

EXP-0006-F (Virtual)
Twitter Fiction: New Literature and Meaning in the Digital Sphere
Fall 2020

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Office Hours: By appointment, on Zoom or Slack

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Foreword on COVID-19: This syllabus as well as the entire class has been revised to reflect the unprecedented situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have incorporated best practices for digital teaching and will do my best to ensure fairness and appropriate accommodations for difficulties that you might encounter. For example, while this is an Experimental College class and therefore requires active participation in classroom discussion, I have shifted a large portion of the coursework to an asynchronous modality to enable access to those of you who encounter technological obstacles. That said, this is a class about the ways that we inhabit a digital environment: about what happens when the technology works, but also about what happens when it breaks down and information flow is impeded by the limitations of our platforms. In this sense, the fully virtual modality of this class is not just a challenge, but also an opportunity: an opportunity for a truly experiential experiment with digital communication media.

Because everything is uncertain, it remains possible that the syllabus and course policies will need to be adjusted as the situation develops. But in the spirit of the Experimental College, I would encourage you to see this uncertainty as not (yet) catastrophic, but rather as an opportunity for us to really delve into the possibilities and limits of the digital world.

Thank you for your cooperation in making this a truly experiential class on the world of digital media!

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In a world where many messages do not extend past 280 characters, how can political communication and action still be possible? This course examines the changed landscape of public communication as it is conducted on the “Twitterverse,” the universe of online social media. We will critically investigate the characteristics of such media and the behaviors they foster and facilitate. Simultaneously, we will also engage

with writers who are attempting to navigate the Twitterverse within their own artistic practice: writers who seek for ways to articulate politically meaningful messages and who attempt to reshape literature's traditional function to fit for a new world. Ultimately, we will explore whether a new kind of fiction, "Twitter fiction," is demanded by the world of the new millennium. Students will also experiment first hand, through writing their own Twitter novels, with what such new literature might mean and what its possibilities and limits are.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- ❖ A nuanced understanding of the diverse communicative forms in the Twitterverse and the types of thinking and behavior they engender;
- ❖ Critical analysis of students' own behavior within the social media-dominated world;
- ❖ An increased awareness of the limits and advantages of literary forms of communication, especially digital literature. Students will also gain firsthand experience in the contributions that new forms of literature can make to the ability to communicate politically.
- ❖ Digital literacy and writing skills, including the skill to evaluate digital sources.

REQUIRED TEXTS

All required texts for this course will be available on the Zotero Resource Hub (link: <https://www.zotero.org/groups/2547273/twitter-fiction-resource-hub>) and/or on the World Wide Web.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION:

This intensive seminar will require careful, studied completion of the class readings, regular attendance, active engagement, and class participation. I have tried to keep the page numbers as low as possible, but the readings will require careful scrutiny. This makes class discussion absolutely essential.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. **Blog posts**

In advance of each week's class, you will respond to the assigned reading for that week on the Course Blog (link here: <https://dgati-tuftstwitterfiction.hcommons.org/category/blog-2/>). Ask a question, point out things you might not understand, speculate on potential implications or respond to your peers. Or, bring in your own perspective towards that class topic, or something the reading does not discuss! The aim of this exercise is for you to bring your own questions and input to the material; therefore there will be no prompts. You don't have to demonstrate how well you have understood the material: I'm looking for active engagement with the central questions of the course and for your own, individual perspectives. Don't aim for quantity: a few well-thought out sentences will do.

Alternative: if you have an alternative resource (article, primary material, etc.) that fits the week's topic and which you would like to share, add it to the Zotero collection and simply make a one-sentence summary in your blog post. Note why you thought this might be a useful resource to share. Link to the Zotero Resource Hub here:

<https://www.zotero.org/groups/2547273/twitter-fiction-resource-hub> .

25%

2. Twitter novel

Starting in Week 4 and concluding in the last week, you will continuously work on your own Twitter novel, alone or in groups of 2-3 (you will receive guidance from me, from the Twitter fiction we encounter and from online resources provided in class). You are not required to use Twitter specifically; you can decide to use Facebook, Instagram, Twine (a free interactive fiction platform) or any digital, social media-based platform. You also don't have to write fiction: you can, if you want, focus on serial journalism or do a public humanities project (essay series etc.)—just discuss with me. The aim is to test out the possibilities and pitfalls of fiction/nonfiction written for the online, social media domain: you are therefore required to experiment with the various possibilities of the online medium (interactivity, community-building, etc.). If you choose to work in a group, I expect you to play around with the possibilities that co-authoring yields to the digital medium. Likewise, if friends or strangers from outside the course begin to interact with your project, such interactions should be encouraged. In fact, you might want to invite friends and fellow students to engage with your work directly.

The focus is not on how good of a traditional author you might be, but on what kind of new ways of communicating that the online media allow. Thus, you will not be graded on how "good" your Twitter novel is, but on the degree to which you have engaged with the potentials and limitations of the medium. Your novel does not need to have a traditional plotline (though it should be narrative), and it does not need to "end" necessarily by the end of the semester. I do expect, however, for you to be working on it continuously throughout

the semester, and to engage with the temporal dimension (liveness, seriality) that the digital medium allows. Therefore, I expect each student involved in your project to post at least twice a week for the duration of the project; each student will also have the option to substitute one of those posts for a blog post that reflects on the process of writing and the course's key themes as they relate to our creative work. You will be required to present your project to the class in the last week of the semester, and you will also have an opportunity to reflect on your project in the final paper.

Hint: you can use your blog posts about your work to inform your final reflections. Your grade will most of all be based on your active engagement with this project and the extent to which you experiment with the specifics of your medium. 20%

3. Final presentation

The aim of this short (max. 5 minutes) presentation is to acquaint your classmates with what your project is and how it has been working out. You should use this opportunity to begin reflecting on the efficacy and pitfalls of your project as Twitter fiction. 15%

4. Final reflection essay

In a short essay of 3-5 pages, you should assess what you think your Twitter novel has accomplished. Has it managed to make use of the specific features of its medium? Did it produce a compelling story? Did it deviate in a meaningful way from traditional literature? Can you explain who has followed it and why? Could your story be used to advance political arguments and opinions, and if so, how? What were your project's limitations? These and other questions you might ask about your Twitter novel will be discussed throughout the course. 20%

****Due dates for assignments will depend on specific academic calendar****

GRADE BREAKDOWN

1.	Blog responses	25%
2.	Twitter novel	20%
3.	Final presentation	15%
4.	Final reflection essay	20%
5.	Participation	20%
	Total:	100%

GRADING SCALE (%)

94-100 A	80-83 B-	67-69 D+
90-93 A-	77-79 C+	64-66 D
87-89 B+	74-76 C	60-63 D-
84-86 B	70-73 C-	0 - 59 F

COURSE POLICIES

ESSAY SUBMISSION:

Essays will be submitted to me electronically (per email). All essays should be formatted consistently, with the use of a single citation style, such as MLA 8, APA, etc. Essays should be double-spaced with titles and a works cited.

OTHER SUBMISSIONS (BLOG POSTS, CREATIVE WORK)

Apart from your final reflection essay, all of your work for this course will be public and counts as submitted when it has been posted on its respective medium (course blog/social media).

LATE WORK & EXTENSIONS

If you are afraid your work will not be completed in time, contact me more before the due date and arrange for an extension. Otherwise, late work will be penalized by a third of a grade per day (B+ → B → B- and so on). Work more than 2 weeks late without notice will be considered missing. Late posts will be considered missing.

ATTENDANCE

I expect you to attend our Zoom sessions; however, I understand that under the current conditions technology and other obstacles may prevent you from attending. You should always make your best effort to attend, and if you can see that you won't be able to, you should notify me as soon as possible. If technology impedes you from participating in the Zoom class, you will be able to make up for lost coursework in an asynchronous mode (blog posts, Twitter novel, etc.). If, however, you do not notify me of an absence and do not make up for it asynchronously, this will count as an absence and impact your grade adversely. After two absences, each additional session you miss without making up for it asynchronously will cause you to lose a third of your grade from your Participation score (Ex: A- → B+ → B, etc.).

Participation on Zoom (lateness, leaving the Zoom session, or turning off your camera):
If you are consistently late (more than 3 times) and fail to notify me and make up for lateness through asynchronous work, this will negatively affect your Participation score. However, you will not be penalized for turning off your camera, changing your Zoom name or even leaving the room for a short while. Be mindful though that if I can't see you, I can't ascertain that you're actively taking part; if you've changed your name I still need to be able to identify you; and if you keep leaving the room you negatively affect your ability to participate. So be sure to remain active and allow me to see that you're participating. Remember also that you can always compensate for difficulties in Zoom participation by contributing more asynchronously.

Zoom Policy of Conduct:

I will not penalize you for eating, drinking, standing up, moving around, etc. during our Zoom sessions as long as these behaviors are reasonable, appropriate, and respectful of everyone's learning environment (and my teaching environment!). Please, for your own safety, be respectful of legal restrictions concerning what you may or may not consume.

Recording the Zoom session:

I will not be recording our Zoom sessions without notifying you first, and I will usually not record unless a student requests to access the session asynchronously. If you do not wish to be recorded, please notify me as soon as possible so we can find a workaround. Students will not be permitted to record on Zoom using any device. Recording our interactions using other software is likewise not allowed.

ELECTRONICS POLICY

Laptops and cell-phones are permitted only for course-related use. It's usually pretty apparent when students are using these devices for other purposes, and if they distract you from being an active participant in the class, this will negatively affect your Participation score. However, this is a class about social media: negotiating our patterns of technology use is part and parcel of the course.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policies on academic integrity apply. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the University Administration. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask or refer to Tufts's guidelines.

ACCOMMODATIONS/ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Tufts University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in class, please see me right away. The Office of Student Accessibility Services states that

“Tufts University values the diversity of our students, staff, and faculty, recognizing the important contribution each student makes to our unique community. Students with disabilities are assured that the Student Accessibility Services office will work with each student individually to ensure access to all aspects to student life. Tufts is committed to providing equal access and support to all students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may access their curricula and achieve their personal and academic potential. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations, please contact the Student Accessibility Services office at 617-627-4539, or through their email at Accessibility@tufts.edu, to make an appointment with the director to determine appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.”

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES DURING COVID-19

This is a highly exceptional semester and I anticipate that we will likely encounter difficulties that we can't plan for. If there are obstacles that you can already anticipate, please let me know right away so we can find a workaround. For unexpected difficulties, I will remain flexible to accommodate them, but I also expect the same degree of flexibility from you.

OTHER POLICIES

All Tufts and the Experimental College policies (sexual harassment, non-discrimination, religion, disabilities etc.) apply. Please refer to the appropriate policies on the University's and the ExCollege's websites.

SCHEDULE

Note: All fiction works in the schedule are noted with the following emoji: 📖

Week 1: Introduction

Introduction; a first glance at Twitter; logistics

A look at Mark Marino's *The Ballad of Work-Study Seth*

Week 2: Brevity, Style

Devereaux, "Vignettes and Vines: Faster Seeing"

Ott, "The Age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the Politics of Debasement"

📖 King Bach Vines

📖 Mark Sample, *Station 51000*

📖 @DeepDrumpf

Week 3: Narrative

Martin, "How Do I Analyze a Media Text?"

📖 Aziah Wells, #TheStory

Wells, V., "How Aziah Wells Is Being Erased from The Zola Story"

Optional: Kushner, "Zola Tells All: The Real Story Behind the Greatest Stripper Saga Ever Tweeted"

Week 4: Seriality

Andersen, "Staggered Transmissions: Twitter and the Return of Serialized Literature"

📖 Jennifer Egan, "Black Box"

*****From this week on, post at least one post per person on Twitter novel by the end of each week *****

Week 5: Public, Private and Counterpublic

Hill, ““Thank You, Black Twitter”: State Violence, Digital Counterpublics, and Pedagogies of Resistance”

Bailey, “#transform(ing)DH Writing and Research”

☺ #BlackintheIvory

Week 6: Community

Pittman and Reich, “Social Media and Loneliness”

Jackson et. al, “#GirlsLikeUs: Trans Advocacy and Community Building Online”

☺ #GirlsLikeUs

Week 7: Advertising, Authenticity

Casaló et al, “ Influencers on Instagram: Antecedents and Consequences of Opinion Leadership”

Crockett, “What I learned analyzing 7 months of Donald Trump's tweets”

Natalie Beach: “I Was Caroline Calloway”

Week 8: Globality

Hafez, “How Global is the Internet?”

Guidry et al., “Welcome or Not: Comparing #Refugee Posts on Instagram and Pinterest;”

☺ Teju Cole, *Small Fates*;

Week 9: Ephemerality, Memory, Space

Raley, “TXTual Practice” (excerpts)

Handyside and Ringrose, “Snapchat Memory and Youth Digital Sexual Cultures”

Boy and Uitermark, “Reassembling the City through Instagram”

☺ Teju Cole, “Time of the Game”

Week 10: Interacting, Following

Zhang et al., “Attention and Amplification in the Hybrid Media System”

☺ Teju Cole, “Hafiz”

☺ Neil Gaiman and the Twitterverse, *Hearts, Keys and Puppetry*

Week 11: News, Journalism

Alper, “War on Instagram: Framing Conflict Photojournalism with Mobile Photography Apps”

Berkowitz and Liu, “The Social-Cultural Construction of News”

☺ Examine reports of police violence on social media, e.g. using #BLM

Week 12: ~~Institutions~~ Misinformation

Gerstell, "The National Security Case for Fixing Social Media"

~~Crouch, “The Great American Twitter Novel”~~

~~Crum, "Twitter Fiction Reveals The Power of Very, Very Short Stories"~~

~~☹ David Mitchell, "The Right Sort"~~ -Try instead to come up with your own examples of stories or news on social media that straddle being credible and outrageous.

Week 13: Last week

Student presentations of projects

Student presentations of projects

Final Reflection Essay due 10pm, December 22.