

Blog Post 3: Close Reading a Work of Electronic Literature

500 words minimum

Due Tuesday, March 24th for A-M

Due Tuesday, March 31st for N-Z

Virtually everyone who has encountered electronic literature has acknowledged that different kinds of reading practices are necessary when encountering texts in digital environments. So it should come as no surprise that different kinds of critical practice, attention, and analysis will be called for when interpreting electronic texts. As N. Katherine Hayles suggests in her excellent historical essay summarizing the field, “the computational media intrinsic to electronic textuality have necessitated new kinds of critical practice, a shift from literacy to what Gregory L. Ulmer calls ‘electracy’ Most crucial, perhaps, is the necessity to ‘think digital,’ that is, *to attend to the specificity of networked and programmable media while still drawing on the rich traditions of print literature and criticism.*”¹

For your third blog post I would like you to closely read one of the electronic texts that we have looked at up until now, and I would like you to take up this challenge to “think digital,” to emphasize *media specificity* when reading the text, while still drawing upon your own experience and knowledge of print literature and criticism. Choosing either Vidzilla’s *Resolution* (2012), Judd Morrissey’s *The Jew’s Daughter* (2000), Stuart Moulthrop’s *Hegirascope* (1997) or *Reagan Library* (1999), the poetry of Stephanie Strickland, William Poundstone’s *Project for Tachitoscope* (2005), or Michael S. Gentry’s *Anchorhead* (1998), I would like you to select a *specific* aspect of the text that you find significant.² Like your first blog post, I would like you to *closely read*, to *interpret* the particular moment you have chosen. But I would also like you to “think digitally,” to pay attention to and analyze not only the language, but the work’s media specificity, its form, its digital processes and procedures. You might do well to recall Noah Wardrip-Fruin’s five elements of digital literature—*data, process, interaction, surface, and context*—in order to think about how to construct an interpretation of your digital object that accounts for its form and content, for its data and processes, for its language and mechanics.³ You may also feel free to draw upon other theory and criticism we will be reading over the next few weeks, including the work of Hayles, Friedrich Kittler, the historical criticism of Christopher Keep, Tim McLaughlin, and Robin Parmar, the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Stephanie Strickland’s criticism, or the thinking of Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker.

Like in all your work this semester, I am primarily interested in your *argument*. The more *specifically* you investigate and interpret what kind of narrative, linguistic, poetic, digital, procedural work the text is doing, and the more you narrowly focus on the critical intersection between modes of print analysis (close reading, hermeneutics, etc.) and digital thinking, the better you will be able to articulate a complex argument with clear critical stakes.

¹ N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 23, 30, emphases mine.

² Students will note that all the primary texts between March 3rd and March 31st are included here, so students should feel free, regardless of when their post is due, to choose any of the above texts. The idea is, like with the other blog assignments, to do a kind of collective research and criticism.

³ See Noah Wardrip-Fruin, “Five Elements of Digital Literature,” in *Reading Moving Letters: Digital Literature in Research and Teaching*, ed. Roberto Simanowski, Jürgen Schäfer, and Peter Gendolla (Verlag, Ger.: Transcript, 2005), 47-48.