in a poster that will circulate roughly one week prior to your presentations on the 30th. Please email me this tagline, together with your name as you'd like it to appear on the poster, before Wednesday, March 22nd at 9am.

For the final presentation, grades will be assigned based on the following scale:
- 90-100 = A+: Presentations in this range are incredibly compelling and even memorable. They demonstrate what was learned during the term and provide clear evidence of that learning. They prompt the audience to ask questions, and they spark conversation about a concrete topic emerging from the seminar. They do not visibly rely much (if at all) on reading a prepared text. Their structure is tangible and easy to follow.
- 85-89 = A: Presentations in this range demonstrate what was learned during the term and provide clear evidence of that learning. They prompt the audience to ask questions, and they spark conversation about a concrete topic emerging from the seminar. They do not visibly rely much (if at all) on reading a prepared text. Their structure is tangible and easy to follow.
- 80-84 = A-: Presentations in this range demonstrate what was learned during the term and provide recognizable evidence of that learning. They prompt the audience to ask questions. They do not visibly rely much (if at all) on reading a prepared text. Their structure is tangible and easy to follow.
- 77-79 = B+: Presentations in this range demonstrate what was learned during the term and provide recognizable evidence of that learning. They do not visibly rely much (if at all) on reading a prepared text.
- 73-76 = B: Presentations in this range demonstrate what was learned during the term and provide recognizable evidence of that learning.

Participation (15%)
Discussion and invested participation are central to the graduate seminar format, and they are important dimensions of academic labour. That said, I will assess your contributions to the seminar this term, including questions you ask, your involvement in workshops, your investment and role in dialogue, and your familiarity with the readings at hand. Near our sixth meeting, I will circulate interim participation grades.

For your participation mark, grades will be assigned based on the following scale:
- 90-100 = A+: Participation in this range demonstrates an incredibly high level of engagement with the course material. You are clearly familiar with the reading(s) at hand, actively engaged in workshops, sparking dialogue with your peers and me, listening attentively to others, and asking compelling questions, which have not occurred to me or your peers.
- 85-89 = A: Participation in this range demonstrates a high level of engagement with the course material. You are clearly familiar with the reading(s) at hand,

actively engaged in workshops, sparking dialogue with your peers and me, listening attentively to others, and asking important questions.
- 80-84 = A-: Participation in this range demonstrates a high level of engagement with the course material. You are clearly familiar with the reading(s) at hand, actively engaged in workshops, sparking dialogue with your peers and me, and listening attentively to others.
- 77-79 = B+: Participation in this range demonstrates an acceptable level of engagement with the course material. You are clearly familiar with the reading(s) at hand and actively engaged in workshops.
- 73-76 = B: Participation in this range suggests you are likely familiar with the reading(s) at hand and engaged in workshops.

POLICIES
Below are the policies for the seminar.

Late Submissions
Barring exceptional circumstances, I will not accept your portfolios after the due date. Belated entries in your notebook will negatively influence your final mark. Since entries are intended to build upon each other, I recommend that you do not fall behind on them. Also, I will not comment on entries submitted after the due date. Of note, the presentation can only occur during the final meeting of the semester.

Absences
Weekly attendance in graduate courses is expected. If you must be absent from a course for a serious reason, then you should contact me before the missed class and explain why you will not be in attendance. Cases of continuous, unexplained absence will result in a penalty to your grade or your ineligibility to complete the course. Attendance and active participation in discussions and workshops are part of fulfilling the course requirements. I will notify the Graduate Adviser if you have three or more unwarranted absences.

Laptops
Laptops are welcome in (but not required for) the seminar.

Extensions
No extensions will be given except in extreme (and verifiable) circumstances. These circumstances include reasons of health and extenuating circumstances, such as the death of a family member.

Learning Climate
The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy. You should alert me immediately if you have any questions about this policy and its application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity
Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. I do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

Accessibility
Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. RCSD staff is available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the sooner we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

Email
With the exception of holidays and weekends, I will respond to your emails within twenty-four hours.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE TERRITORIES
The Department of English acknowledges and respects the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples on whose traditional territories the University of Victoria stands and whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF PREVIOUS WORK
I would like to thank Kari Kraus and Bill Turkel, whose work deeply informs this course, which was also inspired by Herbert Blau's "Traditions of the Avant-Garde" seminar (2005) at the University of Washington.

PREVIOUS VERSION OF THIS COURSE
In 2016, I taught the first version of this course for UVic English. The course site and source files are still online: https://jentery.github.io/508/.

SCHEDULE
Week 1 | 5 January | What's a Prototype? What's Text?
Why interpret texts by altering them? What are some low-tech approaches to prototyping and interpreting texts in a whiz-bang world? How do we think about design and text together?

Read: Kraus, "Finding Faultlines: An Approach to Speculative Design" and "Family of Subjunctive Practices" | Samuels and McGann, "Deformance and Interpretation" | McGann, "Texts in N-Dimensions and Interpretation in a New Key"

Background (no need to read any of these): Balsamo, "Design" | Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* | Barthes, "From Work to Text" | Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation* | Bowker and Star, *Sorting Things Out* | Drucker and Nowviskie, "Speculative Computing" | Dunne and Raby, *Speculative Everything* | Guilford's Alternative Uses Task | Jackson, "Rethinking Repair" | Kraus, "Conjectural Criticism" | Mitchell, "Addressing Media" | Moten, *In The Break* | Rosner and Ames, "Designing for Repair" | Sample, "Closed Bots and Green Bots" | Sayers, "Prototyping the Past" | Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* | Sterling, "Design Fiction"

Week 2 | 12 January | Survey Some -Isms.
Between the 1870s and 1970s, what are some notable -isms operating across art, culture, and textual production? How were these -isms designed? How do their aesthetics and politics intertwine?

Read: Caws, "The Poetics of the Manifesto" | Chan, "Act Natural" | Matheson, "Ouliprototype" | Murphy, "Prototyping Personism" | Digital Manifesto Archive | Modernist Journals Project

Notebook: Take notes on your general impressions of at least five -isms. Please attend to the politics and aesthetics of each -ism, with notes on the historical particulars of when each occurred and why.

Workshop (for Weeks 3-16): Sharing digital files for this seminar (FTP, GitHub, Drive, and Tumblr)

Week 3 | 19 January | Pick an -Ism.
What's your -ism?

We'll conduct presentations (five minutes each, plus Q&A) during this seminar meeting.

Notebook: Select an -ism you wish to study throughout the term as well as a key text (poem, manifesto, fiction) enacting that -ism. Ideally, this text will have charged design elements. Thoroughly describe the aesthetic (style, composition, materials), political (ideologies, representations, biases), and cultural (community, modes of expression) contexts of your text. Prepare a seminar presentation about your -ism. During the presentation, feel free to use the data projector, if you wish. You may wish to bring tactile materials for circulation, too. Include all relevant notes and materials for your presentation in your notebook.

Week 4 | 26 January | Make It an Image.
When is text also image? And image also text? When do images resist translation into text? How are screens and pages entangled in interpretation? How do images address us?

Read: Drucker, selections from *Figuring the Word* | Paglen, "Invisible Images (Your Pictures Are Looking at You)" | Internet Archive | Public Figures Face Database

Notebook: Digitize or acquire your text as a series of page images (TIFF, JPG, PNG). Put it in a context of use. Interpret it as an image.

Workshop (for next week): Intro to metadata (including Dublin Core)

Week 5 | 2 February | Make It Metadata.
When is text merely description? Or text about text? When is it infrastructure? What does metadata do aside from keeping things found?

Read: Schnapp, "Small Data: The Intimate Lives of Cultural Objects" | Zotero

Notebook: Articulate ten metadata fields for your text and provide data for each field. Put it in a context of use. Interpret the text as metadata.

Workshop (for next week): Converting text to ASCII and composing with HTML5

Week 6 | 9 February | Make It ASCII. Make It Markup.
What does plain text do? How is it processed? When and how does it get hyper?

Read: Nelson, *Computer Lib / Dream Machines* | Danet, "ASCII Art and Its Antecedents" | Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art | Voyant

Notebook: Generate an ASCII (or plain text) version of your text, removing all formatting. Put it in a context of use. Interpret it as plain text. Then encode your text in HTML5. Put it in another context of use. Interpret it as markup.

Workshop (for Week 8): Interpreting typefaces and fonts

Week 7 | 16 February | Make Nothing.
No seminar. Take a break. Refuse productivity.

Week 8 | 23 February | Make It a Booklet.
What is the relation between print and digital typography? Tactile and screen media? How do we think about them together? How does typography invite or exclude readers?

Read: Bringhurst, selections from *The Elements of Typographic Style* | Lupton, *Thinking with Type*

Notebook: Change the typeface of your text, print it, and assemble it as a booklet. Put it in a context of use. Interpret the text as type.

Workshop (for next week): Making forms

Week 9 | 2 March | Make It a Form.
When and why do texts become documents? How do they gather and store information? How do they exhibit traces of use?

Read: Gitelman, "A Short History of _____" | Library and Archives Canada: Politics and Government

Notebook: Convert your text into a fillable form. Put it in a context of use. Have at least three other people complete it. Interpret the text as a document.

Workshop (for next week): Bots and databending

Week 10 | 9 March | Make It Indeterminate.
How are texts what's missing? When and how do they break? How might their materiality surprise us? What happens if we accelerate their aging or compression?

Read: Craze, "In the Dead Letter Office" | Menkman, "Vernacular of File Formats" | Belojevic, "Circuit Bending" | Pipkin and Schmidt, *withering.systems* | Parrish, *The Ephemerides* | Kazemi, *Corpora* | Parrish, *PyCorpora* | Compton, *Tracery*

Notebook: Hide, mask, or erase aspects of your text. Put it in a context of use. Interpret it as a redaction. Now repeatedly compress and bend your text. Put it in another context of use. Interpret it as a glitch. If you wish, then feel free to turn your text into a bot, too.

Workshop (for next week): Recording sound and sonifying texts

Week 11 | 16 March | Make It Sound.
How are texts heard? Performed? How do they speak? Through which formats?

Read: Rodgers, "Approaching Sound" | Sterne, "The Meaning of a Format" | PennSound | UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive | Graham, "The Sound of Data"

Notebook: Convert your text into audio. Read it aloud and record the performance, sonify it, or cut it up. Put it in a context of use. Interpret it as sound.

Workshop (for next week): Presenting your work

Week 12 | 23 March | Make It _____.
We'll workshop your exercises and prototypes during this seminar meeting.

Notebook: It's your turn. Cook up your own exercise. Run an experiment for a new text. Put it in a context of use. Interpret the effects. Present them and your exercise

during seminar. Include all relevant notes and materials for your presentation in your notebook.

Week 13 | 30 March | Make It a Presentation.
We'll conduct public presentations (five minutes each) during this seminar meeting.

Notebook: Present your prototyping work to UVic faculty, staff, and students. Include all relevant notes and materials for your presentation in your notebook.

Weeks 14-16 | Portfolio
Please compile all of your digital and tactile materials into a portfolio using an approach of your choice. With the portfolio, include a brief cover statement describing the effects of your various alterations. Please note: a cover statement is not a seminar paper or journal article. For the purposes of this seminar, it should describe, reflect, share, and project, not analyze, deconstruct, or interrogate.

Your portfolio is due by *20 April 2016*.