Course Description

> *We are all mired in historical circumstance. Some of us are knee-deep, and some of us are neck-deep. If you want to think seriously about the future, you have to think historically. There isn't any other way to do it. Otherwise you'll mistake the accidents of our current situation for some iron-clad law of the cosmos. You need to be aware of longer-term trends, how things play out. History never repeats itself, but it does kind of rhyme. Bruce Sterling, LoneStarCon 2 interview (1997)*

When you hear the word "technology," you may think of your computer or smart phone. You probably don't think of the alphabet, the book, or the printing press: but each of these was a technological innovation that changed dramatically how we communicate and perhaps even how we think. Literature has always developed in tandem with—and often in direct response to—the development of new media technologies—e.g. moveable type, the steam press, the telegraph, radio, film, television, the internet. Our primary objective in Technologies of Text will be to develop ideas about the ways that such innovations shape our understanding of classic and contemporary texts, as well as the people who write, read, and interpret them. We will compare our historical moment with previous periods of textual and technological upheaval. Many debates that seem unique to the twenty-first century—over privacy, intellectual property, information overload, and textual authority—are but new iterations of familiar battles in the histories of technology, new media, and literature. Through the semester we will get hands-on experience with textual technologies new and old through labs in letterpress printing, bibliography, digital editing, and computational text analysis, including through field trips to museums, libraries, and archives in the Boston area.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will:

1. Understand technology and new media as historical rather than exclusively recent phenomenon;
2. Analyze books and other textual technologies as material objects and within their social contexts;
3. Experiment with a range of textual technologies, both historical and modern, reflecting on how these hands-on experiences lead to new humanistic understanding;
4. Examine the ways practices of reading, writing, and publishing interacted, thematically and materially, with contemporaneous technological innovations;
5. Draw parallels between literary studies and diverse fields such as information science, computer science, communications, and media studies;
6. Develop emerging proficiency exploring textual data with the computer programming language R;
7. and Create original, public, creative research projects that consciously use media to convey their messages.

Acknowledgements

This course has been developed over many years and for too long didn't include acknowledgements—which is to say I cannot trace all the teachers I should thank for their models. I owe many of the ideas here (and some of the lab assignments) to classes I've taken at the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia, and in particular Michael F. Suarez's "Teaching the History of the Book" course. I have also been inspired by syllabi from many other generous scholars, including Whitney Trettien, Meredith McGill, Kari Kraus, Alan Liu, Matthew Kirschenbaum, and Lori Emerson.

Course Policies

Table of Contents

Shadow Syllabus

Really, all I *want* to write here can be found in Sonya Huber’s Shadow Syllabus. There is a lot of truth in this list for your college careers and beyond. Read it and believe it.

- Class Meetings: Wednesday-Friday, 11:45-1:25
- Location: Barrs Room (472 Holmes Hall)
- Professor: Ryan Cordell
- Cordell Email: r.cordell@northeastern.edu

- Cordell Office: Nightingale Hall 415
- Cordell Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-4:00, Fridays 10-11, and by appointment

Required Texts

The majority of our readings will be available online or through the library's Leganto system. We will read a few books, however, which you will need to purchase:

- James Gleick, *The Information: A History, A Theory, A Flood*, Vintage (2012)
- Sydney Padua, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer*, Pantheon (2015)
- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, Vintage (2015)
- Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book* (2018)

Communication

The best way to get in touch with me is to visit during my office hours. If you're unsure about our readings, struggling with an assignment, or just want to talk, please visit. During the Spring 2018 semester, I will be in my office (Nightingale 415) on Wednesdays 2:30-4:00 and Fridays 10-11. I'm also happy to make appointments at other times—just email me with **at least three possible meeting times** for me to choose among. I can schedule in person or virtual meetings.

The next best way to get in touch with me is by sending me an email. When you write to me: consider your tone and your audience. An email to your professor shouldn't read the same as emails to friends or family. For help, see this guide to emailing your professors. I will respond to an email within 48 hours. Often I will respond more quickly, but you should not send me an

urgent email, for example, the night before an assignment is due. If for some reason I have not responded to your email within two days, please do follow up—my delay is likely inadvertent and I will welcome a reminder.

Class Engagement

This experiential course requires active engagement in class activities and discussions. There will be few lectures and we will not be building toward an exam. Instead, we will work together to build our facilities for thinking critically about literature, new media, and technology. You should come to every class having read all of the required reading, watched the required videos, browsed the suggested resources, and so forth. You should enter the classroom prepared to discuss these materials with colleagues and complete both individual and group in-class assignments.

Participation

I will not explicitly grade participation in this course (i.e. "participation = 20% of final grade"), but I will take account of your reading and course engagement through your class preparation, our discussions, and related activities. As a reminder, all of our class grading contracts require you to:

> *Come to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings, games, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.*

There are many ways to participate in a college class. Just a few of the most valuable contributions are:

1. Raising ideas from our assigned materials for class discussion, including directing our attention to specific moments you found evocative, inspiring, infuriating, or otherwise salient;

2. Asking questions about materials or ideas you found puzzling or difficult (I cannot overstate how valuable good questions are to a thriving class, and how desperately I wish more students were courageous in asking them);
3. Sending pertinent materials discovered outside of class to the course email list, or bringing them to our attention during discussion;
4. Assisting classmates with lab assignments or other in-class work amenable to cooperation;
5. Visiting during office hours to extend course conversations around subjects or questions you find particularly interesting.

Attendance

Maintaining an active class conversation requires that the class be present, both physically and mentally. "Attendance" does not simply mean that your body can be found in proximity to those of your classmates. You must also be mentally present, which means you must:

1. Be awake and attentive to the conversation of the day;
2. Prepare assigned texts before class begins;
3. Bring your assigned texts to class. If we're reading online articles, you should either bring a device on which to read them or print them and bring that hard copy. For some of our "texts" such as videogames this will be a bit harder to accomplish, but we will discuss what precisely to bring before those sessions;
4. *Bring your assigned texts to class!*
5. and, finally, **bring your assigned texts to class!!!** I mean it. Seriously. If you come to class without the day's reading on hand, I reserve the right to count you absent.

If you fail to meet these requirements, I will consider you mentally absent, though you may be physically present.

Missing Class

You may miss the number of classes specified in your chosen grade contract and you need not provide an explanation. If you find yourself in extraordinary circumstances that will impact your attendance, please come talk with me during office hours. When you must miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, get updates on upcoming assignments, and/or ensure that you are prepared for future classes.

For as many absences as allotted in your grade contract, you will be exempted from the class preparation assignment. If you miss more classes than agreed, we may need to reevaluate your contract.

"Overload" by Sir Mildred Pierce

"Information Overload" Day

I do understand that the semester can get hectic. The reading load for this

class is often challenging, and you must balance it with the work in your other classes. Most likely you will have days when you simply cannot—for whatever reason—complete the assigned reading. Please do not simply skip class, compounding your stresses, when this happens. Instead, you may take *"information overload" (IO) days* during the semester up to the number specified in your grade contract. On these days you will not be expected to contribute to class discussion and you will receive a pass on class preparation. In order to take an IO day, you must follow these rules:

1. You must attend class, listen attentively to any lectures or class discussions, and take part in any activities or group work not dependent on the day's reading. **Your IO days cannot be used as additional excused absences**.
2. You must inform me **before the beginning of class** that you are taking your IO day. You may not wait until I call on you or until you see day's the in-class assignment. **I will deny any IO requests made during class**. To that end: take special care to be on time if you plan to request an IO day, as you won't be allowed to request one if you arrive late.
3. You may not extend an IO day into another class session. If, for instance, you take your IO day during our first class on a novel, you will not then be excused from discussing the book during subsequent classes.
4. You may not take an IO day to avoid completing a major assignment. IO days will excuse you from reading quizzes, group work, or reflections, but nothing of more serious import. If you are unsure whether an assignment is "major," the syllabus is a good guide. If a particular assignment has its own "assignment" page on the course website, it is a major assignment.
5. In general you should not use IO days to avoid drafting writing before our in-class workshops. The writing demands in this class are high and the workshops are designed to help you stay on task for completing them, as well as to give you valuable feedback as you write or revise. It would strongly advise against foregoing these benefits.

IO days are intended to help you manage the inevitable stresses of your individual semester. Use them wisely.

Digital Etiquette

In-class Devices

Some of this section and much of the rubric below were inspired by and adapted from this cell phone use rubric from Zombie Based Learning.

This should go without saying, but let's say it anyway: while in class, you should be focused on class. You may think that you are an excellent multi-tasker, but there is a growing body of evidence that argues multitasking is a myth: trying to do multiple things simultaneously means you do all those things worse than if you focused on them serially—the act of multitasking literally drains your brain's energy reserves In a discussion-focused class like this one, it's usually pretty easy to tell when a student is checking in and and out of class an other on-screen activities.

In your professional lives, people will have their phones and other devices with them at their jobs, in meetings, at conferences, and so on. Adults do not have their devices taken away from them. They are expected to manage their own use.

You may have your phone and/or laptop on hand during class, but if so you should use them only for accessing our readings, class resources, or for finding outside materials pertinent to our discussions and activities. You should not use them to follow a game, message your friends, check your friends' Tumblrs, commit (non course related) code to Github. Though it may seem unthinkable, your friends and family may actually survive three hours each week without direct updates as to your whereabouts and doings. They probably won't call the police to report you missing. They will no doubt pine for your witty banter, but that longing will only make your 2:41pm updates all

the sweeter each Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday this semester.

Periodically during the semester I may ask folks to put screens away. This means I want everyone—myself included—to focus attention on another aspect of class. In fact, it would be a very good idea to have a physical notebook available for classes when phones and laptops cannot be used.

Device Use Rubric

The rubric below outlines my expectations for device use in this classroom. We can discuss these expectations in our first days together and edit them if the class agrees on amendments. I will not be recording marks for device use in every class. Instead, I will assess your use periodically and include these measures in my assessment of your class contributions.

1. Unacceptable	2. Below Expectations	3. Meets Expectations	4. Exceeds Expectations
Use is *inappropriate*. Device is a distraction to others. **Examples**: A student uses their device to play games, view material unrelated to the course, OR hold social conversations.	Use is *distracting* to the student, their colleagues, and/or the instructor. Student frequently checks devices for information unrelated to the class. **Example**: A student takes out their phone to look at text messages several times in one class period.	Device is *not used* except during designed times, or device use is limited to quick checks during times of transition. **Example**: a student receives an important text from a parent, which they check quickly during our transition between group work and full-class discussion, but waits to respond until an appropriate time.	Device *only used* as an efficient academic tool for a direct purpose. Device is not a distraction. but used at appropriate times as an extension of work or learning. **Examples**: A student uses their phone to do research during a research project, or uses their laptop to create a collaborative document for a group project.

"Glitch" by 622

Technical Snafus

This course will rely on access to computers, specific software, and the internet. **At some point during the semester you WILL have a problem with technology**: your laptop will crash, a file will become corrupted, a server will go down, a piece of software will not act as you expect it to, or something else will occur. These are facts of twenty-first-century life,

not emergencies. To succeed in college and in your career you should develop work habits that take such snafus into account. Start assignments early and save often. Always keep a backup copy of your work saved somewhere secure (preferably off site). None of these unfortunate events should be considered emergencies: inkless printers, computer virus infections, lost flash drives, lost passwords, corrupted files, incompatible file formats. It is *entirely your responsibility* to take the proper steps to ensure your work will not be lost irretrievably; if one device or service isn't working, find another that does. When problems arise in the software I have assigned for you to learn, we will work through those problems together and learn thereby. However, I will not grant you an extension based on problems you may be having with the specific devices or the internet services you happen to use.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to complete a TRACE (Teacher Rating and Course Evaluation) toward the end of the semester. In addition, the English Department asks its students to complete a separate, wholistic, largely narrative course evaluation. I will set aside some time during a class period for students to complete their TRACE and English Departmental evaluations.

Academic Integrity

In this class you will abide by Northeastern University's Academic Integrity Policy at all times:

> *A commitment to the principles of academic integrity is essential to the mission of Northeastern University. The promotion of independent and original scholarship ensures that students derive the most from their educational experience and their pursuit of knowledge. Academic dishonesty violates the most fundamental values of an intellectual community and undermines the achievements of the entire University.*

If you have any questions about what constitutes academic integrity in this class—particularly as the concept applies to digital course projects—please talk to me. We will also discuss the ethics of digital scholarship in class.

Writing Center

The Northeastern University Writing Center is located in 412 Holmes Hall and in Snell Library (for current hours call 617-373-4549 or see http://www.northeastern.edu/english/writing-center/) and offers free and friendly help for any level writer, including help with reading complex texts, conceptualizing a writing project, refining your writing process (i.e., planning, researching, organization, drafting, revising, and editing), and using sources effectively. You can receive feedback face-to-face during regular hours or via email/online response. I strongly recommend that you make appointments to go over drafts of your work—including your digital work—before turning it in. Questions about the Writing Center can be directed to neuwritingcenter@gmail.com.

Class Schedule

Table of Contents

- Interlude ☛ Spring Break
- Book the Third ☛ Read-Write-Execute
    - Chapter Nine: Algorithmical
        - March 13
        - March 15
    - Chapter Ten: Text as Data
        - March 20
        - March 22
    - Chapter Eleven: Obsolescence
        - March 27
        - March 29
    - Chapter Twelve: Book Futures
        - April 3
        - April 5
    - Chapter Thirteen: Memory
        - April 10
        - April 12
        - April 17

Schedule Organization

Our syllabus is divided into thematic books and organized by weekly "chapters," each of which includes a set of required readings and (typically) a humanities laboratory we will complete together. Readings should be prepared (and the *class prep* for them committed to your fieldbook) before class on the day of the assignment.

A Key to Alerts

These red alert boxes signal a change of our typical schedule, such as meeting in a location outside the classroom or altered office hours during the week.

These orange alert boxes signal an assignment due date.

These information boxes signal the in-class lab that we will work on together. As the semester progresses I will add links to the lab assignments to these boxes. Your fieldbook reports are due within a week of a given lab session.

Book the First ☛ (re)Mediation

Chapter One: Media Messages

January 9

Introducing the class

January 11

- Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message" (1964)
- Lisa Gitelman, "Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects," (to the break on page 12) from *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture* (MIT Press, 2006)

Chapter Two: Codex

Meet in the Northeastern Archives & Special Collections, 92 Snell Library (in the basement) on January 16

January 16

- Bonnie Mak, "Architectures of the Page" (2011)

January 18

- Amaranth Borsuk, "The Book as Object" from *The Book* (2018)

Chapter Three: Manuscript

January 23

- James Gleick, *The Information*, prologue-chapter 2 (pg. 3-50)
- Ted Chiang, "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling" (2013)

January 25

- Ælfric, Preface to his translation of Genesis (ca. 990)
- Geoffrey Chaucer, "Chaucer's Words to His Scrivener" (ca. 1380)
- Excerpts from Johannes Trithemius, *In Praise of Scribes* (1492)
- (watch) Getty Museum, "Making Manuscripts" (6:19)
- (optional, but new and incredibly cool) A. Radini *et al* "Medieval women's early involvement in manuscript production suggested by lapis lazuli identification in dental calculus"

Chapter Four: Literacy

January 30

- Ellen Cushman, "'We're Taking the Genius of Sequoyah into This Century': The Cherokee Syllabary, Peoplehood, and Perseverance" (2011)
- Annette Vee, "Introduction: Computer Programming as Literacy" from *Coding Literacy: How Computer Programming is Changing Writing* (2018)

February 1

Book the Second ☛ Impression

Chapter Five: Into the Matrix

February 6

- Amaranth Borsuk, "The Book as Content" from *The Book* (2018)
- (watch) Stephen Fry, *The Machine That Made Us* (This video is about 1 hour long; plan accordingly!)

February 8

- James Gleick, *The Information* (2011), chapter 3 (pg. 51-77)
- Adam J. Hooks, "How to Read Like a Renaissance Reader" (2012)
- (optional, but very useful, watch) "Printing" vocational film (1947) and "Learning to Set Type" vocational film (1940s)

Chapter Six: Print Cultures

Professor Cordell away on February 15 and 20. Virtual class on February 15

February 13

- Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Chapters 2-7
- Lisa Gitelman, "Print Culture (Other Than Codex): Job Printing and Its Importance" from *Comparative Textual Media* (2013)

February 15

- Sydney J. Shep, "'Smiley, you're on candid camera': Emoticons & Pre-Digital Networks" (2011)
- Chris Gayomali, "How Typeface Influences the Way We Read and Think" (2013)
- Lindsay Lynch, "How I Came to Love the En Space" (2016)
- Choose a font to research from the Font Review Journal, Typographica's Favorite Typefaces of 2017, or the Kern Your Enthusiasm series. Be ready to discuss it in class.

Chapter Seven: Typecasting

Professor Cordell away on February 15 and 20. No class on February 20

February 22

- Articles about the Victoria Press
  - M. M. H., "A Ramble with Mrs. Grundy: A Visit to the Victoria Printing Press," *English Woman's Journal* (1860)
  - "The Victoria Press," *Illustrated London News* (15 June 1861)
  - Emily Faithfull, "Women Compositors," *English Woman's Journal* (1861)
- Sarah Werner, "Finding Women in the Printing Shop" (2014)

Chapter Eight: Circulation

February 27

- 19th-Century Commentaries on Novel Reading:
  - "On Novel Reading" (from *The Guardian; or Youth's Religious Instructor*, 1820)
  - "Devouring Books" (from the *American Annals of Education*, 1835)
  - M.M. Backus, "Novel Writers and Publishers" (from *Christian Parlor Magazine*, 1844)
- Anna North, "When Novels Were Bad for You" (2014)
- Frank Furedi, "The Media's First Moral Panic" (2015)

March 1

- James Gleick, *The Information* (2011), chapters 11 (pg. 310-323)
- Ryan Cordell and Abby Mullen, "'Fugitive Verses': The Circulation of Poems in Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers" (2017)

Interlude ☛ Spring Break

March 4-8

Book the Third ☛ Read-Write-Execute

Chapter Nine: Algorithmical

March 13

- James Gleick, *The Information* (2011), chapters 4-6 (pg. 78-203)

March 15

- Vikram Chandra, "The Beauty of Code" (2014)
- Electronic Literature Collection: Bots
- Scott B. Weingart, "The Route of a Text Message" (2019)

Chapter Ten: Text as Data

March 20

- Sydney Padua, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer* (2015), beginning-pg. 90

March 22

- Sydney Padua, *The Thrilling Adventures of Lovelace and Babbage: The (Mostly) True Story of the First Computer* (2015), pg. 147-257

Chapter Eleven: Obsolescence

March 27

- Octave Uzanne, "The End of Books" (1894)

- (watch) Carl Schlesinger and David Loeb Weiss, "Farewell etaoin shrdlu" (1978)

March 29

- Lauren J. Young, Daniel Peterschmidt, and Cat Frazier, "File Not Found Series" (2017)
  - "Ghosts in The Reels"
  - "The Librarians Saving the Internet"
  - "Data Reawakening"
- Craig Mod, "Future Reading" (2015)

Chapter Twelve: Book Futures

April 3

- Jon Bois, "What Football Will Look Like in the Future" (2017)
- Amaranth Borsuk, "The Book as Idea" and "The Book as Interface" from *The Book* (2018)

April 5

- James Gleick, *The Information* (2011), chapters 14, 15, and epilogue

Chapter Thirteen: Memory

Unessay discussion in class April 17

April 10

- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, to page 115

April 12

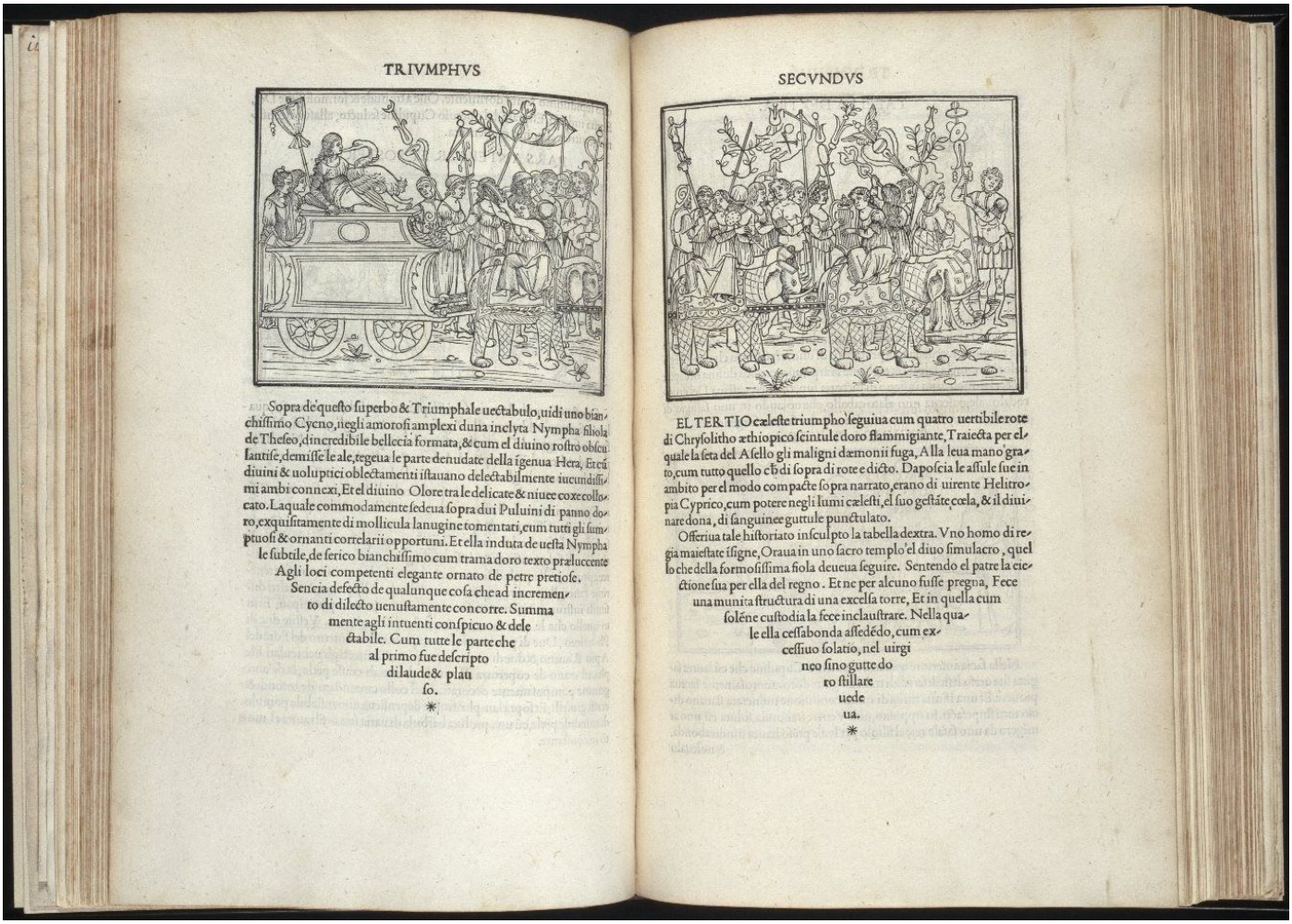
- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, to page 228

April 17

- Emily St. John Mandel, *Station Eleven*, to end

Into the Archive/Thinking with the Codex

> *Whether thick, thin, brittle, smooth, dog-eared, or stained, every page discloses a unique identity that has been shaped by cultural forces over time. This identity is susceptible to change across different reading communities, but the material cues provided by the page perdure and are always present in the transmission of ideas. Designers make calculated decisions regarding the size, shape, colour, and quality of the material to suggest to readers what kind of page it is and how they wish it to be treated. Although a handwritten folio of animal skin in a medieval manuscript is as much a page as the leaf of a mass-produced paperback, the characteristics of each communicate vastly different messages about their respective manufacture, circulation, and cultural value.*
>
> *Bonnie Mak, "Architectures of the Page"*



TRIVMPHVS

Sopra de questo superbo & Triumphale uectabulo, uidi uno bianchissimo Cycno, negli amorosi amplexi duna inclyta Nympha filiola de Theseo, di incredibile bellecia formata, & cum el diuino rostro obscu
lantise, demisse le ale, tegeua le parte denudate della ignenua Hera, Et cú diuini & uoluptici oblectamenti istauano delectabilmente iucundissimi ambi connexi, Et el diuino Olore tra le delicate & niuee coxe collocato. La quale commodamente sedeua sopra dui Puluini di panno doro, exquisitamente di mollicula lanugine tomentati, cum tutti gli sumptuosi & ornanti correlarii opportuni. Et ella induta de uesta Nympha le subtile, de serico bianchissimo cum trama doro texto præluccente
Agli loci competenti elegante ornato de petre pretiose.
Sencia defecto de qualunque cosa chead incremento di dilecto uenustamente concorre. Summa
mente agli intuenti conspicuo & dele
ctabile. Cum tutte le parte che
al primo fue descripto
di laude & plau
so.
*

SECVNDVS

EL TERTIO cælestе triumpho seguiua cum quatro uertibile rote di Chrysolitho æthiopico scintule doro flammigiante, Traiecta per el quale la seta del Asello gli maligni dæmonii fuga, A lla leua mano grato, cum tutto quello c'ho di sopra di rote e dicto. Dapoi cia le assule sue in ambito per el modo compacte sopra narrato, erano di uirente Helitropia Cyprico, cum potere negli lumi cælesti, el suo gestáte cœla, & il diuinare dona, di sanguinee guttule punctulato.
Offeriua tale historiato insculpto la tabella dextra. Vno homo di regia maiestate isigne, Oraua in uno sacro templo el diuo simulacro, quel lo che della formosissima fiola deueua seguire. Sentendo el patre la ciction sua per ella del regno. Et ne per alcuno fusse pregna, Fece una munita structura di una excelsa torre, Et in quella cum
solene custodia la fece inclaustrare. Nella qua
le ella cessabonda assedédo, cum ex
cessiuo solatio, nel uirgi
neo sino gutte do
ro stillare
uede
ua.
*

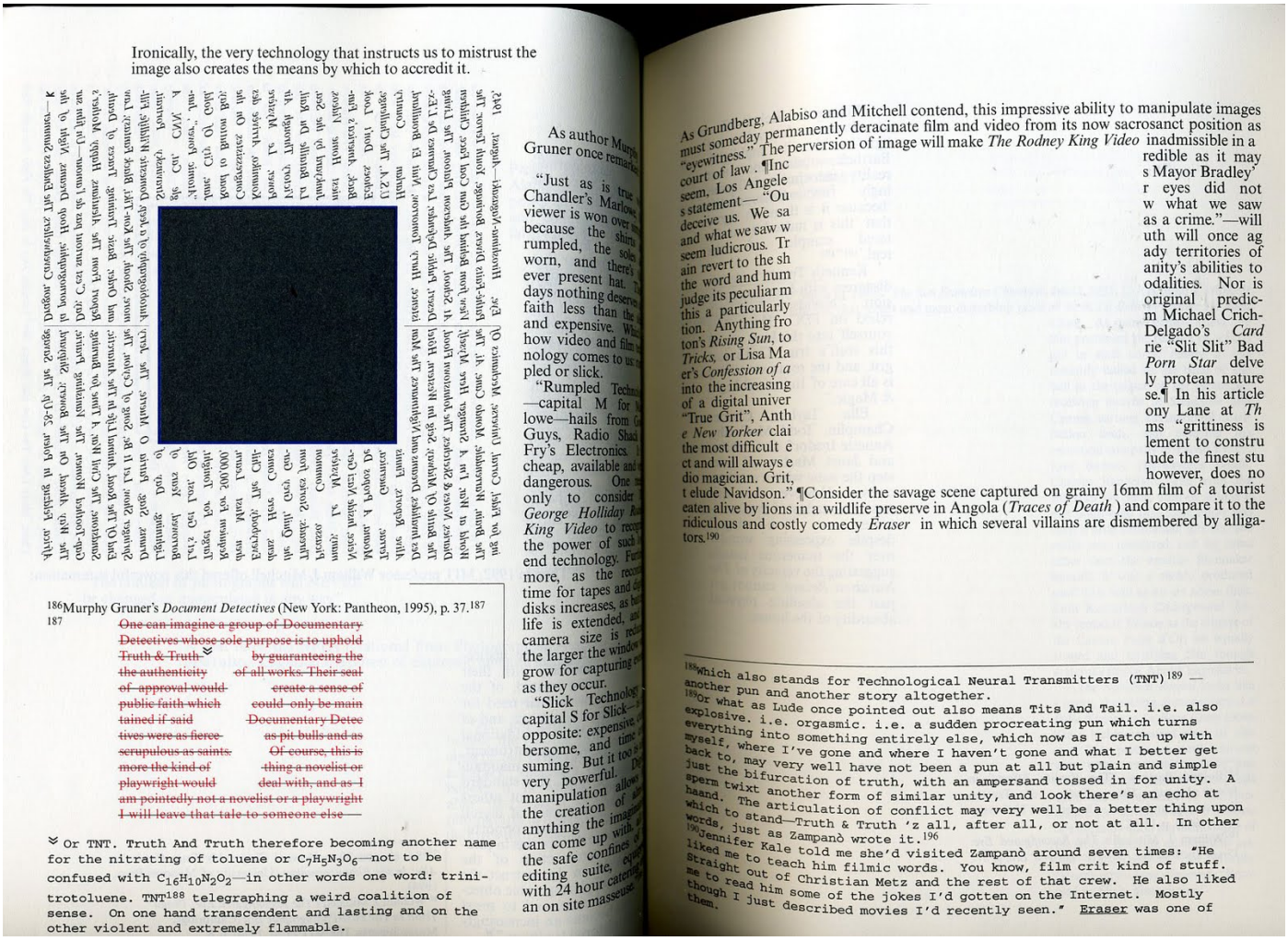
For this lab, I have selected books from Northeastern University's Archives and Special Collections for us to investigate. As when we looked at Harlequins on the first day, this lab is an exercise in close looking. I've arranged the books in pairs, each designed to illuminate a particular textual contrast: between time periods, technologies, or cultures.

You should choose one pair of books and compare two facing pages (one *opening*) from the first book with two facing pages from the second. You are not bound (pun *so very much* intended) to analyze pages I discuss in the guided part of the lab, and in fact I encourage you to find others. Feel free to browse, carefully, for two sets you find particularly interesting. And then you should *look* and *feel* and *smell* and *listen* (but **not** *taste*) closely! Consider returning to Special Collections to spend more time with your chosen books. You should also choose two facing pages from one of the digitized books listed at the end of this assignment and compare them with the physical

books you studied, so that **in total you compare and contrast six pages from three books**.

Your fieldbook entry should analyze salient similarities and differences among the pages in your three chosen books. Don't simply list comparisons—though you might use bullet points to organize your thoughts—but work to understand significances. What can we learn from just a few page openings about relationships among technology, media, and culture during your texts' periods? What do these books teach us about shifting reading, writing, and publishing practices? How does each set of pages signal what a book is, who a book is for, and what a book does during its historical period? What are the logics, codes, and protocols through which a "book" operates in each period? Can you trace an evolutionary path from earlier books in your set to latter ones?

In your lab report, you should link your thoughts and observations about these specific texts to our course readings, which can help you understand the features and effects I want you to attend to.



> *A book is a machine to think with, but it need not, therefore, usurp the functions of either the bellows or the locomotive.*
>
> *I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism*

Possible In-Archive Pairs

1. The "Dragon Prayer Book" (after 1461) and Ovid, *P. Ovidii Nasonis Amatoria* (1546)
2. Wynkin de Worde, *The History of Helyas* (1901; reproduction of 1512 edition) and Guido Bentivoglio, *Relationi fatte in tempo delle sue nuntiature di Fiandra e di Francia* (1629)
3. Buteo Delphinaticus, *Bvteonis Delphinatici Opera Geometrica* (1554) and Benjamin Franklin, *Briefe von der Elektricität* (1758)
4. William Maitland and Others, *The history and survey of London* (1756)

and Karl Baedeker, *The Rhine from Rotterdam to Constance* (1900)

5. Charles Dickens, *Sketches of Young Couples* (1840) and Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1904)
6. Alexander Jones, *Historical Sketch of the Electric Telegraph* (1852) and George W. Pierce, *Principles of Wireless Telegraphy* (1910)
7. Alfred Koehn, *Japanese Tray Landscapes* (1937) and Amaranth Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Page and Screen* (2012)

Digital Books

- Codex Sinaiticus (~350)
- Lindisfarne Gospel (~700)
- Book of Kells (~800)
- Diamond Sutra (868)
- Medieval Bestiary (~1200)
- Sultan Baybars' Qur'an (1306)
- The Golden Haggadah (~1320)
- The Sherborne Missal (~1400)
- The Gutenberg Bible (~1454)
- The Nuremburg Chronicle (1493)
- Hypnerotomachia Poliphili : ubi humana omnia non nisisomnium esse docet atque obiter plurima scitu sane quam digna commemorat (1499)
- Codex Arundel (~1500)
- *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543)
- Shakespeare First Folio (1623)
- Mamusse wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblium God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk VVusku Testament (1663)
- The Mercator Atlas of Europe (~1570)
- Nature Printing (1774)
- *Birds of America* (1838)

Assignments

s19tot.ryancordell.org (https://s19tot.ryancordell.org/assignments/)

Technologies of Text will be assessed using a **contract grading system** (described below). The work of the class will be conducted across these four assignments:

Dead Media Poster

Photo via Wikimedia (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Messenger_pigeon_released_from_British_tank_1918_IWM_Q_9247.jpg)

Unessays

Unessay by former ToT student Laura Packard

Grade Contracts

In this course, you will determine the grade you receive by fulfilling a contract you will submit for my approval on the fourth day of class: **Friday, January 18th**.

Your written contract will detail:

1. the requirements you will meet in order to receive the grade for which you've contracted,
2. the penalties you will incur for not meeting those requirements,
3. a calendar you will follow for meeting the requirements you have outlined. Many aspects of this calendar will be determined by windows outlined on the course schedule, but your contract will take ownership of these deadlines while committing to specific due dates for the course's more flexible assignments.

Why Contract Grading?

As you no doubt know, grading can be a contentious issue in college courses, particularly in writing- and discussion-based courses, where grades can seem arbitrary and contestable. Grading in school does not much resemble the way you will be evaluated in your lives or careers, where you will define many of your own goals and be measured by how responsibly and effectively you achieve them. To quote Cathy Davidson, a professor at CUNY from whom most of my ideas about contract grading are adapted:

> The advantage of contract grading is that you, the student, decide how much work you wish to do this semester; if you complete that work on time and satisfactorily, you will receive the grade for which you contracted. This means planning ahead, thinking about all of your obligations and responsibilities this semester and also determining what grade you want or need in this course. The advantage of contract grading to the professor is no whining, no special pleading, on the students part. If you complete the work you contracted for, you get the grade. Done. I respect the student who only needs a C, who has other obligations that preclude doing all of the requirements to earn an A in the course, and who contracts for the C and carries out the contract perfectly. (This is another one of those major life skills: taking responsibility for your own workflow.)

Contract Details

To fulfill **any** grade contract a student must do the following, which should nonetheless be specified in the contract submitted for approval. When writing self assessments students must describe how they have met these requirements in addition to the grade-specific requirements:

1. Come to class prepared to discuss any assigned readings, videos, or other media. Participate actively in class activities and discussions, making observations and asking questions that help the class think together.
2. Meet with me in person—during office hours or another scheduled time—at least once around midterm—roughly between weeks 5-8—to ensure you are on-track to meet your contract requirements, discuss any questions or concerns you have about the course or your progress, and decide on any necessary contract amendments.
3. Revise contractual assignments as necessary until both you and I consider them “Satisfactory.”

4. Complete a final self-assessment demonstrating that your work has met the agreed requirements, submitting it to Professor Cordell by 5pm on Wednesday, April 24.

"A" Contract

To contract for an "A" in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn "Satisfactory" on all class preparation fieldbook entries save two, meaning you could: miss up to two classes, skip writing up to two class preparation entries, earn "Unsatisfactory" on up to two class preparation entries, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than one information overload day during the semester.
3. Exceed expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Write at least 9 "Satisfactory" lab report fieldbook entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the fieldbook assignment, lab reports are due within one week of the pertinent laboratory activity.
5. Complete two "Satisfactory" Unessays on a schedule you will specify in your contract.

"B" Contract

To contract for an "B" in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn "Satisfactory" on all class preparation fieldbook entries save three, meaning you could: miss up to three classes, skip writing up to three class preparation entries, earn "Unsatisfactory" on up to three class preparation entries, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than two information overload days during the semester.
3. Fully meet expectations expectations regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.

4. Write at least 8 “Satisfactory” lab report fieldbook entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the fieldbook assignment, lab reports are due within one week of the pertinent laboratory activity.
5. Complete one “Satisfactory” Unessay on a schedule you will specify in your contract.

“C” Contract

To contract for an “C” in this course, you agree to:

1. Earn “Satisfactory” on all class preparation fieldbook entries save four, meaning you could: miss up to four classes, skip writing up to four class preparation entries, earn “Unsatisfactory” on up to four class preparation entries, or some combination of these conditions.
2. Take no more than three information overload days during the semester.
3. Generally meet expectation regarding in-class device according to the policies outlined in the device use rubric.
4. Write at least 6 “Satisfactory” lab report fieldbook entries over the course of the semester. As specified in the fieldbook assignment, lab reports are due within one week of the pertinent laboratory activity.
5. Complete one “Satisfactory” Unessay on a schedule you will specify in your contract.

“D” and “F” Grades

I’ve borrowed this clause, too, from Cathy Davidson, because I cannot improve upon it:

> The professor reserves the right to award a grade of D or F to anyone who fails to meet a contractual obligation in a systematic way. A "D" grade denotes some minimal fulfilling of the contract. An "F" is absence of enough satisfactory work, as contracted, to warrant passing of the course. Both a "D" and "F" denote a breakdown of the contractual relationship implied by signing any of the contracts described above.

What About Exceptional (or Mediocre) Work?

I also reserve the right to reward exceptional work throughout the semester using the full range of Northeastern's grading scale. If you contract for a "B," for instance, and submit particularly strong pieces to fulfill that contract, I may elect to raise your contracted grade to a "B+."

Likewise, if you consistently submit mediocre work in fulfillment of your contract, I reserve the right to adjust your grade one half-step down (e.g. from "A" to "A-") or even, in extreme cases, a full step.

Contract Adjustments

Periodically during the semester I will ask you to evaluate your work thus far and compare it against what you agreed in your grade contract. In these moments you can also take the opportunity to request an adjustment to your contract in either direction. If you find that you will be unable to meet the obligations of your contract, you may request to move to the next lowest grade and its requirements. Contrariwise, if you find that you've been performing above the obligations of your contract, you may request to fulfill the requirements for the next higher grade. **Important Note**: In order to effectively evaluate your own progress, you must keep track of your work, including days missed, IO days taken, blogs completed, and so forth.

s19tot.ryancordell.org (https://s19tot.ryancordell.org/assignments/)

Lab Fieldbook Entries

Assignment Overview:

- A growing portfolio of documents, composed in MultiMarkdown and committed to a Github repository
- Students work individually
- Class preparation entries due before the class in question; lab report entries due 1 week after the final session for the pertinent lab
- Some stellar entries will be posted on the course website under Model Fieldbook Entries

Details:

Technologies of Text is an experiential course that moves between discussion of readings and applied "humanities laboratories" each week. A central goal of the class will be to bring its two facets into conversation: to use our readings and discussions to contextualize our applied work in laboratories, and to use our applied work in laboratories to enrich our understanding of concepts from our readings.

To help accomplish this goal, you will maintain a fieldbook, which will constitute your central scholarly activity throughout this semester. I call this assignment a "fieldbook" rather than a "journal" to convey its hybridity: week by week, your entries will include a mix of description, analysis, code, figures, or images. This ongoing assignment will give you the chance to organize the diverse tasks of the class' experiential work, practice the skills introduced in the labs, bring your experiential work into conversation with class readings and personal research, and experiment with ideas that will be further developed in your Unessay projects.

There will be two types of entries in your fieldbooks: **class preparation** and **lab report**.

Class Preparation Entries

For most classes, you will be assigned articles or books to read, files to watch, or websites to browse prior to class. We will discuss strategies for attending closely to these texts throughout the class, but in general you should not skim. You should pay close attention, note interesting ideas, and ask questions. You will like some of our texts and dislike others, but you should engage them all; don't stop at "I like this" or "I don't like this." Instead, think about what the text is trying to say and how it's trying to say it. Think about the choices made by its creator—stylistic, tonal, ideological—and how those choices contribute to the text's success or failure. Compare one text with others, whether from our class, from your other classes, or from independent reading.

In order to help you attend closely to our course texts and prepare for each class, you should prepare 1-2 paragraphs responding to each class' readings. I mean 1-2 paragraphs **in total**, *NOT* 1-2 paragraphs per reading. Your entries should synthesize and bring readings into conversation, and should focus on a few ideas you want to highlight rather than attempting to summarize everything in the readings. Your class prep fieldbook entries can make critical observations about the readings or they may ask questions.

You should draft each class prep fieldbook entry in its own `.md` file, following the naming convention outlined above, and commit it to your fieldbook repository prior to the pertinent class period. *To emphasize: each class preparation entry should be saved as a separate file in your Github repository.*

In order for your class preparation fieldbook entries to be "Satisfactory," they should, in general:

1. Get beyond basic questions or observations of fact and instead work toward questions or observations of significance.
2. Demonstrate close thought about the themes, style, arguments and other

elements of our texts, as well as about the relationships among them.
3. Emerge from (and refer to) specific ideas, pages, quotations, scenes, &c. from our assigned texts rather than broad or generic concepts.
4. Genuinely open toward discussion and debate during class (i.e. no leading the witness, your honor).

Reading responses will be deemed "Unsatisfactory" when they indicate lack of preparation or inattentive reading, and will have consequences as outlined in your grading contract.

Lab Report Entries

Your lab report entries will vary quite a bit from lab to lab. I will often post a prompt for a lab to help start your thinking; you should begin your reports from these prompts.

There are a few elements I will expect to find in each lab report fieldbook entry:

1. A description of the lab activities completed. Most of our experiential activities will include specific outcomes. You might produce a specific material product, such as a letterpress printed sheet, or be asked to adapt the lab's code to answer a new question. The first task of any fieldbook entry will be to demonstrate completion of these tasks. In the case of a coding session, you will likely integrate code snippets directly into your Markdown file (more on this as those labs approach). For other labs you may instead reference external proof of your work, such as photos.

2. Prose that reflects analytically on the work of the lab, putting it into conversation with *one or two* readings *from the same week of class* as the lab. This prose need not be as formal as a research paper, but it should demonstrate careful thought and preparation. You should integrate the readings explicitly, if possible through direct quotation. Use

this writing to experiment with intellectual pairings you think might be generative to your larger thinking and help you prepare for the class' Unessay projects.

Organizing Your Fieldbook

Your fieldbook will be a collection of Markdown or `.md` files collected in a Github Repository. We will learn how to write in Markdown and contribute to a Github repository during the first laboratory (which you will reflect on in your first lab report). You will share the address of your repository with me so that I can check your progress. I may also download particularly strong entries for reposting as Model Student Fieldbooks on the class website.

You should name your files following the following convention:

For class preparation entries:

```
YYYY-MM-DD-classprep-WHAT-WORDS-YOU-WANT.md
```

For lab reports:

```
YYYY-MM-DD-labreport-WHAT-WORDS-YOU-WANT.md
```

Flexibility

ToT is a challenging and full class. The semester will include thirteen chapters and eleven labs. To give you some flexibility, you will complete fieldbook entries as outlined in your course contract, which will mean there will be some class days for which you will not submit class preparation entries, and some labs for which you will not submit reports.

Pacing Your Field Work

Your fieldbook should be a developing record of your thinking about our class and its activities. Thus you should be working on it steadily, responding to the

labs in a timely manner, in part to keep your thinking fresh and in part to avoid falling too far behind as new labs approach.

Class preparation entries are due prior to the pertinent class, while lab report entries are due within one week of the lab session. If a particular lab session extends through multiple classes, its fieldbook entry is due within one week of the final classroom session devoted to it. You may not wait until late in the semester to complete fieldbook entries for activities earlier in the semester, and I will check your fieldbooks periodically to ensure you are working steadily. The coding labs, in particular, will build on each other and you will find it difficult to complete fieldbooks for later coding labs if you do not complete earlier ones.

I regularly assign ongoing assignments in my classes and every semester I strongly urge students to start working early in order to complete the work. Each semester at least a few students ignore this urging, usually to their later dismay. Complications will almost certainly arise during the semester, and if you put off starting your fieldbook entries you will struggle to earn full credit on this assignment.

Why Markdown?

I am asking you to write in Markdown for two primary reasons:

1. Markdown makes it very easy to weave together code and prose, which I see as a necessity for a class that wants to think humanistically about code.

2. Markdown itself will help us think about text and remediation in a very direct way. Writing outside of a GUI (Graphical User Interface) like Word will challenge use to think about the structure of our texts and how that structure translates among different media. I don't want to pretend like the plain text of Markdown is somehow less mediated than a GUI; Markdown is an interface just like Word is an interface. But I suspect it

is an unfamiliar interface for many of you, which will prompt you to think about how interface shapes our interactions with text.

3. Markdown is flexible. A single Markdown document can be instantly translated through a program like Pandoc into HTML, DOCX, PDF or a range of other formats, and we can use these transformations to think through the affordances and limitations of those formats for contemporary writing.

Dead Media Poster Presentation

Assignment Overview:

- A research poster presented in class
- Students should work together in pairs
- Due on February 1
- Claim your dead medium by signing up here

Details:

In "Imagining the New Media Encounter," Alan Liu suggests that "The déjá vu haunting of new by old media is clear enough." New technologies and new modes of communication draw, both technically and metaphorically, from older modes—including "dead media" that have, to all surface appearances, entirely disappeared.

To better understand this haunting, you will work in pairs to research a historical new medium and/or technology that flourished and then faded from popular view: some might call this "media archaeology". These new media might be very old or relatively new: new textual technologies have emerged since the invention of writing, while some popular technologies introduced as recently as a decade ago are already obsolete.

How 'Dead' is Dead?

I would ask that you employ a relatively strict, but not pedantic, definition of "dead media": it should mean less than "completely and totally banished from human culture" and more than "no longer hip." To put this idea another way: a small community of dedicated enthusiasts should not rescue a technology from being called "dead media," but neither should we prematurely kill off a medium that is still in wide use, even if cutting edge users have moved on (think CDs, perhaps).

Resources for Finding a Medium

You might consider this list from the original Dead Media Project or from the Dead Media Archive as you plan your topic. When choosing your medium, opt for the unfamiliar and the strange if at all possible—try to find a medium you suspect your classmates have never heard of, or perhaps one they will *think* they know until its reality surprises them.

The Poster

You and your partner will prepare a conference-style poster to present your "dead medium" to your classmates and instructors. If you've never created a research poster, consult the references on the "poster session" Wikipedia page for writing and design tips. Your poster should address on the following questions:

1. How did this medium innovate, diverge, or respond to even earlier media? What precisely was new about it when it was the "new media?" Remember that for contemporanous people, these media were every bit as strange, exciting, or terrifying as the most cutting edge advances are to us today.
2. What were the cultural effects of this medium during its heyday? Did it produce substantive changes in domestic life, politics, art, or other spheres? Were there cultural changes its creators sought, either successfully or unsuccessfully, to institute through the medium?
3. Were there competing media that attempted to meet the same needs or fill the same niche as your chosen medium? How did this competition play out?
4. How and why did your medium decline in importance?
5. What were the lasting effects or products of your medium? Was it a media "dead end" or did new media evolve from it? How does your medium linger in descendants, images, memory, or language?

You should not attempt on your poster to tell us everything that you might say about your chosen medium in a written paper nor explain its every nuance. When designing think CONCISE, INFORMATIVE, and CREATIVE. Students often choose to create a model or interactive aspect to their poster to help their colleagues understand their medium. The idea here is that the form's restriction (paradoxically) promotes your creativity, as some might argue the formal restrictions of certain poetic forms force the poet toward ever-more-deft feats of language. You will have ample opportunity during the poster session to share more details and anecdotes from your research than you can fit onto your poster itself.

We will hold our dead media poster session on Friday, February 11.

The Unessay

Assignment Overview:

- Form can vary *widely!!*
- Students generally work individually, though I am open to collaborative proposals.
- You will prepare 1 or 2 unessay projects, depending on your contract
- You will present 1 unessay project to your peers on the last day of class.

The Nitty-Gritty

Once or twice this semester you will develop unessay projects.

1. I *highly prize* creative takes on this assignment. Before jumping into typical paper writing mode, consider other media, presentation styles, and modes of critical engagement you might employ instead.
2. This is a hands-on course about media and technology: I would be thrilled to see unessays that *do* rather than (only) *describe*. Consider using your unessay assignments to get your hands dirty (perhaps literally) with some of the media we discuss in class.
3. Take advantage of my advice and help as you develop your unessay ideas. That's what I'm here for!

You may complete your unessays on your own schedule, but they must be turned in by the listed due dates. I would strongly advise you not to put the assignment off. To motivate you to work earlier, I am happy to offer feedback on drafts submitted at least one week in advance of a given deadline. We will also workshop ideas during class sessions well in advance of each deadline.

I will also show you some stellar examples of unessays in the weeks leading up to the first deadline, and would be happy to show you others during office hours. I have a growing collection of stunning student unessay work that I

love revisiting.

Assignment Background

Thanks to Daniel Paul O'Donnell for this brilliant assignment, which I've only slightly modified for our class. For more on the research behind the Unessay assignment, see the work of Emma Dering and Matthew Galea.

The essay is a wonderful and flexible tool for engaging with a topic intellectually. It is a very free format that can be turned to discuss any topic—works of literature, of course, but also autobiography, science, entertainment, history, and government, politics, and so on. There is often something provisional about the essay (its name comes from French *essai*, meaning a trial), and almost always something personal.

Unfortunately, however, as Wikipedia notes,

> *In some countries (e.g., the United States and Canada), essays have become a major part of formal education. Secondary students are taught structured essay formats to improve their writing skills, and admission essays are often used by universities in selecting applicants and, in the humanities and social sciences, as a way of assessing the performance of students during final exams.*

One result of this is that the essay form, which should be extremely free and flexible, is instead often presented as a static and rule-bound monster that students must master in order not to lose marks (for a vigorous defense of the flexible essay, see software developer Paul Graham's blog). Far from an opportunity to explore intellectual passions and interests in a personal style, the essay is transformed into a formulaic method for discussing set topics in five paragraphs: the compulsory figures of academia.

Enter the Unessay

By contrast, the unessay is an assignment that attempts to undo the damage done by this approach to teaching writing. It works by throwing out all the rules you have learned about essay writing in the course of your primary, secondary, and post secondary education and asks you to focus instead solely on your intellectual interests and passions. In an unessay you choose your own topic, present it any way you please, and are evaluated on how compelling and effective you are. Here are the guidelines:

1. **You choose your own topic.** The unessay allows you to write about anything you want provided you are able to associate your topic with the subject matter of the course and unit we are working on. You can take any approach; you can use as few or as many resources as you wish; you can even cite the Wikipedia. The only requirements are that your treatment of the topic be *compelling*: that is to say presented in a way that leaves the reader thinking that you are being accurate, interesting, and as complete and/or convincing as your subject allows.
2. **You can present it any way you please.** There are also no formal requirements. Your unessay can be written in five paragraphs or twenty-six. If you decide you need to cite something, you can do that anyway you want. If you want to use lists, use lists. If you want to write in the first person, write in the first person. If you prefer to present the whole thing as a video, present it as a video. Use slang. Or don't. Write in sentence fragments if you think that would be effective. In other words, in an unessay you have complete freedom of form: you can use whatever style of writing, presentation, citation, or media you want. What is important is that the format and presentation you do use helps rather than hinders your argument about the topic. Perhaps most importantly, the unessay allows you to use media deliberately and thoughtfully. You can create a digital unessay, or you can create an analog project—in fact, many of the most compelling unessays I've seen have been entirely analog.
3. **You are evaluated on how compelling and effective you are.** If unessays can be about anything and there are no restrictions on format and presentation, how are they graded? The main criteria is how well it

all fits together. That is to say, how *compelling* and *effective* your work is.

An unessay is compelling when it shows some combination of the following:

- it is as interesting as its topic and approach allows
- it is as complete as its topic and approach allows (it doesn't leave the audience thinking that important points are being skipped over or ignored)
- it is truthful (any questions, evidence, conclusions, or arguments you raise are honestly and accurately presented)
- it makes an argument, taking a particular point of view on the topic. A good unessay doesn't just describe, it *synthesizes* and *analyzes*.

In terms of presentation, an unessay is effective when it shows some combination of these attributes:

- it is readable/watchable/listenable: i.e. the production values are appropriately high and the audience is not distracted by avoidable lapses in presentation.
- it is well crafted: the assingment's invitation to write in different modes (using slang, etc.) does not mean the unessay needn't be copyedited. Deliberate stylistic choices can help convey your message, while needless errors will distract from your message.
- it is appropriate: i.e. it uses a format and medium that suits its topic and approach.
- it is attractive: i.e. it is presented in a way that leads the audience to trust the author and his or her arguments, examples, and conclusions.

Why Unessays Are Not a Waste of Your Time

The unessay may be quite different from what you are used to doing in English class. If so, a reasonable question might be whether I am wasting your time by assigning them. If you can write whatever you want and present

it any way you wish, is this not going to be a lot easier to do than an actual essay? And is it not leaving you unprepared for subsequent instructors who want you to right the real kind of essays?

The answer to both these questions is no. Unessays are not going to be easier than “real” essays. There have fewer rules to remember and worry about violating (actually there are none). But unessays are more challenging in that you need to make your own decisions about what you are going to discuss and how you are going to discuss it.

And you are not going to be left unprepared for instructors who assign “real” essays. Questions like how to format your page or prepare a works-cited list are actually quite trivial and easily learned. You can look them up when you need to know them and, increasingly, can get your software to handle these things for you anyway. In our class, moreover, I will be giving you separate instruction on what English professors normally expect to see in the essays you submit to them.

But even more importantly, the things you will be doing in an unessay will help improve your “real” ones: excellent “real” essays also match form to topic and are about things you are interested in; if you learn how to write compelling and effective unessays, you’ll find it a lot easier to do well in your “real” essays as well.

Model Unessays

Below are some fantastic digital unessays that students have submitted. These examples don’t necessarily model the *content* of your assignments, as some were completed for classes covering very different topics, but hopefully they will give you a sense of what kinds of work you might complete.

- Operation Critique
- Beyond the Words: Text in Art
- Programming a Medium

- Ada on Ada: A Programmer's Manifesto
- Mixed Korean Scripts and *Hanja* writeup, Korean text, and mixed text
- The Best Story I Ever Wrote, Annotated
- "Fonts and Feelings" movie and writeup
- Know Code (music available on request)
- Unessay Generator
- ESSAIS1580
- The Evolving Album Cover
- Skeuomorphic
- Graffiti and New Media
- Which Text(s) Work(s)?

I have also added some pictures of some elements of physical unessays students have submitted. Most of these were accompanied by written components which I don't reproduce here, but I'm happy to talk about them. I will bring these and some other physical model unessays to class to discuss, or you can peruse them during office hours.