

English 349: Literature and Digital Culture  
Spring 2021  
TR 1:30pm – 2:45pm  
Class Location: Gailor Hall 130

Dr. Ben Mangrum  
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Office: Gailor Hall 102A  
Office hours: T 10:30am-12:00pm  
(and by appointment)

### **Algorithms, AI, and Digital Identity**

Alan Turing once posed the question, “Can machines think?” The question led Turing to reflect on the nature of human intelligence and the many similarities between humans and the computational technologies we create. This course, too, considers what is distinctive about human existence by examining digital culture. Students in this course will analyze the relationship between humans and computers by studying literary representations of digital technologies alongside the products of present-day digital culture. Yet we will also take up a set of concerns absent from Turing’s original question. We’ll consider how theories of machine intelligence and computer algorithms interact with ideas about race, gender, and sexuality. As we consider whether machines “think,” we will also investigate what computational thinking tells us about social norms and biases. Neither familiarity with machine learning nor fluency with computers are prerequisites.

We will draw on insights from scholars in critical race theory and science and technology studies. Students will also have the opportunity to learn new digital technologies to exhibit their academic work online. In particular, students will be introduced to the content management system Omeka, which students will use to curate museum-like collections of digital artifacts.

#### **Required Course Texts:**

- Meredith Broussard, *Artificial Unintelligence: How Computers Misunderstand the World* (ISBN 9780262537018)
- Samuel R. Delany, *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand* (ISBN 9780819567147)
- Louisa Hall, *Speak* (ISBN 978-0062391209)

| <b>Course Assignments</b> | <b>Due Date</b>                 | <b>Grade %</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| Three Exams (15% each)    | February 25, March 25,<br>May 6 | 45             |
| Omeka Contributions       |                                 |                |
| Digital Artifact Analysis | February 22                     | 10             |
| Meme Creation             | March 15                        | 15             |
| Map Record                | April 22                        | 15             |
| Participation             | Daily                           | 15             |

#### **Course Learning Objectives:** By the end of the semester, students will...

- develop close reading skills when analyzing texts in literature, science, and philosophy.
- learn key terms in digital studies, critical race theory, and gender studies.
- demonstrate knowledge of the course readings and key terms through exams.
- examine the artifacts of digital culture as products of social norms, biases, and complex histories.
- gain facility with tools for exhibiting digital scholarship.

**Office Hours**

I invite you to join me for office hours from 10:30am to 12:00pm on Tuesdays. My office hours are a time for you to talk with me about the course material and assignments. I'm also happy to talk about navigating college, applying to grad school, or any other topic not related to our course. Please use my office hours; it's additional time I've set aside specifically to help you succeed in this course. I am also happy to meet in person outside of my office hours. Please email me to set up an appointment.

I'll hold office hours this semester over Zoom. You will join at this link: <https://sewanee-edu.zoom.us/j/6208825012>. I'll also post this link to our Brightspace page. You'll be placed in a Waiting Room, and I'll admit you into the Zoom meeting in the order in which you arrive.

**DAY-BY-DAY SCHEDULE**

Most required readings may be found in the three required texts. Additional readings are posted to Brightspace (B). Readings should be completed by the due date listed in the course schedule below. I have included due dates for graded or draft assignment in italics and bold. Also, there are a few ungraded but required activities listed alongside the reading.

|        | <b>Tuesday</b>  | <b>Thursday</b>   |
|--------|---|---|
| Week 1 | <p><b>February 2</b><br/>Syllabus, introductions, etc.</p> <p>Fredric Brown, "Answer" (to be read in class)</p>   | <p><b>February 4</b><br/>Sections 1-4 (pp.433-439) and 6 (pp.442-454) from Alan Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (B); Bierce, "Moxon's Master" (B)</p>  |
| Week 2 | <p><b>February 9</b><br/>In preparation for class on this day, watch the five Tutorial Videos introducing Omeka (see Brightspace Content &gt; Tutorials &gt; Videos for February 9). It will take approximately an hour to watch these videos.</p> <p>Read Shifman, "The Cultural Logic of Photo-Based Meme Genres" (B). We will use this article as the basis for a discussion of memes, digital culture, and computational thinking. To give us a few examples to discuss, find and post a screenshot or image of a meme to Brightspace &gt; Discussions &gt; February 9.</p> | <p><b>February 11</b><br/>Broussard, <i>Artificial Unintelligence</i>, chs. 1-3 (pp.3-39); Elizabeth Borgese, "For Sale, Reasonable" (B)</p> <p><i><b>First draft of your Digital Artifact analysis due by 11pm on Monday, Feb. 15. This is an ungraded submission. Post your draft work to Omeka and add it to the "Artifacts of Digital Culture" Collection but do not make the Item public. I will send you feedback by Thursday, Feb. 18.</b></i></p> |
| Week 3 | <p><b>February 16</b><br/>Hall, <i>Speak</i>, Prologue and Book One (pp.1-78); Mori, "The Uncanny Valley" (B)</p>   | <p><b>February 18</b><br/>Hall, <i>Speak</i>, Books Two and Three (pp.81-184)</p> <p><i><b>Final Draft of Digital Artifact Item due by 8:00am on Monday, February 22. You formally submit your Item by selecting the "Public" option within the editing page for the Item. Please email me the URL when you've made the item public.</b></i></p>  |
| Week 4 | <p><b>February 23</b><br/>Hall, <i>Speak</i>, Books Four and Five (pp.187-314)</p>  | <p><b>February 25</b><br/><i><b>Exam 1</b></i></p>  |

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| Week 5  | <p><b>March 2</b><br/>Broussard, <i>Artificial Unintelligence</i>, chs. 4-8 (pp.51-147); Sarah Lotz, “Home Affairs” (B)</p>  | <p><b>March 4</b><br/>Ruha Benjamin, chapter 1 from <i>Race After Technology</i> (B)</p> <p><b><i>First draft of your meme due by 8:00am on Monday, March 8. This is an ungraded submission. Post your draft work to Omeka and add it to the “Meme Creations” Collection but do not make the Item public. I will send you feedback by Thursday, March 11.</i></b></p>   |
| Week 6  | <p><b>March 9</b><br/>Darryl A. Smith, “The Pretended” (B)</p>   | <p><b>March 11</b><br/>Broussard, <i>Artificial Unintelligence</i>, chs. 9, 11-12 (pp.149-160, 175-199); also, listen to the spoken word performance <i>Voicing Erasure</i> (<a href="https://www.ajl.org/voicing-erasure">https://www.ajl.org/voicing-erasure</a>)</p> <p><b><i>Discussion of sources for Mapping Assignment</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Final Draft of your meme due by 8:00am on Monday, March 15. You formally submit your Item by selecting the “Public” option within the editing page for the Item. Please email me the URL when you’ve made the item public.</i></b></p> |
| Week 7  | <p><b>March 16</b><br/>Ch2 from Safiya Umoja Noble, <i>Algorithms of Oppression</i> (B)</p> <p><i>In-class discussion of meme creations.</i></p> <p><b><i>In-class signup for sources to be used as the basis for the Mapping Assignment</i></b></p> | <p><b>March 18</b><br/>Lilith Lorraine, “The Brain of the Planet” (B)</p> <p>Please also watch the following video on Omeka’s Geolocation plugin: <a href="https://vimeo.com/156298642">https://vimeo.com/156298642</a>. The video is also available at Brightspace &gt; Tutorials &gt; Video for March 18. This tutorial runs about ten minutes. Watching this video will help you complete the mapping assignment.</p>  |
| Week 8  | <p><b>March 23</b><br/>R. Joshua Scannell, “This Is Not <i>Minority Report</i>: Predictive Policing and Population Racism” (B); Walter Mosley, “Little Brother” (B)</p>  | <p><b>March 25</b><br/><b><i>Exam 2</i></b></p>   |
| Week 9  | <p><b>March 30</b><br/><b><i>No class – Reading Day</i></b></p>  | <p><b>April 1</b><br/>Delany, <i>Stars</i>, Prologue (pp.1-57) and Monologues One and Two (pp.59-92)</p>  |
| Week 10 | <p><b>April 6</b><br/>Delany, <i>Stars</i>, Monologues Three-Seven (pp.93-187)</p>   | <p><b>April 8</b><br/>Delany, <i>Stars</i>, Monologues Eight-Eleven (pp.188-274)</p>  |
| Week 11 | <p><b>April 13</b><br/>Delany, <i>Stars</i>, Monologues Twelve-Thirteen and Afterword (pp.275-356)</p>   | <p><b>April 15</b><br/><b><i>First draft of your Map Record due by the start of class. This is an ungraded submission. Post your draft work to Omeka and add it to the “History of Computational Thinking” Collection but don’t</i></b></p>   |

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|         |   | <i>make the Item public. We'll discuss your drafts during class. I will also send feedback on each entry by Monday, April 19.</i>  |
| Week 12 | <p><b>April 20</b><br/>Benjamin Woolley, "Virtuality" (B); Selections from Descartes, <i>Discourse on the Method</i> (B)</p> <p>As you complete these readings, think about the following questions: (1) How does the human body relate to the virtual worlds of digital culture? How does Descartes understand the body in this brief excerpt from his work? (2) How do these two readings depict (metaphorically, metaphysically) the nature of reality? What does it mean, according to each writer, for something to be "real"?</p> <p>Please come to class with reading notes that begin to address these questions.</p> | <p><b>April 22</b><br/><b><i>Final Draft of your Mapping Record is due by the start of class on April 22. You formally submit your Record by selecting the "Public" option within the editing page for the Item.</i></b></p> <p><i>In-class presentation of Mapping Records.</i></p> |
| Week 13 | <p><b>April 27</b><br/>Mosley, "Whispers in the Dark" (B) and "Voices" (B)</p>  | <p><b>April 29</b><br/>Deleuze and Guattari, selections on "desiring-machines" from <i>Anti-Oedipus</i> (B); Nalo Hopkinson, "Ganger (Ball Lightning)" (B)</p>   |
| Week 14 | <p><b>May 4</b><br/>Guest lecture: Hannah Huber</p>   | <p><b>May 6</b><br/><b><i>Exam 3</i></b></p>   |
| Week 15 | <p><b>May 11</b><br/>TBD</p>  |  |

**Source Texts for Mapping Records:**

Each of the following texts may be found under the “Source Texts” tab on Brightspace. You will use one of these texts as the basis for creating an Item and Map Record. Some of these records will provide you with a specific place for the Geolocation component of the assignment, such as a city, institution, or business location. Other sources point to a general country or region; in these instances, you will need to use your chose article as a starting point for additional research. You must geolocate you’re the mapped Item within a specific location.

1. Nakamura, “Indigenous Circuits”

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2. Campbell-Kelly, “The Computer Becomes a Business Machine”

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3. Rankin, “How *The Oregon Trail* Began in Minnesota”

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4. Leong and Pandita, “Made in China”

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5. Agarwal and Wankhade, “Hi-Tech Heaps, Forsaken Lives: E-Waste in Delhi”

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6. McIlwain, “Kansas City Burning” and “The Man’s Best Friend”

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7. Rankin, “Making a Macho Computing Culture”

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8. Turner, “Stewart Brand Meets the Cybernetic Counterculture”

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9. Atwood, “A City by the Sea: Uncovering Beirut’s Media Waste”

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10. Beltrán, “The First Latina Hackathon: Recoding Infrastructures from México”

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11. Zuboff, “The Discovery of Behavioral Surplus”

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