Special Topics in Literature: Poetry and Technology

Hartwick College
ENGL 350-D (3 Credits; WL3)
Spring 2018

Dr. Bradley J. Fest
Assistant Professor of English
Office: 226 Clark Hall, ext. 4921
Email: festb@hartwick.edu

TuTh 2:30 – 3:50 pm, 248 Clark Hall
Office Hours: TuTh 4:00 – 5:00 pm
and by appointment

These are the two fantasmatic limits of the book to come, two extreme, final, eschatic figures of the end of the book, the end as death, or the end as telos or achievement. We must take seriously these two fantasies; what’s more they are what makes writing and reading happen. They remain as irreducible as the two big ideas of the book, of the book both as the unit of material support in the world, and as the unity of a work or unit of discourse (a book in the book). But we should also perhaps wake up to the necessity that goes along with these fantasies.
—Jacques Derrida, “The Book to Come”

Required Texts
*Dear Esther*. Chinese Room, 2012.¹

Additional texts to be covered are on the calendar below. These will be available on D2L under “Content Browser: Readings” and then under a folder corresponding to the date by which they should be read; other texts are only available online. See endnotes for bibliographic citations.

Recommended Materials
I recommend acquiring a folder dedicated exclusively to this course. Students may also want to set aside roughly ten dollars for printing costs if they go beyond their allotted print quota.

Prerequisites
This course fulfills the Writing Level 3 requirement, so students must be at the appropriate Writing Level. Students majoring in English or Creative Writing are expected to have completed Introduction to Literature and Criticism (ENGL 190) before taking this course.

Catalog Description
This course will investigate the relationship between poetry and technology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with a particular emphasis on how poetry has responded to and been transformed by the digital age. Students will read modern, postmodern, and contemporary poetry

¹ Students should note that *Dear Esther* is a videogame. It is not available in the bookstore, but is available for download. Please see the accompanying handout for directions on how to acquire it.
that experiments with print and digital forms, literature that engages changing media technologies, and texts that challenge traditional writing and reading practices by involving the reader as an active participant. The course will also provide students with a number of theoretical tools for thinking critically about new media and contemporary culture, preparing them for further work in poetics and media studies. (WL3)

**Course Description and Purpose**

Digital technologies have transformed life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in a variety of ways. Predictably, people have greeted these transformations with both enthusiasm and trepidation: the internet is either going to produce a utopian, democratic space of freedom and equality, or else it is going to control populations in an unprecedented and dystopian fashion through ubiquitous networks of surveillance. Critics have greeted literary production during the digital age similarly: either new media technologies will open up new vistas for composition, distribution, creativity, and expression, or else they will produce the long-predicted “death of the poetry” or the “death of print.” Obviously, however, the realities of how people make and read literature in the information age are simultaneously more complex and more mundane. Grounded in the history of the book and print during the last 125 years, this course will investigate some of the transformations that have taken place in poetic production during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focusing principally on interactive print and electronic poetry that is in conversation with changing technologies.

As such, we will examine poetry that meditates on technology, poetry that exploits the material possibilities of print and digital forms, poetry that challenges traditional notions of creativity, and poetry that formally involves the reader as an active participant in the experience of the work through navigation, manipulation, creation, collaboration, or other forms of interactive decision-making. Privileging, on the one hand, the physical materiality of text as a path toward understanding its poetic dimensions, and, on the other, the history of technological and aesthetic transformation during modernity and postmodernity, this course will be divided into three sections. We will begin with important modernist and postmodernist experiments in print that confront the changing technological realities of the early and middle twentieth century. Next, we will read twenty-first century conceptual poetry, namely, erasure poetry and “uncreative” writing. And to conclude the course, we will focus on electronic literature, including cybertexts, digital poetry, hypertext, and videogames. The transformations in human life produced by changing technologies have provided a number of important twentieth- and twenty-first-century thinkers with a plethora of complex new issues to think about. So in order to better understand the intellectual milieu informing and surrounding many of the works we will be studying, we will also be reading a number of often challenging works of criticism, theory, and philosophy. Students will contribute reflections and comments to a collaborative class blog, write critical essays, and do research on print and electronic poetry. Reading and writing have long been significant activities for making sense of the world. By looking at some exciting, experimental, and challenging works of modern, postmodern, and contemporary poetry, this course seeks to understand some of the ways that people are trying to represent, transform, and make sense of life in the digital age.

**Learning Outcomes**

In addition to the basic skills of literary and poetic analysis, students in this course will: 1) learn to interpret poems and other cultural artifacts closely and carefully; 2) learn to make critical
arguments supporting their interpretation of individual texts; 3) learn to situate poems and other cultural artifacts within their political, social, literary, material, historical, and technological contexts; 4) learn to draw upon the work of other critics, theorists, and scholars to support their analyses; and 5) become familiar with discussions in literary and media studies surrounding the impact of technology on cultural production.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Texts—Students will be required to have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts for each class meeting. This also entails that students bring the texts to class, whether the book or printouts of the .pdfs from D2L. Additional readings for the course (see below) can be found under the “Readings” section of D2L and then under a folder corresponding to the date by which given texts should be read. Failure to bring the assigned text(s) to class will count as an absence (whether I call attention to it or not). Do not let the content of this course or common preconceptions about poetry fool you (i.e., poetry is generally short): this course asks students to read quite a bit, and very carefully. Our meetings and discussions will depend upon the rigorous, intelligent, and frequent involvement of each and every participant of the class, and this involvement is simply not possible if students do not come to class prepared. All students must obtain the edition of the texts specified above. Unless individual arrangements are made with the instructor, electronic versions of the texts will not be permitted. Students should expect to read around 75–150 pages per week.

Papers—Students will be asked to write two essays of 4–6 pages and a final paper of 7–10 pages during the course of the semester, along with four short papers of around 2 pages each. These papers are designed to build upon one another in preparation for your final paper. Their percentage of your grade will reflect this process. All papers should be proofread and polished. They should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins, and should accord to MLA guidelines for citation and format. Students who do not follow directions or fail to meet the basic requirements of an assignment—e.g., not meeting the page requirement, failing to format a paper correctly, or failing to upload a paper to D2L—will automatically cost that student a minimum of 5% of their grade (so B+ to B-, B to C+/B-, et cetera). Papers will be assessed primarily on the strength of their argument, the quality of their idea, and the rigor of their analysis. Due dates for these papers are below. The assignments will follow. All papers must be handed in as hard copies in class and submitted on D2L. There will be a link under “Assignments” to electronically upload your papers.

Blog—Because some of the central questions of this course revolve around the relationship between writing and technology, the class will be keeping a collective blog in order to put students’ writing in conversation with one another. During the course of the semester, in addition to other requirements for the blog, each student is required to write a minimum of 5 blog posts

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2 I would highly recommend that students purchase the indispensable 8th edition of the MLA Handbook (2016), currently available in the bookstore. For a good website on MLA style, visit the Purdue Online Writing Lab at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/. I urge students not to rely on EndNote, Microsoft Word, or software found online to format your “Works Cited” pages, for your citations will be incorrect roughly 90% of the time (trust me). Students should also note that in this syllabus, each text has been correctly cited in MLA format, either above or in the endnotes below (so there is no excuse for incorrect citations).

3 4–6 pages means that the paper must be at least 4 full pages (i.e., not 3 ½ or 3 ¾ pages). Students will not be penalized for going over the page requirement (within reason).

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and should comment on at least 10 other posts (i.e., 2 comments for each assigned post). Individual posts will not be graded but will receive credit for completion. (Full credit if you do the assignment; no credit if you do not.) So that students can have an idea of how they are doing in their posts, I will “like” posts that are particularly strong, compelling, well-written, insightful, intellectually ambitious, risky, et cetera, especially posts that have clearly articulated, complex arguments that are supported by close and careful engagement with the text. These “likes,” however, do not have any bearing upon a student’s grade.

A student who does the “bare minimum” on the blog—5 posts, 10 comments—will receive a completion grade of 10 out of 15 possible points for the blog portion of their overall grade. (1.5 points per post, .25 points per comment.) The other 5 points of the blog grade will be assessed holistically. Particularly strong or thoughtful required posts and comments, additional posts, comments, or links about historical and contemporary topics relevant to the class, and other significant activity on the blog will inform and raise this portion of a student’s grade. Basically, students who want a higher grade for the blog than the bare minimum should go above and beyond the required work by contributing to the blog early and often, demonstrating that they are thoughtfully and rigorously engaged with the conversation occurring online. Additional posts and comments will not be accepted after the final class meeting (before finals week).

Students will receive an email from me through Wordpress.com inviting them to write for the blog in the first week of class. They should be signed up and ready to participate by Friday, February 16. (For each business day a student is not signed up beyond that, they will lose 1 out of the 15 possible points for the blog portion of their grade.) See the assignment sheet I will be passing out the first day of class for more specific details. Also, each post will have a specific assignment that I will be handing out later in the semester. (The blog has been set to “private,” so students who have not signed up will be unable to see it.) The blog is separate from D2L and can be found at: https://engl350spring2018.wordpress.com/.

Quizzes—Students will often be given unannounced short quizzes on the assigned material. Students who have done the reading will, for the most part, find these quizzes quite manageable. Students who fail a quiz will lose two points off their final grade. If you do the math, multiple failed quizzes could dramatically lower your grade. Unless otherwise informed, all quizzes are open book.

Participation—As we will be engaged with critically reading texts and exploring them together in class, an absolutely crucial part of this course is student participation. Though I will lecture from time to time, the class is conceived as a collective inquiry into the subject matter and class time will primarily be based around discussion that privileges students’ thinking, reading, and writing. I am quite excited to delve into the material, as I see it as both quite challenging and, in all honesty, quite fun. But this class will be a two-way street and will require the input of all its participants. I am completely aware that some students may be more vocal than others, but if I see a student consistently attempting to add to the discussion, I will take this into consideration. I have a habit of a rambling a bit, so please help me with this by asking questions of me if you are unclear. Asking questions can be an excellent way of participating. Since this class will rely heavily on student participation, your attendance is a necessity. More than three absences will negatively affect your grade and can be grounds for failure, in which case you may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.
Students are expected to be prepared for class each day. In addition reading and having the text in class, this includes having paper to write on and a writing utensil. A lot of the material we will be covering is quite difficult, so students are expected to take notes during each class meeting (which will come in handy when writing blog posts, short papers, and essays [trust me]). Over a dozen years of teaching, I have found that, unsurprisingly, students who take notes in class perform better than students who do not. Also, anyone observed using their mobile phone or another digital device during class, whether I call attention to it or not, will be marked absent for the day. Phones will not be tolerated in this class. Unless special arrangements are made with the instructor, the use of laptops or tablets in this course will not be permitted except when appropriate. There will be a number of class periods during which we will be looking at digital texts and artifacts, so it will often be beneficial, though not required, for students to have a laptop in class on those days. Otherwise, leave your laptops at home or in your bag.4

**Grading**
- Participation: 15%
- Short Papers: 10%
- Blog: 15%
- Essay 1: 10%
- Essay 2: 15%
- Final: 35%

**Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**
Plagiarism is a serious and intellectually inexcusable offense, and it will simply not be tolerated. It will result in an immediate zero for the assignment and I will file a formal charge with the Office of Academic Affairs; plagiarism could also result in more serious action, including a student failing the class completely and being suspended from the College. *Plagiarism includes: lack of proper citations when quoting from someone else’s work, representing someone else’s work as your own, and knowingly allowing one’s work to be submitted by someone else. This should ultimately be a fun and stimulating class, and there is absolutely no reason for you not to take advantage of being able to do your own work and discuss it in an academic environment. Violations of Hartwick’s Academic Honesty policy are not limited to plagiarism—for example, cheating and submitting a paper to more than one class would constitute violations—so students should familiarize themselves with Hartwick College’s policy on academic honesty at:**

- [https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/](https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/).

**Academic Adjustments and Modifications**
Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Erin Braselmann, Director of AccessAbility Services, at braselmanne@hartwick.edu, or AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. AccessAbility Services is located on the 5th floor of Yager Hall in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student’s disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

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Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the 2017–2018 academic year in order to be eligible for academic adjustments.

**The Writing Center**
Located in Clark Hall 230, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for students. Tutors can help you with your writing for classes or any writing project, and can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a tutor once or regularly over the course of the semester; the Writing Center will also respond to queries via email. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services at [https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-serviceswriting-center/](https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/), or make an appointment by emailing wcenter@hartwick.edu or calling (607) 431-4910.

**E-mail Communication Policy**
Each student is issued a College e-mail address (username@hartwick.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the College for official communication with students. I will also communicate with students via their hartwick.edu address. Students are expected to read e-mail sent to this account on a regular basis. Failure to read and react to communications from either the College or from me in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to communications sent to their Hartwick e-mail address.

**Special Assistance**
Hartwick offers free counseling for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. The Counseling Center is located in the Perrella Health Center and offers psychological services and sexual assault services. Appointments can be made Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, by calling (607) 431-4420 or emailing counselingcenter@hartwick.edu.

**Statement on Classroom Recording**
To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, or activities, nor can they take any photographic image of classroom proceedings, without the advance written permission of the instructor; any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student’s own private use.
Calendar

2.6 Introduction
   Syllabus
2.8 Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”¹

2.13 Stéphane Mallarmé, “A Throw of the Dice . . .”²
2.15 Re-read Stéphane Mallarmé, “A Throw of the Dice . . .”
   Jacques Derrida, “The Book to Come”³

2.20 Blog Post 1 Due
   Harold Bloom, introduction to The Complete Poems of Hart Crane (pp. xi–xxxii)
   Hart Crane, The Bridge, in The Complete Poems of Hart Crane (pp. 41–68)
2.22 Two Comments Due on Blog
   Hart Crane, The Bridge, in The Complete Poems of Hart Crane (pp. 69–90)

2.27 Short Paper 1 Due
   Hart Crane, The Bridge, in The Complete Poems of Hart Crane (pp. 91–108)
3.1 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”⁴

3.6 Blog Post 2 Due
   A. R. Ammons, Tape for the Turn of the Year (pp. 1–101)
3.8 Two Comments Due on Blog
   Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium Is the Message”⁵

3.13 Short Paper 2 Due
   A. R. Ammons, Tape for the Turn of the Year (pp. 102–205)
3.15 Friedrich Kittler, “Introduction” to Gramophone, Film, Typewriter⁶

3.20 Essay 1 Due
   Janet Holmes, The MS of My Kin (pp. 1–85)
3.22 Janet Holmes, The MS of My Kin (pp. 86–168)
   Solmaz Sharif, “The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure”⁷

3.27 No Class, Spring Break
3.29 No Class, Spring Break

4.3 Blog Post 3 Due
   Sol Lewitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”⁸ and “Sentences on Conceptual Art”⁹
   Kenneth Goldsmith, “Why Appropriation?”¹⁰

Note: If you have any difficulty printing .pdfs from Hartwick’s printers, in the print setup screen, select “fit to page.” I find that this resolves most issues.

⁵ This calendar is subject to change and additional readings or handouts may be assigned when appropriate. For ease with citation, provided below in MLA style are bibliographic endnotes to the readings available on D2L (anything with an endnote rather than page numbers). Some of the “readings” on p. 8 require you to access particular websites (they are unavailable on D2L). URLs have been provided in the endnotes and links are available on the blog.
Kenneth Goldsmith, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (pp. 9–70)

4.5 **Two Comments Due on Blog**
Kenneth Goldsmith, *Seven American Deaths and Disasters* (73–175)
Seth Perlow, “The Conceptual War Machine”¹¹

4.10 **Essay 2 Due**
Espen Aarseth, “Introduction: Ergodic Literature”¹²
*Patchwork Girl* (in-class demonstration)¹³

4.12 **N. Katherine Hayles, “Intermediation: From Page to Screen”¹⁴**
William Carlos Williams, “This Is Just to Say”¹⁵
Kenneth Koch, “Variations on a Theme”¹⁶
Read the most recent twenty poems by Mark Sample, @JustToSayBot on Twitter¹⁷
William Poundstone, *Project for Tachistoscope [Bottomless Pit]*¹⁸
Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, “Dakota”¹⁹

4.17 **Blog Post 4 Due**
Stephanie Strickland, *V: WaveSon.nets* (pp. 1–48)

4.19 **Two Comments Due on Blog**
Stephanie Strickland, *V: Losing L’una* (pp. 1–52)
Stephanie Strickland, “Quantum Poetics: Six Thoughts”²⁰

4.24 **Short Paper 3 Due**
Stephanie Strickland, *Vniverse*²¹

4.26 Alexander R. Galloway, “Gamic Action, Four Moments”²²

5.1 **Blog Post 5 Due**
*Dear Esther* (in-class play)

5.3 **Two Comments Due on Blog**
*Dear Esther* (finish game on your own)

5.8 **Short Paper 4 Due**
Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs”²³

Bradley J. Fest, “Toward a Theory of the Megatext”²⁵

5.17 **8:00 am – 11:00 am**
**Final Papers Due**
**Mini-Conference and Class Wrap-Up**
Endnotes

Click “start” to start the text.
Acknowledgments

I would like to signal my debt to Dr. Mark Best, who initially designed ENGLIT 1001 Interactive Literature for the Literature Program in the Department of English at the University of Pittsburgh, and which I then adapted and taught at Pitt during the spring of 2015. Both iterations have informed the construction of this course.