This course has two complementary goals. The first is to introduce the history of technologies used to produce and circulate literature, from the parchment upon which Beowulf is written to the social media platforms exploited by netprov artists. This history provides a broad overview of the material conditions of possibility for the emergence of literary form and genre in the Anglophone tradition. The second goal is to examine how digital media are transforming scholarly publishing and communication by reflecting upon our own writing practices and their attendant technologies. By pursuing these two goals in tandem, this course places current trends, like digital humanities, within a much longer history of technological transformation and textual production.

To keep things manageable, we are ditching strict chronology in favor of topic clusters. Each week, we’ll explore a new technical threshold or “interface” (in Alex Galloway’s sense of the term — we’ll get to that!) where matter meets meaning. It is my hope that this approach will enable us to engage in comparative, cross-historical analysis without undermining the historicist impulse that motivates the course.

Because you really do need to experience many of these technologies for yourself, we’ll also be spending the last hour of most classes in Wilson Library, looking at everything from medieval parchment and hard disk drives to phonographic cylinders and Civil War scrapbooks. This is a unique opportunity, and we are extraordinarily lucky that the awesome staff at Wilson are letting us spend so much time with the materials.

Assignments

The core assignment in this course is the production of a **collaborative digital book** built in Scalar.

This assignment has two phases.

First, we’ll begin by producing a **timeline** that tracks the various technologies of literary production that we encounter throughout the semester (and some we won’t). I think each person will produce 2-3 entries, but we’ll have to see how the project evolves. A non-exhaustive list of technologies that you might research can be found on our course website. A draft of your contributions to the timeline should be uploaded by March 24.
Next, you will author a **multimodal digital essay** relating the literature of the period to its media ecology. This could take the form of a close reading of a particular text, a broad overview of media in transition, or something else altogether. The aim is for you to go deeper with a particular technology, and to do so in a way that relates to your primary field of study. We’ll be uploading drafts on April 14th. The final essay is due April 28th by class time. The timeline entries and related essay are worth 50 points (40 points for the final essay, 10 for the timeline entries).

To get you thinking about how this original research might transform your pedagogy, an intermediate assignment asks you to **design a syllabus for a survey course in your field**, inflecting it through the idea of mediation. It is due March 10th in class and worth 25 points.

In addition to these core assignments, you will be **contributing regularly to our course blog**. I see the blog as an opportunity to air questions, discuss the readings, or share examples from one’s own research – and to do so while developing a professional yet colloquial voice as a scholar participating in a community of practice. I would like you to aim for about 2 posts every three weeks, or 10 posts over the course of the semester. Please aim to respond to someone else’s post once a week as well, or 15 times over the course of the semester. Each post is worth a point, or 25 points over the course of the semester.

**Schedule**

*This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be posted to our class website and announced in class.*

**Week 1 (January 13): Media Archaeology**

- Vilém Flusser, “Introduction,” “Superscript,” *DWHAF?*
- Bob Brown, “The Readies” (1930)
- Octave Uzanne, “The End of Books” (1894)

**Week 2 (January 20): Platform**

- Flusser, “Books”, *DWHAF?*
- If you’ve never seen how a common press and movable type work, start by watching a few videos, so you can see what these important technologies look like, such as:
• this fun and informative hour-long BBC documentary with Stephen Fry;
• this short, odd, and also informative three-dimensional model of a hand-press period print shop;
• or any of the many short demos by funny old men on Youtube (search “printing press demo” or “Gutenberg press”).

• Elizabeth Eisenstein, “Introduction,” “An Unacknowledged Revolution,” and “Defining the Initial Shift,” and “Some Features of Print Culture” from *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*
• Adrian Johns, “The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book” to page 40 (you don’t need to read the rest, although I encourage you to read as much as possible), in *The Nature of the Book* (Chicago UP, 2009)

• Optional but recommended: Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible”

• I also highly recommend (but am not requiring) that you read Bogost and Montfort’s “Platform Studies: FAQ.”

**Week 3 (January 27): Interface**

• Johanna Drucker, “Interface and Interpretation,” *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (metaLab, 2014)
• Lori Emerson, “Introduction” and “Indistinguishable from Magic,” in *Reading Writing Interfaces* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)

Explore further (not required reading):

• Alex Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Polity, 2012)
• Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (MIT Press, 2006)

**Week 4 (February 3): Code**

• Vilem Flusser, “Inscriptions,” “Notation,” “Letters of the Alphabet,” “Texts,” “Print,” “Instructions,” *DWHAF?]*
Explore further (not required reading):

- Johanna Drucker, “From A to Screen,” in *Comparative Textual Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

**Week 5 (February 10): Substrate**

  - Explore The Manuscripts Lab: https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscriptslab/
- Herman Melville, “The Tartarus of Maids”
- Nicholson Baker, chapters 1, 3, 6, 12, 13 from *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper* (2001)

Other resources to explore:


**Week 6 (February 17): Inscription**

- Explore The Agrippa Files: http://agrippa.english.ucsb.edu/

We’ll be focusing on inscription, but here we might also think and talk about inks. Recommended further reading:

Week 7 (March 3): Network

- Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” *The Atlantic*
- Judy Malloy, *Uncle Roger*

Recommended further reading:

- “Judy Malloy’s Uncle Roger” in the Pathfinders collection: http://scalar.usc.edu/works/pathfinders/judy-malloy

Week 8 (March 10): Assemblage

*Due: syllabus.*


Optional:


Week 9 (March 17): Spring Break – NO CLASS

Week 10 (March 24): Word Processing (I)

*Due: timeline contributions.*
• Flusser, “Desks,” *DWHAF?*
• Friedrich Kittler, “Typewriter,” in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford UP, 1999)
• Darren Wershler, selections from *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (Cornell UP, 2007)
• Explore these images: https://mobile.twitter.com/mwichary/status/791709895083102209
• Watch and explore “Nietzsche’s Writing Ball”: https://vimeo.com/43124993

**Week 11 (March 31: CLASS CANCELLED)**

*We can’t meet this week, as I’m away, but please watch Linotype: The Film. You can rent or buy it on Amazon.*

**Week 12 (April 7): Word Processing (II)**

*I’m away this week too. Let’s find an alternative time to meet.*

• Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes* (Harvard UP, 2016)

**Week 13 (April 14): Workshop, Loose Ends**

**Week 14 (April 21): Book Symposium**

*There will be a symposium on text technologies at the National Humanities Center and around the Triangle on this day. Details to come.*

**Week 15 (April 28): Wrap-up**

*Due: final multimodal digital essays.*