

# Reading Digital Literature: Synopses of an US-German Conference

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Dear Readers,

In the context of the conference “Reading Digital Literature” I organized at Brown University in October 2007, Kathetrine Hayles stated in an email: “Now that the initial waves of enthusiasm, hype and counter-hype have given way to sustained creative production and critical inquiry, it is time to move away from highly generalized accounts into detailed and specific readings that account, in media-specific ways, for the practices, effects, and interpretations of important works.” The conference was driven by exactly this agenda and addressed the questions: How do close readings help develop digital literacy? It was based on the conviction that one task for scholars of literature – or any hermeneutic discipline open to digital media – may be to do what Andre Bazin once did for cinema asking how to read a movie and investigating the semiotics of film rather than just content or technique. In doing so, he contributed to the development of cinematic literacy. In like manner, what we need today is the development of “digital literacy”. Digital aesthetics should be concerned with the use digital literature makes of the specific features of digital media to express its thoughts and feelings. How are interactivity, intermediality, performance, and other aspects of digital media applied to convey a specific aesthetic message or performance? What is a digital sign and how can it be read? With what methods can digital literature be approached? The conference aimed to answer these and related questions through close readings of specific examples of digital literature and asked the contributors to discuss pieces with regard to their particular strategies for the expression of significance and affect.

The conference aimed at participants and attendees interested in new topics and methods in the humanities and targeted especially teachers who incorporate digital literature and art into their courses, and students who are attending such courses, as well as all those who create digital literature and art or are simply interested in understanding this new subject. The conference was scheduled, and promoted, in coordination with the Pixilerations festival at Brown University, which itself is part of the FirstWorksProv-Festival in Providence, and contained an exhibition with three installations of digital literature, public screenings of digital literature as well as writing performances of digital literature by Brown-affiliated authors.

The conference's lectures will be published in print by Roberto Simanowski, Peter Gendolla and Jörgen Schäfer with the German publisher *Transcript*. This issue presents the synopses of the talks, the introductory words to the conference and the statements of the conference attendees on what they like and dislike about digital literature.

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