

The Book in the Digital Age: Literary Studies as Media Studies

Professor Jessica Pressman
ENG 563 | Fall 2015
SDSU

Everywhere you turn, someone has an opinion about the fate of books and reading in the digital age. We are told that books are dying and, along with them, so too are literature and knowledge. But, what *is* the state of the book in the digital age? Does it matter? To think critically about new reading technologies such as e-readers, computers, cell phones, etc., we need to know our media history. This class takes the topic of the book in the digital age as an opportunity to consider the book as a medium and symbol-- a technology perfected over a thousand years and a powerful cultural symbol. In our contemporary moment of medial shift from print to digital, we follow many scholars, pundits, writers, and artists in returning to the book to reconsider it and its impact. To do so, we will read across a wide range of genres and medial formats, including history of the book scholarship, media studies criticism, fiction, digital literature, youtube animations, bookwork sculpture, and much more.

Learning Outcomes:

- To critique the distinction between print and digital
- To acquire a historical perspective through which to critical understand the technologies through which we read, learn, and communicate, namely books and e-readers
- To practice media-specific analysis and comparative media studies on a variety of literary media formats
- To present a critical argument in the form of a creatively-formatted project in which media format supports form and content of analysis
- To identify the relevance of literary studies in a digital age

Email:
jpressman@mail.sdsu.edu

T, Th: 12:30-1:45
Room: SH 109

Office hours: AL 261
T, Th 9:30-10:30 and by appointment

Course Website:
[http://fall2015-
eng563.jessicapressman.com/](http://fall2015-eng563.jessicapressman.com/)

Course Librarian:
Anna Culbertson (Special Collections)

Anna Culbertson
<aculbertson@mail.sdsu.edu>

Required Texts (Available in SDSU Bookstore):

Nicole Howard, *The Book: The Life Story of a Technology* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2009)
Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (Bantam, 1967)

Carlos Dominguez, *The House of Paper* (2005)

On Reserve in Love Library:

Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Screen and Page* (Siglio, 2012)

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation: 20%

This is *your* class, and your participation is vital to its success. Come to class prepared to discuss the novels in depth; this means having read the *entire* novel *before* the first class meeting dedicated to that text.

- Your participation grade includes an in-person meeting with the professor.
- Your participation grade requires weekly comments on the blog posts (i.e. the experimental assignments) of your peers.

Weekly Blog Responses: 20%

You will be required to complete write short (250 words) responses to the weekly reading. These should be thoughtful and critical posts, not quick and subjective responses. These posts should show you exploring a topic, question, or passage in the reading that most interests you and should serve to foster productive conversation in class.

- You will be given an *overall* grade for blog posts, based on completion and content, not a grade for each post. Rubric for grading is available on our website.

Midterm Essay: 25%

Write a thesis-driven argument about *at least one* of the texts we've read so far. The steps for this essay: 1) make an argument about that text-- about its content, form, format— and, 2) use support from the text to explain and prove your claim.

- The essay should be 5-6 pages (double-spaced) and posted to our course blog.
- **Graduate students will write an 8 page essay that includes a secondary, critical text.

Final Project: 35%

This course culminates in a project that will allow you to practice creative criticism. You will showcase your learning by focusing on one topic, question, or text from the course and develop an argument about it that can be presented in a creative and media-specific way.

- You might create an artwork made from paper, a work of bookart, a stop-animation video, a biography of a particular manuscript or collection of materials from SDSU's Special Collections archives, or a full-blown web-based essay.
 - Your project must include an essay that is 8 pages (double-spaced) and which contains an argument (a thesis) and uses at least two texts from our class, not including the text you discussed in your midterm essay.
 - **Graduate students will write 10-12 pages.
 - Your grade will be in part based upon how well the format of your project supports the argument you present.
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- If you create a work of art, you MUST include an explanatory essay that presents your argument *through the art* and situates your argument along with the texts from the course that inspired it. The essay should be turned in along with the artwork.
 - You will present your final project to the class in a 3-minute presentation in week 15 or 16.
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READING SCHEDULE

*Graduate students should plan to read the Piper, Mak, and Bolter and Grusin books in their entirety as well as the following scholarship from book history:

--Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Trans Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992)

--Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (metaLABprojects; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Week 1: Introduction

August 25: Introduction to the Course

August 27: Introduction to the Study of Literature's Media

Guest visit from Special Collections Librarian Anna Culbertson

Week 2: The Context

September 1: Nicolas Carr, "Is Google Making us Stupid?" (*The Atlantic*, 2008)

September 3: Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (prologue)

Week 3: The Book Imagined

September 8: Carlos Dominguez, *The House of Paper* (1-74)

September 10: Carlos Dominguez, *The House of Paper* (75-104)

Week 4: Book History

September 15: Nicole Howard, *The Book: The Life Story of a Technology* (vii-86)

September 17: Nicole Howard, *The Book: The Life Story of a Technology* (87-155)

Week 5: The Page

September 22: Andrew Piper, *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times* (49-59)

September 24: Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters*, Chapter 1: "Architectures of the Pages" (9-21)

Week 6: Bookshelves and Libraries

September 29: Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf*, Chapter 3: "Chests, Cloisters, and Carrels" and Chapter 4: "Chained to the Desk"

October 1: Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library" (1931)

Week 7: The Book in the Electronic Age

October 6: Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (1-51)

October 8: Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (52-99)

Week 8: Media Studies

October 13: McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (100-131)

October 15: McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (132-end)

Week 9: Remediation

October 20: Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Introduction: "The Double Logic of Remediation" 3-15

October 22: Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Chapter 1: "Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation" 21-50

****Midterm Essay Due, Sunday at midnight****

Week 10: The E-Book

October 27: Johanna Drucker, "The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-Space"

October 29: Johanna Drucker, "The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-Space"

Week 11: Special Collections

November 3-- Special Collections visit with Anna Culbertson

November 5— Special Collections visit with Anna Culbertson

Week 12: Bookwork and Artist Books

November 10: Brian Dettmar (preface), Alyson Kuhn (introduction), *Art Made from Books*

November 12: Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Screen and Page*

Week 13: The Book Remediated

November 17— Judd Morrissey, *The Jew's Daughter*

November 19- Peer Review Session for final projects

****Final Project Proposals Due****

Week 14: Student Projects

November 24— Building student projects

November 26- Thanksgiving. No class.

Week 15: Student Projects

December 1- Building student projects

December 3- Student Presentations

Week 16: Conclusion

December 8— Student Presentations

December 10—Concluding discussion

****Final Project Due: December 15 at noon***

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

I take teaching seriously, and I expect you to take seriously your work as a student. That means that academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonest includes, but is not limited to: (a) using assignments that you wrote for another class, (b) representing work done by someone else as your own (i.e., plagiarism), and (c) copying someone else's work on an assignment, basic cheating. Plagiarism and Cheating of any kind will result at least in an "F" for that assignment (and may, depending on the severity of the case, lead to an "F" for the entire course) and may be referred to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for further action. If you have questions at all, you should consult me immediately.

DISABILTY STATEMENT

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at [\(619\) 594-6473](tel:6195946473). To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.