

Digital Representation and Creation in a Humanities Context: “How to Network a Novel”

Humanities 250, University of Victoria, Spring 2012 (CRN: 25533)

Tuesdays: 14:30 – 16:20 (CLEA015 – Mac Lab) & Fridays: 14:30 – 15:20 (CLEA302)

Course Site: web.uvic.ca/~englblog/huma250s2012/

Instructor: Jentery Sayers, Assistant Professor, Department of English

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

What’s the role of cultural criticism in a digital age? How is interpretation changing with the web? And how are art, language, literature, and the book changing along with it? With these questions in mind, this course blends literary studies and cultural criticism with digital technologies and social media.

Students will learn how to:

- Conduct research online,
- Write for the web,
- Produce arguments that combine literature, history, and social media, and
- Collaboratively “network” a single novel, namely James Baldwin’s *Another Country*.

To network a novel is to express its inherently social character. In this course, that will entail reading *Another Country*; gathering historical video, images, and essays related to it; and using an online platform to collectively exhibit multiple (and perhaps contradictory) ways of interpreting it.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the conclusion of this course, students should learn to:

- Collaborate with their peers through not only the use of new technologies but also an agreed-upon model for networking a novel,
- Purposefully read, analyze, and synthesize electronic texts and new media using the appropriate research tools and techniques,
- Concisely articulate issues (e.g., social, cultural, political, economic, technical, and aesthetic) common to digital literary studies and explain why they are relevant to today’s audiences,
- Demonstrate an awareness of various strategies used by digital scholars to express and interpret both literature and cultural history online, and
- Collectively produce an interactive website (i.e., the “Class Project”) that provides audiences with multiple ways of reading, contextualizing, and understanding *Another Country*.

Student work will be evaluated through individual contributions to the Class Project, the Class Project itself, informal oral presentations, class discussions, a final exam, and a final audit. The Class Project will be iteratively developed, giving students the opportunity to periodically share and revise their work.

REQUIRED TEXTS

James Baldwin, *Another Country*

All other texts are available (for free) online or will be circulated in class by the instructor.

ASSESSMENT and ASSIGNMENTS

All assignments will be graded with letter grades, based on the following:

A+: 90-100 / A: 85-89 / A-: 80-84 / B+: 75-79 / B: 70-74 / B-: 65-69
C+: 60-64 / C: 55-59 / D: 50-54 / F: 0-49

I do not use plagiarism detection software when assessing student work. Final grades will be determined in accordance with the University's official grading system.

Below is a list of the assignments for the course, together with an explanation of each. Please note: the requirements for assignments are subject to minor changes throughout the semester. If I do change the requirements for an assignment, then I will notify you well in advance.

*** Individual Project Contributions, Parts 1, 2 & 3 (each 10% of a student's grade, totaling 30%)**

Almost every week, students will individually contribute to the Class Project on *Another Country* (using the Scalar platform to compose their work). At three points in the semester, these contributions will be marked in order for students to develop a sense of how they are doing in the course. These individual contributions will respond to a detailed prompt (posted on the course website), and all of them will be taken together to account for the final grade for the Class Project. Meanwhile, students will learn more about how to use the Scalar platform for authoring and publishing purposes and, more generally, how to create and represent material for web-based interpretation.

*** Class Project (15% of a student's grade)**

The Class Project will consist of all Individual Project Contributions taken together and assessed as a whole. This portion of a student's grade will be shared by everyone actively participating in the project (meaning I will give the Class Project only one mark). Please note that "active participation" depends on (among other things) whether students submit contributions on time, attend class meetings, and engage in class discussions.

*** Final Audit (25% of a student's grade)**

After the Class Project is submitted at the end of the term, students will audit it in writing. Whereas the Class Project is a collaborative endeavor, the Final Audit will be individually composed in essay form (1250 to 1750 words). In short, it will function as a way to reflect on the project as one mode (effective or not) of practicing digital literary studies, with students documenting what they learned from contributing to the project. A detailed prompt for the audit will be circulated during the second half of the term.

*** Final Exam (30% of a student's grade)**

The Final Exam will include a combination of short answer questions and essay questions. It will last roughly two hours. The Exam will cover content from the entirety of the semester, including material from and related to *Another Country* as well as more technical material related to researching, authoring, and publishing scholarly communication online. The Exam is not intended to surprise students; they will be given a clear sense of what to expect.

Grading Rubric for All Assignments

Note: Below, "prompt" implies written instructions for a given assignment. All assignments in this class will be prompted.

A- through A+: Exceeds all expectations of the prompt. Offers a very highly proficient, even memorable demonstration of learning, including some appropriate risk-taking and/or creativity.

B- through B+: Meets all expectations of the prompt. Offers a proficient demonstration of learning, which could be further enhanced with revision.

C or C+: Meets some expectations of the prompt. Effectively demonstrates learning, but less proficiently; could use significant revision.

D: Meets few, if any, expectations of the prompt. Minimally demonstrates learning; work is not fully realized and would benefit from significant revision.

F: Does not meet any expectations of the prompt. Requires substantial revision on multiple levels.

How to Do Well in this Course

Read assigned texts and watch assigned videos before we discuss them. Otherwise, you will not be able to follow conversations in class, let alone the lectures.

Write while you read. For me this means annotating a text as I read it. You can annotate print and digital texts. (See me if you need ideas or resources.)

Come to class with ideas and questions. Be curious. Seek connections between this course and others, even in other disciplines.

Take notes during class meetings. A good portion of the Final Exam will cover what we talk about in class. Students who take good notes understand and retain the material better and then do better on the exam than students who do not.

Let me know when you don't follow what I'm saying. I am not aware of what you do not know or do not understand, and I may assume more contextual knowledge on your part than you have. I find this stuff fascinating, but I will not always know what you want to investigate or know more about—so please tell me.

Persuasive work takes time. Before you submit anything, and most certainly before you submit your Final Audit, consider producing and circulating drafts. Ask friends or peers to give your work a gander. Come chat with me during office hours. Consider how your work can extend and even complicate our in-class discussions. Also avoid producing work that is primarily descriptive.

During class and in writing, be concrete when you comment on anyone's work. Quote it. Speak to specific gestures. And then respond with your own interpretations. When the work is by a peer, be sure to affirm her or his ideas (e.g., "I like how you...").

Use class time to share ideas. If you have a question, then ask your classmates. If you hear something you want to remember, then note it for later reference. If you like someone's work, then let her or him know.

Be prepared to conduct research on your own. Find and read/watch material we are not discussing in class. Write about that material. Publish it in the Class Project. In short, be a self-starter.

("How to Do Well in this Course" adapted from a syllabus written by Christopher Douglas, University of Victoria Department of English.)

POLICIES

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes in which they are enrolled. A department may require a student to withdraw from a course if the student is registered in another course that conflicts with it in time. An instructor may refuse a student admission to a lecture because of lateness, misconduct, inattention or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course. Students who neglect their academic work, including assignments, may be refused permission to write the final examination in a course. Students who are absent because of illness, an accident, or family affliction should report to me upon their return to classes.

If a student misses more than 20% of the scheduled class meetings (without documentation of illness, accident, or family affliction), then she or he may not qualify to submit the Final Audit or take the Final Exam. Also note that all students should actively contribute to the Class Project.

Late and Missed Submissions

If assignments are submitted after the beginning of the class period when they are due, credit will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter-grade per day, starting with the due date. Extension of a due date must be negotiated with me well in advance, and medical or other emergency exceptions to this policy must be properly documented. Barring extenuating circumstances, I will not accept the Final Audit after it is due.

Email

With the exception of holidays and weekends, I respond to student emails within twenty-four hours.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. Students and faculty members are expected to adhere to the UVic human rights policy. Students should alert me immediately if they have any questions about this policy and its application, or if they have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the UVic academic integrity policy. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, students agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review.

Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability (RCSD) as soon as possible. The RCSD staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals and arrange appropriate accommodations. The sooner you let us know your needs, the quicker we can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

TENTATIVE COURSE OUTLINE

Below is the course outline, which is subject to change (especially since this is a project-based course). If I do make changes to the outline, then I will notify you well in advance.

— Week 1: Introductions

Friday, January 6th: Introduction to the Course

— **Week 2: Introduction to Baldwin, Scalar, and Evernote**

Tuesday, January 10th: Review Syllabus and Course Policies; The Anatomy of the Scalar Platform; Using Evernote to Document Your Research

Friday, January 13th: Lecture on Baldwin's Biography

* Due: Read "Authoring and Publishing with Scalar" by Sayers and Dietrich

— **Week 3: Annotating and Interpreting Video**

Tuesday, January 17th: Importing and Annotating Video in Scalar; Baldwin on YouTube

* Due: Search the Web for Video Related to Baldwin

Friday, January 20th: Lecture on Baldwin and Mid-20th Century Exclusionary Politics

* Due: Video Import and Annotation (in Scalar)

— **Week 4: Annotating and Interpreting Images**

Tuesday, January 24th: Importing and Annotating Images in Scalar; How to Find Stuff Online; Baldwin, New York, and Paris on the Web

* Due: Search the Web for Images Related to Baldwin, New York, and Paris

Friday, January 27th: Lecture on Baldwin's New York

* Due: Image Import and Annotation (in Scalar)

— **Week 5: Annotating and Interpreting an Essay**

Tuesday, January 31st: Writing with Text in Scalar; Modeling *Another Country*; Contextualizing "Everybody's Protest Novel"

* Due: Read "Everybody's Protest Novel" by Baldwin; Search the Web for Material (Any Medium) Related to "Everybody's Protest Novel"

Friday, February 3rd: Baldwin on Naturalism, Sentimentalism, Race, and the Novel

* Essay Annotation and Interpretation (in Scalar)

— **Week 6: Annotating and Interpreting a Novel**

Tuesday, February 7th: Assessment of Annotations Thus Far; Revising the Model

Due: Read *Another Country*; Add Annotations Based on the Model (in Scalar)

Friday, February 10th: Lecture on *Another Country*

Due: Read *Another Country*; Add Annotations Based on the Model (in Scalar)

— **Week 7: Reading Break**

— **Week 8: Annotating and Interpreting a Novel (continued)**

Tuesday, February 21st: Assessment of Annotations Thus Far; Revising the Model

Due: Read *Another Country*; Add Annotations Based on the Model (in Scalar)

Friday, February 24th: Class Discussion of *Another Country*

Due: Read *Another Country*; Add Annotations Based on the Model (in Scalar)

— **Week 9: Descriptively Tagging a Collaborative Project**

Tuesday, February 28th: Adding and Describing Tags in Scalar; Categorization and *Another Country*

Due: Sketch a List of Keywords for *Another Country*

Friday, March 2nd: Lecture on Race, Class, Sexuality, and Gender in *Another Country*

Due: Tag Application and Description for the Class Project (in Scalar)

— **Week 10: Integrating Criticism into a Collaborative Project**

Tuesday, March 6th: Adding Commentary in Scalar; A Survey of Criticism Related to *Another Country*

Due: Search the Library for Criticism Related to *Another Country*

Friday, March 9th: Collective Assessment of the Class Project / Baldwin on Categorization

Due: Integration of Commentary (in Scalar)

— **Week 11: Creating Paths of Inquiry**

Tuesday, March 13th: Constructing Paths in Scalar; Ways of Reading *Another Country*

Due: Sketch Two Paths in Scalar

Friday, March 16th: Critically Read Paths in the Class Project / The Ambivalence of *Another Country*

Due: Construction of Two Paths (in Scalar)

— **Week 12: Constructing Narratives**

Tuesday, March 20th: Adding Content to Paths in Scalar; Making Arguments about *Another Country*

Due: Draft Content for Two Paths

Friday, March 23rd: Critically Reading Narratives in the Class Project / Cultural Criticism of Data Visualization

Due: Final Content for One Path

— **Week 13: Polishing a Project**

Tuesday, March 27th: Adding an Index Page to Scalar; Interpreting Scalar Visualizations; Final Edits and Revisions to the Project

Due: Final Content for Another Path

Friday, March 30th: Final Discussion and Presentation of Class Project

Due: Class Project

— Week 14: Celebrating Collaborative Work

Tuesday, April 3rd: Class Celebration (last class meeting)

Thursday, April 5th: Final Audit Due