“There has been more information produced in the last 30 years than during the previous 5000.”

We’ve all heard some variation on this maxim. As we find ourselves wading through a billion websites; as publishers supply over two million books to the world’s libraries each year; as we continue to add new media – from apps to geo-tagged maps – to our everyday media repertoires, we continually search for new ways to navigate this ever more treacherous sea of information. Meanwhile, our analog audio-visual archives are deteriorating, and our ever-volatile digital media and data sets present their own preservation challenges. Throughout human history we have relied on various institutions and politico-intellectual architectures to organize, index, preserve, make sense of, and facilitate or control access to our stores of knowledge, our assemblages of media, our collections of information. This seminar looks at the past, present, and future of our archives, libraries, and data repositories, and considers what logics, politics, audiences, contents, aesthetics, physical forms, etc., define them. We will examine what roles these collections play in a variety of contexts: in democracy, in education, in socio-cultural heritage, in everyday life, and in art. Throughout the semester we’ll examine myriad analog and digital artworks that make use of archival/library material, or take the archive, library, or data repository as their subject. Some classes will involve field trips and guest speakers. Students will have the option of completing a substantial traditional research project, or a research-based, theoretically-informed creative/production project for the class.

COURSE MATERIALS

All readings will be posted as pdfs to the class website:
http://www.wordsinspace.net/booksdata/fall2016/

To access password-protected readings, you’ll be prompted to enter the user name <student> and password <seecritfilez>. Not so secret, eh?

A few notes about the weekly readings/screenings/listening exercises:

- I believe that we can better appreciate the complexity, relevance, and resonance of each of our weekly themes by approaching them from multiple theoretical, historical, practical, and creative directions. That’s why, for each week, I’ve put together a mini “anthology,” rather than assigning a single definitive text. Yes, sometimes those reading lists might look intimidatingly long – but the total number of pages hardly ever exceeds 150 (and a lot of those pages are illustrated!), which is a reasonable workload for a graduate student. Plus, each text on that list is there because it has the potential add a distinctive voice to our conversation (you should see the ridiculously long lists of readings that didn’t make the cut!).

- That said, my selection of a particular text does not constitute an endorsement of it. Sometimes I choose texts that annoy me, or with which I disagree, for a few reasons: because they’re widely cited
and I think it’d behoove you to be aware of them, because I want to allow you to exercise your own judgment, and because I’m pretty sure they’ll make for good conversation.

• We will not address all the readings in our in-class discussions. Some readings are primarily factual, some are self-explanatory, some simply present interesting illustrations or case studies; we needn’t discuss these sorts of texts in-depth – but they’re still worth your time; they provide valuable nuance and color that will inform our discussions, shape your own understanding, and, ideally, inspire ideas for your own projects.

YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. In a seminar course each participant’s contribution is valued, and absences affect the entire group. You will be permitted two excused absences (“excused” means that you must have contacted me prior to class to inform me of your absence) throughout the semester. Any excused absences in excess of two and any unexcused absences will negatively affect your grade. A pattern of late arrivals is likewise detrimental. More than three excused absences, or more than two unexcused absences, will prevent you from passing the course.

You’re expected to come to class prepared (i.e., having read and digested the readings), remain engaged, and participate thoughtfully in class discussions, presentations, group exercises, etc. Attendance and participation are worth 20% of your final grade.

PROCESSING POSTS. Just as archivists “process” a newly-acquired collection, we need to process the new ideas we’re exposed to; we need to arrange those ideas in our minds, consider them in relation to our past knowledge, personal interests, and everyday experiences; and appraise what value they might hold for the future. This intellectual work benefits not only you; it also helps us make the most of our in-class discussions. You’ll need to post to our class blog at least five ~150-word “processing posts” over the course of the semester; you should begin posting within the first three weeks of the semester, and keep posting at least once every three weeks for the duration of the semester. Posts are due by noon on Tuesdays. Your posts should involve some critical, synthetic reflection on the week’s assigned readings, but would also ideally include: ideas that you find particularly captivating or frustrating and that you might like to explore through further research (perhaps your final project); questions you’d like us to address in our group discussion; connections you’ve drawn between the readings and art you’ve recently experienced, places you’ve recently been, current events you’ve heard about, etc. You’re welcome to illustrate your posts with images, audio, video, etc., where appropriate. These posts are worth 20% of your final grade.

APPLICATION. Over the course of the semester each student will deliver one 15-minute in-class presentation and submit one 900- to 1200-word post focusing on a concrete application of the theories we discuss in class. Where do you see the week’s central themes playing out in the world – in a brick-and-mortar library or archive, in an artist’s work, in a particular online database, in one of the many behind-the-scenes spaces supporting our digital infrastructure, etc.? On our website you’ll find a sampling of interesting artists and local sites that you’re welcome to take as your topic, but you’re also welcome to go “off list.” Just please try not to duplicate examples we discuss in class, and please post a little preview (or “teaser” or “trailer”) of your topic on our class blog at least two days before class, so I don’t steal your thunder in my own prepared presentation 😊 (…and so your classmates know what to expect). You’re encouraged to investigate how archival/library/database theory works on the ground – which means that, ideally, for this assignment, you’ll go visit places, talk to people, touch stuff, etc., rather than simply conduct online research from a critical distance, without “getting your hands dirty,” so to speak. In your paper and presentation you’ll want to
strike a balance between synopsis of the relevant theoretical frameworks or concepts; description of your chosen concrete subject; and critical analysis of that subject in light of those theories and concepts.

You’ll find a few sample application projects from our Spring 2011 class here, from our Fall 2012 class here, from our Fall 2013 class here, and from our Fall 2014 class here.

Your paper should be posted to our class website before class on the date you’re schedule to present.
You’re encouraged to include illustrative media. And please note that, just because it’s a blog post doesn’t mean it’s casual writing; please edit and proofread! You’ll have ten minutes for your formal presentation, then we’ll dedicate roughly five minutes to discussion. The presentation and paper are together worth 20% of your final grade.

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL. See below for more on the format of the final project. Throughout the semester I hope you’ll come across several ideas, arenas, individuals, etc., about which or whom you would like to know more. This final project will give you the opportunity to delve deeply into a research and/or creative area of personal interest. You can draw inspiration from previous students’ work: here’s what the students in my 2011 “Archives/Libraries/Databases” class did, here’s what the 2012 students did, here’s what the 2013 students did, and here’s what the 2014 students did.

You should begin thinking about potential topics early in the semester. By the end of the day on Monday, October 31 (you needn’t wait until October 31; you can submit any time before then!) I’ll need you to submit via Google Drive a formal ~900-word (including end-matter) project proposal. This proposal must include (1) a problem statement or research question; (2) a discussion of your proposed research methodology and an outline of your research/production plan*; and (3) a tentative bibliography containing at least ten sources, half of which must be scholarly sources. You’ll be expected to share your proposal in an informal two-minute presentation in the following class, on November 1. I certainly don’t expect your proposals to be perfect (the primary reason I ask you to submit these is so you can receive constructive feedback before delving too deeply into your projects), but I do expect the proposals to evince some serious contemplation, good planning, and an awareness of relevant resources in the field. The proposal is worth 10% of your final grade. You’ll have an opportunity to revise and resubmit the proposal if necessary. You’ll find a list of 2011 projects here, 2012 projects here, and 2013 project here.

*If you’re considering a research-based creative project or media production, your “research methodology” section should explain how your chosen format – video, artist’s book, interactive map, audio documentary, etc. – serves as an appropriate “method” for your project, i.e., how the form suits the content.

FINAL PROJECT. Throughout the semester you should be working toward the completion of either (1) a 4,000- to 6,000-word paper (word count includes end-matter), or (2) a creative/production project (that’s of final-project-appropriate scope) with a 600-word accompanying text, in which you address the critical issues you aimed to explore through your work and explain how your chosen format aided in that exploration. This research project is worth 30% of your final grade, and is due before class on December 13. Papers and support papers for creative projects should be submitted via Google Drive.

I’m afraid I can’t accept late work. I’m leaving for a conference in Australia on December 15 and must submit all final grades before my departure!
SUBMITTING WORK VIA GOOGLE DRIVE. Depending upon your level of comfort with Google and “the cloud,” you could either (1) create your work as a Google Doc, in which case I'll simply use GD’s own commenting features; or (2) upload your work as a Word doc and not convert it to a Google Doc, in which case I’ll add comments via Word’s “track changes” and email your edited work back to you. Please do not upload PDFs; I can’t comment on them.

To share your work with me, simply click the “share” button in the top-right corner of Google Docs. Make sure the “sharing settings” are set to “Private,” so “only people explicitly granted permission can access,” and under “Add People,” type my email address. That’s it.

POSTING WORK ONLINE. We’ll all create accounts for our class’s blog, and we’ll briefly review how to post. If you’re not comfortable posting your work on line, talk to me.

DEADLINES. Assignment deadlines are noted on the syllabus. Late work will be penalized, and extensions will be granted only rarely, and only after consulting with me well in advance of the assignment deadline. Sorry – I know some other faculty are a bit more lenient with deadlines, but I tend to set aside big blocks of time for assignment review, and I provide substantial feedback – so missing deadlines means you miss your “window of opportunity” for feedback, which is an essential part of your learning in this course (and any course, for that matter).

A student who has not submitted all assigned work by the end of the semester does not receive an “Incomplete” by default. “Incompletes” are assigned only in extreme circumstances, and require that the student consult with me before the end of the semester and sign a contract obligating him or her to complete all outstanding work by a date that we agree upon.

ACADEMIC HONESTY. All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the University’s academic honesty policy. Plagiarism or cheating of any form will result in immediate failure of the course. No joke. If you have any questions regarding proper citation of sources or other academic integrity matters, consult the Writing Center.
Week 1: Aug. 30

Introductions + Historicizing Information Overload

TEXTS REFERENCED IN CLASS (You needn’t read these, but you’re welcome to!)

- Ann Blair, Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information Before the Modern Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
- Open Scholarship Initiative, Report from the Information Overload Workgroup (June 23, 2016).

Week 2: Sept. 6

Ecologies of Information: Entangled Infrastructures

READINGS

- Mar Cabra & Erin Kissane, “The People and Tech Behind the Panama Papers,” Source (April 11, 2016) [note the amount of link rot in a story that's only a few months old].

…And now, over the course of the semester, we’ll examine how our knowledge institutions – particularly archives and libraries – function as informational ecologies, networks of entwined infrastructures: architectural, technical, intellectual, social…
Epistemological Architectures

Week 3: Sept. 13
Archaeologies of the Archive

FIELD TRIP: New York City Municipal Archives, w/ Marcia Kirk, Director of Public Programming, NYC Department of Records and Information Services
• Meet at 4:00 at 31 Chambers @ Centre St. Take 4/5/6 to Brooklyn Bridge. Please bring picture ID.

READINGS
The following will help to provide some context for our tour:
• NYC Municipal Archives + Collections
We’ll discuss this material in class next week:
• Jessa Lingel, “This It Not an Archive,” Jessa Lingel (November 5, 2013) [for an extended reflection on similar concerns, see Michelle Caswell, “The Archive is not an Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies,” Reconstruction 16:1 (2016)].
• Part 3 of The Hairpin’s “Ask an Archivist” series (September 4, 2012).
• “Networked Q&A with Marvin Taylor,” NYU Workshop in Archival Practice Blog (April 20, 2012).
• Browse through the “Total Archives” Special Issue of Limn Journal 6 (March 2016), ed. Boris Jardine & Christopher Kelty.

Week 4: Sept. 20
Library Lineages

FIELD TRIP: Morgan Library, 225 Madison Ave @ 36th Street, 4-5pm; afterward, we’ll meet somewhere nearby (@ the Ginger Man?) to discuss.

READINGS
The following will prepare us for our field trip:
• The Morgan Library & Museum, “McKim Building Restoration.”
• Check out the collection and CORSAIR, their catalog.
Contrast the Morgan as a physical environment with the material concerns of other institutions:
• Skim Karrie Jacobs, “The Library Whisperer,” Curbed (December 9, 2015) [re: NYPL’s 42nd Street library].
Week 5: Sept. 27
The Places of Knowledge
We’ll recap our previous field trips and discuss the material landscapes and logistics of information.

READINGS/SCREENINGS
  - Optional: Listen: Craig Shank & George Drake, Jr., Everything Sounds 25: “Packard Campus” (May 23, 2013) [28:10].

The Warburg Library
- The Warburg Institute Library and Classification Scheme + Cornell’s Mnemosyne project.

The Prelinger Library

Recommended Event: Orhan Pamuk in Conversation with Massimiliano Gioni re: “The Keeper” @ The New Museum, Thursday, October 29 @ 7pm (sadly, I’ll be out of town!)

Epistemological Apparatae

Week 6: Oct. 4
Intellectual Furnishings & Containers

PRESENTATIONS: TBD

READINGS

Paul Otlet
- See the Google Cultural Institute’s Mundaneum Collection, and especially their “The Origins of the Internet in Europe: 1895-2013” exhibition.

Vannevar Bush
- Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think,” The Atlantic (July 1945).
Week 7: Oct. 11
 Ordering Logics

PRESENTATIONS: TBD

READINGS/Screening

- Optional: David Weinberger, “Everything is Miscellaneous” [video] Google Tech Talks (May 10, 2007) [the first few minutes are a little rocky].
- Jefferson Bailey, “Disrespect des Fonds: Rethinking Arrangement and Description in Born-Digital Archives” *Archive Journal* 3 (Summer 2013) [“Fonds Essentialism” through the end].

Browse through the resources for Dr. Cristina Patuelli’s “Knowledge Organization” class at Pratt – just to get a sense of what LIS students need to know!

Week 8: Oct. 18
 Epistemological Aesthetics

PRESENTATIONS: TBD

READINGS/listenings

- Shannon Mattern, “Archival Aesthetics,” Talk @ Princeton-Weimar Summer School on “Archive Futures,” Bauhaus University, Weimar, Germany (June 18, 2015).

Explore the work of a few additional archival artists:

Mariam Ghani:
  - *Index of the Disappeared*

Walid Raad:
  - *The Atlas Group*

Amie Siegel:
  - Steel Stillman, “In the Studio: Amie Siegel,” *Art in America* (November 2, 2015).
Collections (aka “Content”)

Week 9: Oct. 25
Photo Collections

GUEST: Diana Kamin, Ph.D. Candidate, Media, Culture & Communication @ NYU

READINGS/SCREENING


OCTOBER 28: FIELD TRIP

(Joint excursion for “Bookshelves to Big Data” and “Maps as Media”)
3:00pm: Office for Creative Research, 81 Willoughby Street #601, Bklyn
4:30pm: Situ Research, 20 Jay Street #218

Week 10: Nov. 1
Collecting and Preserving Sound + Moving Images

SHARE YOUR FINAL PROJECT PROPOSALS (2 minutes each!)

READINGS

- Various kinds of sound archives: poetry archives, radio archives, bird calls, sound art, and so on. Check out the breadth of the British Library’s sound collections, and its campaign to preserve those materials.
- Katharine Gammon, “Chemistry is Rescuing our Audio History from Melting,” Nautilus (November 11, 2015).
- Check out NYU’s Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program and Anthony Cacciolo’s “Moving Image + Sound Archives” syllabus (from Pratt).
- Jeffrey Weiss, “Revisions — Zen for Film,” Artforum (March 2016) [on exhibiting archival copies of Nam June Paik’s films].
Week 11: Nov. 8
Collecting Code | New Materialities of Storage

PRESENTATIONS: TBD

READINGS/SCREENING

- Dennis Yi Tenen, “Preliminary Thoughts on the Way to the Free Library Congress,” Schloss – Post 2 (March 24, 2016) [on pirate libraries + file-sharing].
- Check out the Svalbard Global Seed Vault.

Patrons + Publics

Week 12: Nov. 15
Public-Facing Interfaces

DESIGN WORKSHOP WITH PARSONS FACULTY FIONA RABY & TONY DUNNE, AND NATE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NY METROPOLITAN LIBRARY COUNCIL

READINGS

- Check out the work of the Harvard Library Innovation Lab, Harvard’s Library Test Kitchen, and LTK alum Jeff Goldenson’s Rewrite the Library project at Olin College.
- Review NYPL Labs’ work and Tim Carmody’s Slate article, “How the New York Public Library is Reinventing Itself” (October 29, 2015), about it.
- Check out the “Dynamic Order” Sitterwerk Art Library, which makes use of RFID technology, in St. Gallen, Switzerland [+ video], and see AstromZimmer’s dynamic library workbenches [+ video].
- See Rosten Woo’s work on Haystacks (and his epic “Can I help you find something?” project blog).
- Good, Form & Spectacle, “What’s In the Library?” + “New Work: Wellcome Library Alpha.”
Nov. 22
NO CLASS: Thanksgiving

Week 13: Nov. 29
Data Are Made of People

PRESENTATIONS: TBD

READINGS
- Christa Wolf, “So Who Could I Tell the Story To,” *Harper’s* (March 2013) [on the Stasi archive].
- Ed Summers, “Introducing Documenting the Now,” Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (February 16, 2016) [on social media archiving, archival silences + BlackLivesMatter] + check out Documenting the Now.
- Tim Sherratt, “A Map and Some Pins: Open Data and Unlimited Horizons,” *discontents* [blog post] (June 11, 2013) [and see Tim’s research notebook].
- Consider the politics of silence and erasure, too. *Skim* through the “Aesthetics of Erasure” issue of Media-N.

Week 14: Dec. 6
Building Civic Infrastructures

READINGS
- Our readings for this week will depend in part upon how our discussions evolve over the course of the semester, and on your developing interests – but here’s a preliminary list:
- Kate Eichhorn, Interview with Hope Leman, *Critical Margins* (January 1, 2014).
- Check out CritLib, and search Twitter for #critlib.

Week 15: Dec. 13 – Final Class
FINAL PRESENTATIONS

5 terry belanger, lanacy and the arrangement of books (new york: oak knoll press, 2003); melanie feinberg, “information system design for communication: the use of genre as a design element” [unpublished manuscript; on prelinger & warburg libraries]; nina katchadourian, “sorted books project”; alberto manguel, “the library as order” the library at night (toronto knopf canada, 2006): 36-63; shannon mattern, “catalogue logic,” ikkm talk, bauhaus university, weimar, germany (january 20, 2016); jennifer & kevin mccoy, “every shot, every episode”; henry petroski, the book on the bookshelf (new york: vintage, 1999); storage techniques for art, science and history.

on memory theaters, wunderkammer, studioli: robert kirkbride, architecture and memory: the renaissance studioli of federico da montefeltro [interactive]; shannon mattern, “500 years of wunderkammern from cabinets to the cloud,” words in space (january 31, 213); museum of modern art, “wunderkammern: a century of curiosities,” july 30 – november 10, 2008; see also the work of hannacro baron, jason rhodes, sarah sze.


