

*"Everything in the world exists in order to end in a book."*  
—Stéphane Mallarmé

## ENGL 759C: BookLab



"Stairs of Improvement," by Anne Marie Kloosterhof  
<https://annemariekekloosterhof.com/portfolio/book-art-series/>

Spring 2020

University of Maryland

Dr. Matthew Kirschenbaum

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he/him/his

Tuesdays 6:30 – 9:00pm, Tawes 3248

Office Hours by appointment

### Introduction

The bite of hard metal type into handmade paper where ink pools in the recesses pressed by the weight of the letters; a literal subtext on the page surfaced through acts of erasure; the hot liquid polymers of 3D-printed objects, deposited in tiny incremental layers to make shapes; lines of circuitry written into lines of text and animated with current; a book that tweets at you; a book that is also a toy box; a book that becomes what the poet and printer William Blake once called an "unnam'd form" (see last page of syllabus). Taught with the resources and facilities available in BookLab (Tawes 3248), this course will be a historical, imaginative, and experiential introduction to the multitudinous forms of what is not the oldest but is surely among the most enduring of human technologies, the codex book.

Our work will be organized around practical and in-depth explorations of different elements of the codex: papermaking, letterpress printing with traditional lead and wood (movable) type, bookbinding, 3-D printing, altered and treated books, and so on. Our historical perspective will be predominantly but not exclusively Western. Class-time will be a mix of discussion and hands-on activity. Using BookLab's rich collections we will look at the work of contemporary book artists and printers as well as predecessors; we will try out various experiments with books at the interface between print and the digital, including examples of books as portals for augmented and virtual reality; we'll read a mixed media novel, Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves*; and we will discuss throughout the politics of books as some of the most powerful instruments ever made for consolidating and exercising social hegemony as well as books as tactical platforms for resistance. In addition, we will enjoy visits and workshops from critics and artists, as well as excursions to the nearby studios of Pyramid Atlantic (one of the preeminent book arts studios in the country) and the Library of Congress.

#### Books to Buy

These are required, and may be sourced from any quality bookseller:

- Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book* (MIT Press, 2018)
- Mark Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (Pantheon, 2000); Remastered Full Color print edition only please
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf, 2014); any edition; used copies—i.e., older printings and editions—especially welcome
- Sarah Werner, *Studying Early Printed Books* (Wiley, 2018)

#### Grading and Requirements

The distribution of requirements and their percentage of your final grade is as follows:

- Final Project: 60%
- Book Report: 20%
- Discussion Postings: 20%

The Final Project will be an original book object of your own making, broadly defined; it might take the form of an artist's book or chapbook, a treated or altered book, a book "kit," or something else entirely. You are required to meet with me to discuss your final project at least once before the end of the semester. You will also submit a 1000-word artist's statement to accompany it describing the concept and ambitions for the project, its influences, your technical process, and challenges. Both will be due in BookLab by Monday, May 18.

The Book Report will be based on any one book, either creative or scholarly, on the shelves in BookLab, 1200-1500 words. It will have two components: a write-up according to a template I will distribute, and a lightning presentation (5½ minutes, strictly timed) to the class. It may be completed at any time during the semester, but must be completed

by [April 14](#). Please contact me individually about scheduling your presentation, the sooner the better.

Finally, [Discussion Postings](#), which should be framed as responses to in-class activities, assigned readings, and/or the reserve materials in BookLab. The requirement is for a minimum of three substantive posts (1000-1200 words) throughout the semester: at least one must be posted [before Feb. 18](#); at least two must be posted [before March 10](#); and at least three must be posted [by April 28](#). These will be evaluated by me collectively as part of your final grade (as opposed to individually), and I will also take into account commenting in response to the postings of others.

#### About BookLab

BookLab is the Department's dedicated space for the study of books as material, cultural, and imaginative artifacts; it is a makerspace, a library, a press, and a studio. We will be using BookLab's resources extensively throughout the semester; you should think of it as your default workspace. You will have access to the printing presses and type collection there, the 3D printer, and other tools and materials. Additional items for reading and browsing each week will be kept there on reserve for you.

If there's a book you want that we don't already [have on our shelves](#), ask us and we may be able to order it; if there's something you need for your project that we don't have on hand, ask us and we'll try to get it; if there's something you want to do but don't know how, ask us and we may be able to help (or point you to someone else who can). You never need a specific reason or a task to be in BookLab; feel free to just drop by and sit on our couch, heat up some water for tea or cocoa, think, play, make a mess (as long as you clean it up), and hang out.

BookLab will be staffed this semester by myself and three GAs, Mal Haselberger, Dylan Lewis, and Britt Starr. Open hours for the semester are posted on the door. You may reach us collectively at [booklab@umd.edu](mailto:booklab@umd.edu) and follow us on Twitter and Instagram at [@umd\\_booklab](#).

#### Policies

This course will operate according to the [University of Maryland Graduate School's policies](#). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with those policies and to ask me if you have a question about any of them or how they apply to this course. Some additional points follow.

**Diversity:** UMD English considers the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff to be critical to its educational mission and expects every member of the community to contribute to an inclusive and respectful culture in the classroom, work environment, and at campus events. It is my intent that students from diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and learning needs be well served by this course and that the diversity students bring to class be viewed as a resource and strength.

Dimensions of diversity include intersections of sex, race, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, intellectual and physical ability, primary language, faith and non-faith perspectives, income, political affiliation, marital or family status, education, and any other legally protected class. I endeavor to present materials and activities that foster a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Please let me know of ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or other students or student groups.

If you experience issues related to diversity and inclusion in your English courses or as part of the English department community—or if you have suggestions for improving diversity, inclusion, equity, and access in the department—please contact our Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee at: [englishidea@umd.edu](mailto:englishidea@umd.edu).

**Academic Integrity:** The University is one of a small number of universities with a student-administered [Code of Academic Integrity](#) and an [Honor Pledge](#). The Code prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. All students in this class are expected to abide by the terms of this code at all times and are assumed to be operating under its strictures. More information is available here: <http://www.shc.umd.edu/SHC/Default.aspx>.

**Attendance:** University policy excuses the absences of students for illness (self or dependent), religious observances, required military service, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, and extreme extenuating circumstances beyond the student's control.

That said, this class is a commitment, and relies upon a dedicated commitment tendered by us all. You are expected to be present for each and every class meeting—remember, missing a single graduate class is the equivalent of missing a full week of undergraduate work. Moreover, given the hands-on nature of this class in particular, much of our work will be unreproducible outside of scheduled class sessions. It cannot be made up in a meaningful way. If you accrue multiple absences, whether “excused” or “unexcused,” I reserve the option to schedule a conversation with you in the presence of the Director of Graduate Studies to assess your circumstances in light of the commitment necessary to perform satisfactory graduate-level work and to discuss appropriate measures.

**Disabilities:** The University will provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. In order to ascertain what accommodations may need to be provided, students with disabilities should inform the instructors of their needs at the beginning of the semester. They will make arrangements with the student to determine and implement appropriate academic accommodations. Students should also register with Disability Support Services (DSS) <http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS> (301-314-7682).

**Canvas (ELMS):** The class is listed on Canvas (ELMS). We will use the ELMS site to distribute readings and host our online discussion forum. Course news and announcements will also be distributed through ELMS. Please make sure you have a current email address recorded in ELMS and that you check that address regularly; and that your spam filter is not blocking ELMS messages. You are responsible for the content of any ELMS announcement 24 hours after it has been distributed.

**Social Media:** From time to time I will wish to take photos of class activities for posting on either BookLab or the English department's social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram). If you would prefer not to appear in any such images, just tell me so: no reason or explanation is necessary, and it will not prejudice your standing in the class in any way. I will generally not name/tag people without their explicit permission, but if you know that you never want to be named or tagged in a public image please tell me and I will make a note of it. If you tweet or otherwise post anything from class yourself, I ask that you follow these same guidelines out of consideration for your classmates (I am fine with photos, and am fine with being identified or tagged by name or as "@mkirschenbaum" if you so wish). Likewise, I will want to document your final projects with photos and/or video—I will distribute a separate release form specifically for final projects when the time comes.

Course Schedule

Unless otherwise indicated, all readings are either available as PDFs in the Files folder on Canvas or else are directly linked to online. Readings from the texts you own are indicated as such. Almost all weeks also include a selection of books or other materials that will be available for your inspection on a dedicated reserve shelf in BookLab. These are not optional: they are required elements of your weekly preparation, and you should plan to spend the necessary time in BookLab browsing them. Budget an average of one hour for a typical week's reserve readings, though it's possible to spend considerably longer if you like!

1/28 Openings

Readings: Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book*; Alyssa Rosenberg, "[If You Love Books Do Not Cut Them in Half](#)"; Alex Christofi, "[I Am the 'Book Murderer'](#)"

2/4 The Natures of the Book

Readings: Adrian Johns, from *The Nature of the Book*; Kirschenbaum, "Bibliologistics: The Nature of the Book Now, or a Memorable Fancy" (forthcoming); Ulises Carrion, "The New Art of Making Books"; Claire Squires and Beth Driscoll, "[Oh Look, a Ferry; Or, the Smell of Printed Books](#)"; Ken Liu, "[The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species](#)"

In BookLab: Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, eds., *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*; Abelardo Morrell, *A Book of Books*; Garrett Stewart, *The Look of Reading*; Drucker, *A Century of Artist's Books*; Marcia Reed and Glenn Phillips, *Artists and Their Books*; Michael Olmert, *The Smithsonian Book of Books*

2/11 Papermaking (class meets at 6:30pm at [Pyramid Atlantic Art Center](#); guest instructor Ms. [Gretchen Schermerhorn](#))

Readings: Nicholas Basbanes, from *On Paper*, “Road Trip,”; Jonathan Senchyne, from *The Intimacy of Paper in Early and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, “Introduction” and “The Whiteness of the Page”

In BookLab: Jonathan Bloom, *Paper Before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World*; Senchyne, *The Intimacy of Paper*; Nicholas A. Basbanes, *On Paper: The Everything of its Two-Thousand Year History*; Mark Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*

2/18 Anatomy of a Book

Reading: Sarah Werner, 1-78, 102-114; Charles Chesnutt, “Baxter’s Procrustes”; Drucker, “The Myth of the Democratic Multiple”

Viewing: “[The Anatomy of a Book](#)” (30 min)

In BookLab: “Anatomy of a Book Workbook”; Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*; Holbrook Jackson, *The Anatomy of Bibliomania*; Keith Houston, *The Book*; Dennis Duncan and Adam Smyth, *Book Parts*; Nicholas D. Nace, *Catch-words*

Reminder: Discussion Posting Due

2/25 Architectures of the Page

Readings: Werner, 79-101; Bonnie Mak, from *How the Page Matters*; Jerome McGann, from *A New Republic of Letters*, “A Page from Cooper”

Viewing: [Proceed and Be Bold: Amos Kennedy Documentary](#) (1:34:00)

In BookLab: Mak, *How the Page Matters*; Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*; Timothy Donaldson, *Shapes for Sounds*; Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un coup de Dés* (and Zboya “translation”); Drucker, *The Word Made Flesh*; Tyehimba Jess, *Olio*; American Type Foundry, *Specimen Book and Catalog*, 1923

3/3 Letterpress I

Readings: M. Sophia Newman, "[So, Gutenberg Didn't Actually Invent the Printing Press](#)"; Joseph A. Dane, "Meditation on the Composing Stick"; Jerome McGann, from *The Textual Condition*, "Beyond the Valley of Production, or *De factorum natura*: A Dialogue"; Shef Rogers, "How Many T's Had Ezra Pound's Printer?"; Marcy J. Dinius, "Look!! Look!!! at This!!!!": The Radical Typography of David Walker's "Appeal"

In BookLab: browse letterpress titles on how-to shelf; P. H. Bellas, *Women Printers in Early Maryland*; Lois Rather, *Women as Printers*; Stanley Plumly, *Nostalgia*; Briggette Fielder and Senchyne, *Against a Sharp White Background*

March 4 and 5: AMOS Paul KENNEDY Jr. VISIT



Please Hold:

Wednesday 3/4 1 - 5pm (workshop)  
Thursday 3/5 3:30 - 5pm (Petrou lecture)

### 3/10 Letterpress II

Readings: William Blake Archive, [About Illuminated Printing](#); Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, "An Inquiry Into William Blake's Method of Color Printing"; Essick and Viscomi, "[Blake's Method of Color Printing: Some Responses and Further Observations](#)"

In BookLab: Michael Phillips, *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs of Innocence and of Experience from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing*; Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*; Morris Eaves, *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy: Art and Industry in the Age of Blake*; William Blake Trust Facsimiles

Reminder: Discussion Posting Due

3/17 SPRING BREAK

### 3/24 This is Not For You

Reading: Mark Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (through XII)

In BookLab: Other Danielewski titles

3/31 Houses of Leaves

Reading: Finish *House of Leaves*

In BookLab: Johanna Drucker, *Fragile*; Anne Carson, *Nox*; B. S. Johnson, *The Unfortunates*; Aldren A. Watson, *Hand Bookbinding*; Alisa Golden, *Making Handmade Books*; Hedi Kyle and Ulla Warchol, *The Art of the Fold*

4/7 Altered States

Leah Price, from *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, “Reader’s Block” and “It-Narrative: The Book as Agent”; Jessica Pressman, “Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Tree of Codes*: Memorial, Fetish, Bookishness”; Pressman, “Bookwork and Bookishness: An Interview with Doug Berube and Brian Dettmer”

In BookLab: Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes*; Jen Bervin, *Nets*; Tom Phillips, *A Humument*; Garret Stewart, *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art*; Mindell Dubansky, *Books: The Art of Books that Aren’t*; Lisa Occhipinti, *The Repurposed Library*

4/14 Between Page and Screen

Readings: Browse [The Agrippa Files](#); browse Borsuk, et. al., [Abra: A Living Text](#); Borsuk, et. al., *Abra*; Borsuk, et. al., *The Abra Codex Kit*; Lisa Gitelman, “[Emoji Dick and the Eponymous Whale](#)”; Élika Ortega, “[Not a Case of Words](#)”; Garrett Stewart, “From Codex to Codecs”

In BookLab: Fred Benenson, ed., *Emoji Dick*; Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Page and Screen*; *Abra* app (on iPad), *Abra* (1913 Press edition); Rollin Milroy, *About Agrippa: A Book of the Dead*; Augmented reality pop-up books; *The Book of Pop-Up Board Games*

Reminder: Book Reports Due

4/21 3D Printing

Readings: Jentery Sayers, et. al., “Between Bits and Atoms: Physical Computing and Desktop Fabrication in the Humanities”; Debbie Chachra, “[Why I am Not a Maker](#)”; Cory Doctorow, “[PrintCrime](#)”; Philip K. Dick, “Pay for the Printer”; browse [3Dhotbed: Extending Bibliographical Pedagogy through Additive Manufacturing](#)

Viewing: [83M80: Letterpress in the Digital Era](#) (25 min)

In BookLab: Chris Ware, *Building Stories*; *The Best of McSweeney's*

4/28 Paper Machines

Readings: Kari Kraus, et. al., “Bibliocircuitry and the Design of the Alien Everyday”; Whitney Trettien, “[Creative Destruction/Digital Humanities](#)”; Stephen Jackson, “Rethinking Repair”

In BookLab: Caroline A. Jones, et al., *Experience*; Chibitronics, *Love to Code*; [Papier Machine Kit](#) and other soft-circuitry materials

Reminder: Discussion Posting Due

5/5 Citizenship

Reading: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*; Donald F. McKenzie, “Oral Culture, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand”

In BookLab: Editions and printings of *Citizen*; the *New England Primer*

5/12 The Deep Time of the Book

Readings: Octavio Uzzane, “The End of Books”; Craig Mod, “[The ‘Future Book’ is Here, But it’s Not What We Expected](#)”; Merve Emre, “[This Library Has New Books By Major Authors but They Can’t be Read until 2114](#)”; Sam Knight, “[Do Proteins Hold the Key to the Past?](#)”

In BookLab: *Cradle to Cradle*; Katie Holten, *About Trees*

Final Projects Due 12 noon, Monday May 18

*Version 2.2 January 28, 2020. For suggestions and contributions to this syllabus I am grateful to Amaranth Borsuk, Ryan Cordell, Kari Kraus, Jentery Sayers, Jonathan Senchyne, and Whitney Trettien.*



# A Memorable Fancy

I was in a Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation.

In the first chamber was a Dragon-Man, clearing away the rubbish from a caves mouth; within, a number of Dragons were hollowing the cave.

In the second chamber was a Viper folding round the rock & the cave, and others adorning it with gold, silver and precious stones.

In the third chamber was an Eagle, with wings and feathers of air, he caused the inside of the cave to be infinite, around were numbers of Eagle like men, who built palaces in the immense cliffs.

In the fourth chamber were Lions of flaming fire, raging around & melting the metals into living fluids.

In the fifth chamber were Unamid forms, which cast the metals into the expanse.

There they were received by Men who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries.



William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, copy G, plate 15 (1818)  
Houghton Library, Harvard  
via [The William Blake Archive](#)