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Studies in Modern American Literature:
Literature, Media, and the Archive
Fall 2011

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:00-2:50pm

Gladfelter 413

Professor Paul Benzon

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CONTACT INFORMATION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

We live in a profoundly archival moment. Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, recently claimed that the human race currently produces as much data every two days as it did from the dawn of humanity to 2003. While the validity of Schmidt's claim has been widely debated, such a statistic nonetheless suggests that our relationship to information—as producers, collectors, and consumers—is undergoing dramatic changes in both kind and degree. Such changes raise numerous cultural, philosophical, and technological questions: how can we come to terms with a repository of information so great that it could effectively never be fully studied? Is it even possible to comprehend such an archive, and if so, how might our understandings of the human condition change as a result? What relations are there between the vast public archive of the Internet and the personal archives that we each develop as individuals within this culture? In what ways does the digital archive represent a dramatic break from the archive of the print analog world, and in what ways does it retain the characteristics of that earlier moment in media history? How might we see collecting, maintaining, or circulating an archive as an artistic or political action? Are archivists authors? Are authors archivists?

In this course, we will consider these and other questions as we explore the ways in which contemporary authors represent, respond to, and employ the archive in their writing. We'll think about what such massive accumulations of data (in print and digital forms, and in textual, visual, and sonic media) have to tell us about questions of time, space, perception, history, narrative, authorship, and the politics of identity, and we'll consider how authors work to harness or resist the possibilities and pressures of the archive in various ways. With these issues in mind, the course is designed as a culminating intellectual experience for the English major that will allow you to think about important literary and cultural questions in complex new ways. At the same time that we approach these questions, we will also work to broaden our understanding of literary study and research through the step-by-step development of an extended research project over the course of the semester. The ultimate goal of the course, then, is for you to find an area of inquiry within our material that interests and excites you, to pose relevant and productive research questions in relation to that area of inquiry, and to master the skills of academic research and writing that will help you answer those questions in thoughtful ways.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Franz Lidz, *Ghostly Men* (ISBN 9781582343112)

Craig Dworkin, *The Perverse Library* (ISBN 9781907468032)

Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (ISBN 9780140152746)

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (ISBN 0618871713)

Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (ISBN 0375703764)

Selected other literature and articles (marked with an asterisk and available on Blackboard or online as noted)

The book versions listed above are available at the Temple University bookstore. If you choose to order books elsewhere online, be sure that you order versions with the ISBN numbers listed above, and that you allow time for all books to arrive before we will be using them in class.

Materials on Blackboard must be printed out and brought to class on the days we will be discussing them. I recommend that you print this material out at the beginning of the semester and keep it all together so that you will have it in hand well before it is due.

COURSE INFORMATION AND POLICIES

Welcome to our course. The following pages explain the course policies and procedures so that you will be able to do your best work, learn as much as possible, and enjoy yourself in our course. If you have any questions, at any time, please do not hesitate to ask me.

Grading

You must complete all of the following course assignments in order to pass the course:

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|--|------|
| Participation | 20% |
| Course Blog | 14% |
| Mascot Naming | 1% |
| Short Analytical Paper | 10% |
| Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography | 7.5% |
| Seminar Paper First Draft | 7.5% |
| Peer Reviews | 5% |
| Seminar Paper Final Draft | 35% |

Attendance

Consistent attendance, preparation, and participation are crucial to your success in this course. I will expect that you come to class on time and ready to work. **More than four absences will have a negative impact on your final course grade, and more than five absences will result in your failing the course. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences.** Thus these absences are meant to cover illnesses, personal emergencies, job obligations, and any and all other contingencies that might keep you from class. Latenesses and early departures of more than 10 minutes will each be considered equal to half an absence (however, even if you are more than 10 minutes late, or if you will need to leave class more than 10 minutes early, you should still always come to class). If you miss class, it is your responsibility to keep up with the work—make sure to turn in any written work that was due for the day, and check the course blog and course website on Blackboard or come see me during my office hours to see what you might have missed in class.

Preparation, Participation, and Class Structure

We will spend our class time each day on a variety of different activities, including full-class discussions, small-group discussions, presentations, screenings, in-class writing, and writing workshop sessions. Because of the intimate and intensive nature of this course, the responsibility for driving these activities lies with you more so than in a lecture or regular upper-level course, so your active engagement and participation are an integral part of this course. While I may occasionally give short lectures, the bulk of our time will be spent talking and engaging together with the course material and with each other's ideas in a variety of contexts. In order to do this, it is essential that you come to class prepared to address the day's material. This means completing all reading before class, bringing a hard copy of the reading to class, and being prepared to discuss the reading thoughtfully. You should have notes, interpretations, questions, and responses to share with the class, and you should be prepared to offer these and to be called on in our conversation. More generally, I expect each of you to approach the course with a sense of responsibility and ownership. The more each of you brings your own thinking to the discussion, the more all of us will get out of class—I encourage you to offer perspectives, ideas, examples, oppositions, questions, and other contributions as much as possible. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in class, please let me know or come see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can work together to make things easier for you.

Although I will lecture rarely, if ever, that does not mean that you should not take notes on what the class has to say about the material we are discussing, just as you would in a lecture course. Even when it seems as if we are “just talking” about a reading, a piece of culture, or something else, you should still be actively

thinking and writing—do not let the discussion just pass you by without actively engaging it, even if only as a listener at certain moments. Having a record of the class' comments, opinions, debates, etc., will be extremely valuable to you in preparing to develop topics and areas of inquiry for further research and writing in the course.

All phones, iPods, and other technological devices should be turned off and kept in your bag or pocket for the duration of class. Sleeping, texting, listening to music, inappropriate computer use, talking outside of class discussion, and other similar behaviors are disrespectful to me and to your classmates and disruptive of our work in class. Students who engage in such behaviors will be asked to leave class and marked absent for the day.

Course Blog

Over the course of the semester, we will all post regularly to a course blog focused on the texts and issues we will be discussing in class. This work will serve both immediate and longer-term goals: firstly (and most immediately), it will give you a chance to think critically about some of the course material before we discuss it in class and to gear our discussion towards issues and questions that are important to you. More broadly, by giving you the opportunity to bring new material and new areas of concern into our conversation, it will help you to generate topics and ideas for further research.

Note that the blog is located at <http://literaturemediaarchive.wordpress.com/>, **not on Blackboard** (although we will use Blackboard for email, papers, and other elements of the course). You are not required to register with WordPress in order to post on the blog, but you must subscribe to the blog so that you receive notifications of new material that I post. The most recent main post will appear at the top of the page—click on the comments link for that post to read what others have written and post your response.

Blog Content. Your work on the blog will take different forms at different points in the semester. Sometimes I will post a prompt for you to respond to, while at other times your posts can be more open-ended; sometimes I will ask you to address a particular passage or other element from the reading, while at other times I will ask you to think about a broader literary, cultural, or technological phenomenon. The blog is a space for us as a group to be reflective about the material we are discussing, and to begin to air initial responses, interpretations, and reactions before we pursue them more fully in class discussion. In this spirit, your posting to the blog should be thoughtful and analytical—you should offer interpretations and questions rather than summaries. Because a blog allows discussion to happen over time, you should always read what has already been posted to the blog on a given week before you make your own post, and you should try to address that material in what you say—thoughtful responses that oppose, expand, rethink, complicate, or otherwise complement what others have written are as helpful and meaningful as “standalone” comments (if not more so). I will participate in conversations as they develop as well as posting opening threads.

Each post should be at least 300 words—you might write and edit your post in Microsoft Word or a similar program so that you know the length of your post and so that you have a backup of it on your computer. I will often ask you to include images, links, video clips, and other media elements in your posts—this is fairly easy to do and we will discuss it in class at the beginning of the course.

Blog Scheduling. Unless I specify otherwise, there will be a blog post due before each Monday class. In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to read one another's comments and absorb the online discussion before we meet on Monday, your posts are due by **midnight on Sunday night**. The notable exceptions to this schedule are the first few posts of the semester and the posts for *House of Leaves*, where we will be following an alternate plan (I will provide details regarding this shortly). Because of the time-sensitive nature of the blog, late posts will not receive credit.

Blog Grading. I will grade your blog posts on a \surd , $\surd+$, $\surd-$ basis each week. I will decide your grade based on the your engagement with the text and your consideration of and response to other students' posts.

Mascot Naming

The three men on the cover of this syllabus are our class mascots, our guides through the complex world of literature, media, and the archive. They will appear frequently throughout the course—on the course blog, on assignment sheets and handouts, and in other as-yet unknown locations. They are also the subject of a semester-long contest in our class to name the mascots. Over the course of the semester, as we read, discuss, and research, you should be thinking of names to give to these figures—humor, relevance to our course material and discussions, and creativity are all encouraged. There is a separate thread on our course blog to post suggestions—everyone must post at least one suggestion over the semester, although you may post as many suggestions as you like at any time. The student who suggests the best set of names will receive a 2% bonus to his/her blog grade. Entries will be judged on the basis of originality and relevance to the subject matter of the course.

Short Analytical Paper

You will write one short analytical paper, four to six double-spaced typed pages in twelve-point font. This paper is intended to give you an opportunity to apply the skills of literary interpretation we will develop in class in a larger context, both in terms of particular texts and in relation to the broader themes and questions of the course. It is also an opportunity to explore possible topics for research and writing later in the course. This paper should go beyond summary or evaluation to make a larger argument about the text(s) you are discussing based on close readings of multiple passages: beyond just tracing a character or theme at a general level, you should consider carefully **how** the author represents those things through the language of the text and advance an interpretive viewpoint about **why** he or she does that and the larger significance of that act. The strongest papers will offer original, individual arguments that add to or go beyond the ideas and examples raised in class discussion.

Seminar Paper

The seminar paper is the main assignment of the course, and it will occupy much of our work over the second half of the semester. Because good academic research is a developmental process that requires time, exploration, reflection, dialogue, and revision, we will break the work of writing this paper down into several sequential assignments. As we proceed through this work, you should be sure to keep both paper and electronic copies of each stage of your paper and of all feedback you receive from me and from your classmates. Each stage of the process is explained briefly below; I will provide more in-depth instructions for each assignment over the semester:

Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography. Your research proposal should be a formal, yet provisional discussion of what you want to explore in your seminar paper. You should propose a topic that is specific enough to write about in a focused way, yet also complex and large enough for you to engage in an extended analysis, and you should contextualize this topic within the issues and questions of our class work. In proposing your topic, you should also raise a set of tentative research questions that you hope to explore through your work. Your annotated bibliography should include citations and descriptions for a range of scholarly and creative sources that you plan to explore and engage with for your paper. You will document and share your research for your bibliography and for subsequent work on your seminar paper using the Firefox browser extension Zotero; I will provide you with instructions for setting up Zotero and using it in our class, and we will practice this before the proposal and bibliography are due.

Seminar Paper First Draft. Your first draft of the seminar paper should be a substantive first attempt to engage with some of the questions and issues of your topic, and should incorporate substantive outside research. It does not have to be a polished finished product, but it should be at least 10-12 pages of writing, and should be in formal paper format rather than in rough notes.

Peer Reviews. Because revision and response to feedback are important parts of this course, you will circulate your first draft for feedback from me and from your peers; each student will give feedback to and receive feedback from at least two peers. I will explain the procedure for this as the time draws closer.

Seminar Paper Final Draft. The final draft of your seminar paper is due at our last class meeting on Wednesday, December 7. It should be 20-25 pages in length (not including a full Works Cited listing) and should represent significant revision, expansion, and further research from your first draft.

I will grade all written work (not including blog posts) based on the rubric at the end of this syllabus. Late work will be marked down one grade level for each class period after the due date (for example, from a B+ to a B for one late day). Extensions will only be granted in the case of an emergency documented by a college dean.

Technology Policy

Technology and the archive are not only a subject of this course, but also frequent tools in our work together: in addition to posting on the class blog, you will be handing in papers electronically and conducting, capturing, and sharing your research online, and many of the texts we will read are available online (some of them only online). These tasks will require some basic familiarity with computers and the internet; we will explore the specific applications we will be using in class together. More broadly, in addition to familiarizing yourself with these tools, you are responsible for making sure that you have the technological tools and access necessary to keep up with the reading and writing for the course. Expect that you will have technological problems at some point in the semester, and plan accordingly. I recommend that you do this in a few ways: save frequently, back up your work using a website such as mybackpack.temple.edu or dropbox.com (I recommend the latter) as well as a USB drive, make sure you have access to alternate computers and printers (a friend's or roommate's, a lab in the library or TECH Center, etc.), and leave yourself time to use these backup resources rather than relying on everything working perfectly at the last second. If you have questions about how to use any of these resources (or anything else technology-related), don't hesitate to come ask me.

Office Hours and Additional Help

This course is meant to be a culminating experience in your work as an English major at Temple, and I want each of you to grow intellectually and to be as successful in this class as possible. Helping each of you develop as scholarly readers, researchers, and writers is important to me, and I want to do what I can to help you achieve those goals. Equally importantly, I love thinking about the material of this course and exploring it with students, and I would love for you to get the same enjoyment from it that I do. If you have any questions, problems, or things you want to discuss—about the course, the readings, writing assignments or paper ideas, career directions, or anything else at all—or if you simply want to talk more about what we're doing in class, please come see me. My office hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 12:50-1:50pm in Anderson Hall 1127—this time is set aside for us to talk and for me to help you and work with you. If you aren't free during that time, get in touch with me before or after class or by email and we can set up a time that is more convenient. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are having trouble or feel you need help.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Independent thinking is a crucial component of your work in this course. **If you plagiarize, you will fail the course.** If you are uncertain about anything, ask **before** you hand in the work. The following rules cover several basic concerns involving plagiarism. If you are in any way uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to consult me.

- a) The language in your paper must be either your own or a direct quote from the original author.
- b) Changing a few words or phrases from another writer's work is not enough to make the writing your own. The writing is either your own or the other person's; there are no in-betweens.
- c) In-text citation and an accurate bibliography acknowledge that the fact or opinion expressed comes from another writer. If the language comes from another writer, quotation marks are necessary, in addition to a correct citation.

Disability Statement

This course is open to all students who meet the academic requirements for participation. Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 in 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Statement on Academic Freedom

Freedom to teach and freedom to learn are inseparable facets of academic freedom. The University has adopted a policy on Student and Faculty Academic Rights and Responsibilities (Policy# 03.70.02) which can be accessed through the following link: policies.temple.edu.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule of readings below may change over the course of the semester. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of these changes by attending class, checking your email and the class blog regularly, and contacting me or coming to my office if you have any questions.

Archive Fevers: Hoarding, Cataloging, Remembering, Burning

- Mon. August 29 Course Introduction
- Wed. August 31 *Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library"
*Kenneth Goldsmith, "Archiving Is The New Folk Art"
*Daniel de Vise, "Old Dominion U. Professor Is Trying to Save Internet History"
Introductory Blog Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. September 2 *Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel," "Funes the Memorious"
- Mon. September 5 **No Class: Labor Day**
- Wed. September 7 Franz Lidz, *Ghostly Men* 1-78
*Ilya Kabakov, "The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away"
Blog Post Due Midnight Tuesday
- Fri. September 9 Franz Lidz, *Ghostly Men* 79-end
- Mon. September 12 Craig Dworkin, *The Perverse Library* 1-45
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
- Wed. September 14 Craig Dworkin, *The Perverse Library* 46-end
- Fri. September 16 *Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever" (selections)
- Mon. September 19 *Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (selections)
*Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)* (selections)
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
- Wed. September 21 **Class Visit to Paley Library Special Collections Department**

Literary Authorship and Media Archives

- Fri. September 23 Don DeLillo, *Mao II* 1-93
- Mon. September 26 Don DeLillo, *Mao II* 94-171
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday
- Wed. September 28 Don DeLillo, *Mao II* 172-end
- Fri. September 30 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* 1-86
- Mon. October 3 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* 87-151
Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday

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| Wed. October 5 | Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic</i> 151-end |
| Fri. October 7 | No Class: Work on Short Analytical Paper and Possible Research Directions |
| Mon. October 10 | Research Workshop: Theories and Techniques *Wayne Booth, <i>The Craft of Research</i> (selections) Short Analytical Paper Due |
| Wed. October 12 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> through page 54 NB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read all materials—appendices, footnotes, exhibits, etc.—as they are referred to in the text, not at the end • Blogging for <i>House of Leaves</i> will work differently than for the rest of the course; details to come |
| Fri. October 14 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 55-79 (including appendix material 584-644) and additional articles to be assigned |
| Mon. October 17 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 80-245 |
| Wed. October 19 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 246-312 |
| Fri. October 21 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 312-384 |
| Mon. October 24 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 384-463 |
| Wed. October 26 | Mark Z. Danielewski, <i>House of Leaves</i> 463-528 |
| Fri. October 28 | Research Topic Workshop Research Proposal and Annotated Bibliography Due |

The Digital Archive

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| Mon. October 31 | *William Gibson, “Agrippa” http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/source/agrippa.asp Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday |
| Wed. November 2 | *William Gibson, “Agrippa” continued *Matthew Kirschenbaum, “Text Messaging: The Transformations of ‘Agrippa’” |
| Fri. November 4 | No Class: Conferences on Research Proposals |
| Mon. November 7 | Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar, <i>We Feel Fine</i> http://wefeelfine.org Jonathan Harris, <i>The Whale Hunt</i> http://www.thewhalehunt.org *Mark Sample, “The Poetics of Metadata and the Potential of Paradata (Revised)” http://www.samplereality.com/2011/03/22/the-poetics-of-metadata-and-the-potential-of-paradata/ Blog Post Due Midnight Sunday |

- Wed. November 9 *Lev Manovich, "Database as a Genre of New Media"
http://vv.arts.ucla.edu/AI_Society/manovich.html
 *Other Articles TBA
- Fri. November 11 Diana Taylor, "The Digital as Anti-Archive?"
http://provost.duke.edu/speaker_series/images/taylor.mov
 *Mark Sample, "The Archive or the Trace: Cultural Permanence and the Fugitive Text"
<http://www.samplereality.com/2010/01/18/the-archive-or-the-trace-cultural-permanence-and-the-fugitive-text/>
- Mon. November 14 **Seminar Paper First Draft Due**
- Wed. November 16 Writing Workshop
Peer Review One Due
- Fri. November 18 **No Class: Conferences on Paper Drafts**
- Mon. November 21 Writing Workshop
Peer Review Two Due
- Wed. November 23 Writing Workshop: Directions for Revision and Further Development
- Fri. November 25 **No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday**
- Mon. November 28 *Wayne Booth, *The Craft of Research* (selections)
- Wed. November 30 Final Revisions, Reflections, and Polishings
 *Wayne Booth, *The Craft of Research* (selections)
- Fri. December 2 Seminar Conference
- Mon. December 5 Seminar Conference
- Wed. December 7 **Final Class: Seminar Paper Final Draft Due**

| | Argument | Topic and Source Material | Textual Analysis | Organization and Structure | Language and Mechanics |
|----------|---|---|---|--|--|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a thought-provoking, original, independent argument that goes beyond the scope of class discussion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topic raises provocative, original questions Source material is comprehensive, creative, and serves the argument well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument by analyzing text(s) in original, unexpected ways and/or by using unexpected passages/ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument in a way that is flexible and open to different sides of a question Movement through the paper is fluid and clearly visible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is polished and sophisticated Free from mechanical errors |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes an argument that addresses ideas and issues that begin in class discussion, but adds to those ideas and issues in new ways | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topic is somewhat in the realm of class discussion but expands it somewhat Source material is appropriate and serves argument well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzes text(s) accurately and intelligently Works mostly with basic concepts and passages, but also introduces new material and/or new interpretations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument in a way that is largely linear, but offers some moments of flexibility and surprise Movement through the paper is easy to follow | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is competent Mechanical errors are frequent and often serious |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely repeats basic, general ideas from class without adding to them Makes overly broad or obvious claims about the text or topic Argument is undeveloped, more of a topic than a debatable claim | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topic largely repeats questions and issues from class without adding to them Sources are limited, misinterpreted, inappropriate, infrequently used, or otherwise fail to meet requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largely works with passages from class discussion without adding any new analysis Some moments of misreading or under-reading of text(s) Work with text(s) is summary or personal reaction rather than interpretation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops argument in a way that is repetitive or confusing; multiple examples that reiterate a single idea without developing upon it Movement through the paper is often weak or difficult to follow | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is too casual and colloquial for the assignment Mechanical errors severe and frequent enough to partially impede meaning |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no recognizable argument Consists mainly of plot summary or uncritical “review”-type reactions to the text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no clear topic; a series of disconnected or overly general comments or observations Source material is severely limited, underused, or inappropriate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not work with text(s) frequently enough or in enough depth to support argument Frequent moments of misreading or under-reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little or no thought to organization or development of argument Movement through the paper is unclear | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is sloppy and shows very little care or attention Errors impede meaning Paper is much shorter than the assigned length Contains plagiarized material |
| F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No recognizable argument Relies on serious misunderstandings or misunderstandings of the text Shows little or no comprehension of the text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No clear topic Source material is entirely absent, plagiarized, or otherwise highly problematic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No textual analysis Textual analysis shows serious misunderstandings of text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No development of argument No sense of organization or movement through the paper | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is sloppy and shows very little care or attention Errors impede meaning Paper is much shorter than the assigned length Contains plagiarized material |