

## Preliminary Web Course Description

\*Please note: This is a preliminary web course description only. The department reserves the right to change without notice any information in this description. The final, binding course outline will be distributed in the first class of the semester.

### School of English and Theatre Studies

Course Code: ENGL*4090	Course Title: Special Topic Digital Literary Studies	Date of Offering: Winter 2024
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Course Instructor: Susan Brown	Course Format: Seminar
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#### Brief Course Synopsis:

#### **Writing with a Digital Difference**

Contemporary writing is almost always already digital. It is a rare text now that has not been through a computer at some stage; most texts destined for print move through multiple computational processes before they get there. The foundational technologies of the Web are deeply indebted to the publishing industry. We are living through the biggest shift in writing technologies since the invention of the printing press. This course addresses that shift both as it affects creative writing and writing in the academy.

Current writing increasingly grapples with its own status in an ever-more digital world, regardless of whether it is printed in the end or published only digitally. The line between different genres and modes of writing is increasingly blurring, as personal devices inscribe not only intentional communications but also data such as location and biostatistics that feed surveillance capitalism. At the same time, approaches to understanding literary texts using machines have been growing as part of the growing field called digital humanities.

What difference does it make to write digitally or to use digital tools to engage with texts? We will reflect on that multi-faceted question, considering a range of print and digital texts, experimenting with writing digitally, and playing with tools for analyzing writing. The primary texts will largely consist of recent Canadian writing that reflects on its place in a digital world. This course aims to be gentle to the technologically wary. No computational expertise is needed or assumed, but intellectual curiosity and a willingness to experiment will help make it a rewarding experience.

The course will begin by asking what writing is within a brief history of inscription technologies. We will consider the materiality of digital writing and what it means to consider writing as a technology. We will consider both the difference the digital makes and how the digital matters with respect to social categories of difference. How do differences of subject position or culture circulate digitally? How does one write in a digital world that in many ways replicates and amplifies the historical effects of misogyny, imperialism, racism, heterosexism, and social inequality? How have marginalized groups appropriated digital writing and representation to assert or critique identity, through high literature, popular e-lit, experimental e-lit, or social media? What does it mean to be constantly inscribing and performing our selves digitally? What is an archive and what is memory in a context in which objects are both stubbornly persistent and evanescent, and digital inscriptions can be rewritten, edited, or faked? What are the implications of writing with or for machines, including chatbots like ChatGPT?

In the process of exploring these questions, we will reflect on what writing is, on the difference that digital media make in the maintenance of and resistance to injustice, as well as on the relationship of different forms of textuality and analysis to literary studies, as a field that has defined itself historically as deeply antithetical to technology.

#### Methods of Evaluation and Weight:

- 10% Summary of a writing technology (500 words)
- 20% 10 weekly posts (~200-300 words) prior to class
- 10% In-class and informal online participation
- 20% Seminar presentation and report (1000 words)
- 40% Final paper/project (3000 words or equivalent) comprising:
  - Annotated bibliography (15%)
  - Proposal (15%)
  - Presentation of work in progress (10%)
  - Draft for peer review (10%)
  - Final Submission (50%)

Creative projects accompanied by a substantive critical statement may be undertaken for the final paper/project.

#### Texts and/or Resources Required (e.g. Internet access, specific textbook title, lab kit, etc.)

A personal computer that can be brought to class for online activities; if this is a barrier, please contact the instructor.

Internet access for accessing open-access online course materials, including:

- Naomi Alderman (with Margaret Atwood), [\*The Happy Zombie Sunrise Home\*](#) (2012)
- J. R. Carpenter, [\*The Gathering Cloud\*](#) (2016)
- Martin Paul Eve, [\*Digital Humanities and Literary Studies\*](#) (2022).
- Caitlin Fisher, [\*These Waves of Girls\*](#) (2001)
- William Gibson, *Agrippa* (1992) ([video](#); [text](#); [archive](#))
- Rupi Kaur, [@rupikaur\\_on Instagram](#) (ongoing; selection)
- Sachiko Murakami, [\*Project Rebuild\*](#) (2011)
- Angela Rawlings, [\*Gibber: Ecopoesis\*](#) (2012)
- Zoë Quinn, [\*Depression Quest\*](#) (2013) (in THINC Lab or download and run)

The following book will be available on reserve:  
Jordan Abel, *Injun* (2013)

Information about mode of delivery (synchronous/asynchronous/distance/in-person/other details):

This will be an in-person seminar involving full attention and participation of all participants.

This course can be taken to satisfy Praxis or Context requirements for the Culture and Technology Studies program.

\*Students who registered at the University of Guelph after Fall 2018 must fulfill the “new” major and minor

requirements. Students who registered at the University of Guelph prior to Fall 2018 must fulfill the requirements of the Calendar in effect when they first enrolled unless they have filed a Schedule of Studies Change Request to change to the 2018-2019 calendar. For more information, please consult the major and minor checklists at <https://www.uoguelph.ca/arts/sets/undergraduate/english/current-student-information>.