The Book in the Digital Age:
Transformations in Reading, Writing, and Thinking in the Digital Age
CAT 2
Dr. Jessica Pressman
Winter 2014

What constitutes literacy in a digital age? What does “reading and writing” describe in the age of Twitter, Facebook, mobile digital narratives? What, if any, kinds of contemporary communication practices are uniquely “digital”? And, the big one: How do digital technologies and the Internet affect the way we read, write, and think? In order to address these questions—indeed, in order to think critically about our digital culture—we need to know our media history.

This class pursues digital literacy as a concept and a practice, a topic and a skill-set. We study contemporary discourse about attention/distraction, hyper/deep reading, mobile/stationary media, convergence culture, etc. by tracing its precursors. We use the book as our primary example of technological shift; we study the history of the book in order to think critically about other, newer reading technologies such as e-readers, computers, cell phones, etc. and the reading practices they enable. To do so, we read and view a wide range of genres and medial formats: media studies criticism, fiction, bookwork sculpture, digital literature, archives, youtube animations, and more. In the process, we not only study digital literacy, we advance our own skills and practices.

Our goal is to gain the critical perspective and literacy tools needed to understand, critique, and actively participate in—rather than just blindly and passively use—our contemporary digital technoculture and the complicated sets of literacies it both promotes and demands.

Email: Jessicapressman0@gmail.com
Lecture: T, Th: 11-12:20
Room: PCYNH 109

Office hours: T, Th 9:30-11:00 and by appointment, Sixth College Office (Pepper Canyon Hall, 2nd floor)
Course Website: http://www.jessicapressman.com/CAT_winter2014

Required Texts (Available in UCSD Bookstore and on reserve in Geisel Library):
John Berger, Ways of Seeing (1972)
Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage (1967)
All other readings are available online, on the course website, or on reserve in the library.

On Reserve in Geisel Library:
Jonathan Safran Foer, Tree of Codes (2010)

**ASSIGNMENTS (rubrics explaining the evaluation criteria for each assignment are available on the class blog)**

**Attendance (in lecture and section) and Participation: 25%**
You must attend all class meetings—both lectures and sections—in order to receive full credit for participation. There will be in-class writing assignments and graded quizzes in both lecture and section.

**5 Short Blog Posts and Weekly Comments: 15%**
You will write 5 very short (250 words) critical responses to the TED section blog and each week you will provide at least 1 comment on a peer’s post.

The goal of the blog posts is to extend the conversation and coverage of the course by allowing you to 1) express, share, and comment upon interests, questions, and concerns related to the readings and also to 2) enable the professor and TAs to address and incorporate these topics in that week’s lecture. It is also a place to draft ideas and text for use in your essays.

**Blog posts are due on Sunday before 6pm weekly; late posts will not receive credit.**
**You will be graded on the completion of the blog posts, though exceptional posts can push the final grade to the + range: 5+ blog posts=A-A+, 4=B-B+, 3=C-C+, 2=D-D+, 0-1=F**

**Essay 1 (Identifying Arguments), 5 pages: 25%**
Write a thesis-driven argument about either the Berger or McLuhan texts. The steps for this essay: 1) identify the central claim of the text you plan to examine, 2) make an argument about that claim—either about its value, validity, or effectiveness or about how it is presented—and, 3) use support from the text to explain and prove your claim. You may revise one of your blog posts in the preparation of this essay.

**Essay 2 (Taking a Stand): 35%**
This essay provides an opportunity to explore your primary interests from the course in an analytical (i.e. thesis-driven) essay that approaches one or more of the texts from the syllabus. This assignment can take two shapes:

**Option 1:** An essay (5-7 pages) that uses the same argumentative skills as you employed in Essay 1 to examine texts and the arguments they present. Here, however, you will be required to engage with more than one text and use these texts to support an argument that extends beyond one text.

**Option 2:** A creative presentation of your essay—you must have an essay (*see below*)—in one of the various forms: 1) a biography of a particular manuscript or collection of materials from UCSD’s Special Collections archives, 2) a web-based essay, 3) a book-based artwork or bookwork along with an explanatory essay that presents your argument through the art and situates your argument along with the texts from the course.
that inspired it. This option MUST include an essay that can be read (it can be shorter than Option 1 (3-5 pages) either in the art or turned in along with it.
a book-based artwork or bookwork along with an explanatory artist’s statement that presents your argument and the texts that inspired it. This option requires a 3+ page essay along with the creative project.

*Whichever option you choose, you must submit a thesis and proposal to your TA before you start writing and in order to receive credit for the assignment.
*If you choose option 2, you need to share your proposal with the professor as well.
** You must write about at least two texts from our class: one text must be from the second part of the course (Week 5 and onwards), and you may not write about the text you discussed in Essay 1.

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**LECTURE & READING SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: Introduction to CAT2**
T (1/7): Introductory lecture
Th (1/9): Introduction to Writing for CAT2
*Understanding Rhetoric*: Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2

**Week 2: The Situation: The Digital Shift**
Th (1/16): Sven Birkets, “Reading in a Digital Age” (*American Scholar*, Spring 2010)

**Week 3: The Prehistory: Learning How to Look**

**Week 4: Looking at a Book about Print Culture**
T (1/28): Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*
Th (1/30): Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*

**Week 5: What is a Book?**
**Draft of Essay 1 due**
Th (2/6): Nicole Howard, *The Biography of the Book* (selections)

**Special Collections visit with sections.

**Week 6: Seeing Around Books: Libraries, Bookshelves, and Archives**
Th (2/13): Henry Petroski, *The Book on the Bookshelf* (selections)
Witold Rybczynski, “Borrowed Time: How Do you Build a Public Library in the Age of Google?” Slate.com

**TAs return drafts**

**Special Collections visit with sections.**

**Week 7: E-Books and the Transition to the Screen**
T (2/18): TA mini-lectures
Th (2/20): Johanna Drucker, “The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-Space”

**Essay 1 revision due**

**Special Collections visit with sections.**

**Week 8: Digital Literature & Bookishness**
(http://collection.eliterature.org/2)
Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, Between Page and Screen (on reserve in library)
Th (2/27): Bookart selections
“The Joy of Books: A Stop-Motion Animation” (Youtube)

**Week 9: Digital Literacy, the University, and Beyond**

**Essay 2 thesis and plan due**


**Week 10: Conclusions**
T (3/11): Student selections

**TAs return drafts**

Th (3/13): Concluding lecture

**Week 11: Finals week**

**Essay 2 revision due at start of scheduled final exam period—Thursday 3/20 @ 11:30**

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**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

UCSD has a university-wide Policy on Integrity of Scholarship, published annually in the General Catalog, and online at http://students.ucsd.edu/academics/academic-integrity/policy.html. All students must read and be familiar with this Policy. All suspected violations of academic integrity will be reported to UCSD's Academic Integrity Coordinator. Students found to have violated UCSD's standards for academic integrity may receive both administrative and academic sanctions. Administrative sanctions may extend up to and include suspension or dismissal, and academic sanctions may include
failure of the assignment or failure of the course. Specific examples of prohibited violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Academic stealing** refers to the theft of exams or exam answers, of papers or take-home exams composed by others, and of research notes, computer files, or data collected by others.

**Academic cheating, collusion, and fraud** refer to having others do your schoolwork or allowing them to present your work as their own; using unauthorized materials during exams; inventing data or bibliography to support a paper, project, or exam; purchasing tests, answers, or papers from any source whatsoever; submitting (nearly) identical papers to two classes.

**Misrepresenting personal or family emergencies or health problems in order to extend deadlines and alter due dates or requirements** is another form of academic fraud. Claiming you have been ill when you were not, claiming that a family member has been ill or has died when that is untrue are some examples of unacceptable ways of trying to gain more time than your fellow students have been allowed in which to complete assigned work.

**Plagiarism** refers to the use of another’s work without full acknowledgment, whether by suppressing the reference, neglecting to identify direct quotations, paraphrasing closely or at length without citing sources, spuriously identifying quotations or data, or cutting and pasting the work of several (usually unidentified) authors into a single undifferentiated whole.

**Receipt of this syllabus constitutes an acknowledgment that you are responsible for understanding and acting in accordance with UCSD guidelines on academic integrity.**

**TURNITIN.COM**

**All** papers must be submitted to TurnitIn via Ted. Papers must be uploaded no later than midnight on the day an assignment is due. To turn in your paper go to the course Ted ([http://ted.ucsd.edu](http://ted.ucsd.edu)) and find the link under ‘Content’ titled ‘TurnItIn Submission’. After you have uploaded your paper a confirmation page will appear. Print out the confirmation page for your records in case your electronic submission is disputed.