

## Technologies of Literary Production

### ENGL 709, Spring 2017, Friday 12:20-3:10PM

#### Instructor:

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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)
- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects," in *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (MIT Press, 2008)
- Siegfried Zielinski, "Introduction: The Idea of a Deep Time of the Media," *Deep Time of the Media* (MIT Press, 2006)

### 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”](#)
- Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, “Stella,” *Racing the Beam* (MIT Press, 2009). Focus on how they define a “platform.”
- I also highly recommend (but am not requiring) that you read Bogost and Montfort’s [“Platform Studies: FAQ.”](#)

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

- Bonnie Mak, “Introduction” and “Architectures of the Page,” [mak-bonnie-how-the-page-matters](#) *How the Page Matters* (University of Toronto Press, 2011)
- 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**

- Brian Rotman, “Lettered Selves and Beyond” and “The Alphabetic Body,” in *Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being* (Duke UP, 2008)
- N. Katherine Hayles, [“Technogenesis in Action: Telegraph Code Books and the Place of the Human,”](#) in *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (University of Chicago Press, 2012)
- 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)
- Marcel Danesi, *The Semiotics of Emoji: The Rise of Visual Language in the Age of the Internet* (Bloomsbury, 2017)

### Week 5 (February 10): Substrate

- Bruce Holsinger, "Of Pigs and Parchment: Medieval Studies and the Coming of the Animal," *PMLA* 124.2 (March 2009): 616-23.
  - Explore The Manuscripts Lab: <https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscriptslab/>
- Joshua Calhoun, "The Word Made Flax: Cheap Bibles, Textual Corruption, and the Poetics of Paper," *PMLA* 126.2 (March 2011): 327-44.
  - Explore Paper Through Time: <http://paper.lib.uiowa.edu> and Combat Paper Project: <https://www.combatpaper.org/>
- 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:

- Mapping Paper in Medieval England: <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/manuscriptslab/mapping-medieval-paper-in-england/>

### Week 6 (February 17): Inscription

- Juliet Fleming, "Introduction: From Grammatology to Cultural Graphology," *Cultural Graphology: Writing After Derrida* (University of Chicago Press, 2016)
- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Writing Things Down, Storing Them Up," *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines* (Stanford University Press, 2000)
- Matthew Kirschenbaum, "Introduction" and "Chapter 1," *Mechanisms* (MIT Press, 2008)
- 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:

- Miles Grier, "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as the Political*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Routledge, 2015)
- Bianca Calabresi, "'Red Inke': Reading the Bleeding of the Early Modern Page," in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England* (Ashgate, 2005)

## Week 7 (March 3): Network

- Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic*
- Alex Galloway and Eugene Thacker, "Nodes," *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007)
- Matt Cohen, "Introduction," *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England* (University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
- Ryan Cordell, "Reprinting, Circulation, and the Network Author in Antebellum Newspapers," *American Literary History* 27.3 (August 2015): 417-45.
- Judy Malloy, *Uncle Roger*

Recommended further reading:

- Lisa Nakamura, "Digital Racial Formations and Networked Images of the Body," in *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007)
- "Judy Malloy's *Uncle Roger*" in the *Pathfinders* collection: <http://scalar.usc.edu/works/pathfinders/judy-malloy>
- Terry Harpold, "'A Future Device for Individual Use,'" in *Ex-foliations: Ex-foliations: Reading Machines and the Upgrade Path* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009)

## Week 8 (March 10): Assemblage

*Due: syllabus.*

- Arthur Bahr, "Compilation, Assemblage, Fragment," in *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (University of Chicago Press, 2013)
- Jeffrey Knight, "Introduction," *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections, and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (U Penn Press, 2013)
- Ellen Gruber Garvey, "Introduction," *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford UP, 2012)
- N. Katherine Hayles, "Cognitive Assemblages: Technical Agency and Human Interactions," *Critical Inquiry* 43.1 (Autumn 2016)

Optional:

- Kathleen E. Kennedy, "Medieval Hackers?," in *Medieval Hackers* (Punctum, 2015)

## 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.*