

**Fall, 2010 ENG 6939: Topics in Texts & Technology:
Inventions in Literature and Media Studies:
An Electronic Monument to Biocultural Data Loss
Professor: Dr. Barry Mauer
Wednesdays 7:30-10:15 p.m., CNH 203
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Office Hours: MWF 12:30-2:15 Department Phone: 823-2213**

Catalog Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to a broad range of approaches to literature and media studies and their relevance to T&T. Among the areas we will examine in the course are drama, fiction, poetry, and the essay, rhetoric, mass media, photography, film, music, fine arts, and digital media.

Detailed Course description:

“The dilemmas of the practical world are fundamentally resistant to policies that neglect the human question.” Gregory Ulmer, *Internet Inventions*, p. 2

This course is billed as “Inventions in Literature and Media Studies.” In order to narrow the field a bit, I have chosen to focus specifically on media and literature dealing with the campus-wide theme: sustainability and the environment. The seminar also deals with a peculiar form of media production: electronic monuments. I first became aware of electronic monuments from an essay written by Gregory Ulmer titled “Abject Monumentality.” Electronic monuments incorporate diverse areas of study into communal activities such as research and public policy formation. Monuments are sites where people come to mourn. An electronic monument is simply a site for mourning on the Internet, accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. I have published three academic works (an online work, a book chapter, and a print journal article) about electronic monumentality. The two most recent ones focus on a specific type of loss that has become an increasingly serious problem: data loss.

In this course, I am refining this research to focus on the problem of biocultural data loss (or biocultural diversity loss). Primarily, I am interested in the ways in which the data explosion occurring as a result of New Media technologies is threatening the diversity of systems that underlie cultural and biological resilience. In this course you will theorize the problems of both resilience and monument production and, working in teams, design and construct a monument to biocultural data loss.

Maywa Montenegro and Terry Glavin have referred to “a global epidemic of sameness” responsible for the problem of biocultural data loss.

... this epidemic carries away an entire human language every two weeks, destroys a domesticated food crop variety every six hours, and kills off an entire species every few minutes. The fallout isn't merely an assault to our aesthetic or even ethical values: As cultures and languages vanish, along with them go not just valuable genetic resources, but critical links in complex ecological webs. (“In Defense of Difference,” 2008)

My view of the “sameness epidemic” is that it poses a human, rather than merely a technological, dilemma, and that understanding it requires we pose some very human questions. To that effect, we will be studying the humanities genres I mentioned in the earlier course description— drama, poetry, and the essay, rhetoric, mass media, photography, film, music, fine arts, and digital media. They will be contextualized around the specific assignment.

The course will be organized into topic areas that include a focus on historical, economic, and technological forces (Arendt), on monumentality (Ulmer), on biocultural diversity (course packet), on literature (Sophocles and course packet) and on using and curating images and sounds (Mitchell, Graham and Cook). Your job will be to find and use the connections among these sources in the most convincing and effective ways you can during the semester.

Course Policies

1. Proper classroom behavior is expected at all times. Students must follow UCF standards for personal and academic conduct as outlined in The Golden Rule. As a matter of common courtesy, please arrive on time prepared to stay for the entire class, and do not engage in conversation other than the classroom critical discussions we will be having about the texts on hand. Proper classroom conduct also entails creating a positive learning experience for all students; therefore, sexist, racist, homophobic, or other derogatory remarks will not be tolerated. My top priority is to provide a safe environment for learning.

2. Your participation in class discussions is **required** and is expected at each and every class meeting. This is a discussion-based, student-centered class; it only works if you, the student, take responsibility for your learning by showing up prepared and engaged. Full preparation means you have read the assigned material and wrote or thought about it and you have brought your course materials to class with you. Please raise your hand and wait to speak until I call on you.
3. No computing, texting, etc. except in cases of emergency or with my permission.
4. Students who arrive late or leave early disrupt class time. Arrive on time and do not leave until class is over. If you must leave early (for health reasons, etc.) please let me know before class if possible. I will count every two unexcused late arrivals or early departures as an absence.
5. Attendance is crucial because of the vital role discussion plays in this course. You will lower your grade a whole letter for every three unexcused absences. Absences will be excused in cases of emergency or for prior arrangements of short duration. You must contact me ASAP once you know you will be absent.
6. Make-up work is available at the professor's discretion for excused absences only. No make-up work will be given for unexcused absences. Students who miss class are responsible for raising the issue of make-up work with the professor.
7. Late assignments will lose 20% of the total possible points per class meeting after due date. Please give yourself enough time to complete assignments!
8. All work is to be done individually unless otherwise noted by the instructor.
9. No handwritten papers will be accepted. No emailed papers will be accepted. All papers must be proofed, printed, and stapled. Incomplete papers will be returned.
10. Responses to emails may take up to three days. Please be patient.
11. No incompletes will be given in this course.
12. Complaints about assignment grades should be discussed with me within two weeks after return.
13. Plagiarism and Cheating: All work that you submit for this class must be your own, and it must be written exclusively for this course. Also, any sources consulted for your writing must be properly documented. "Rewriting," in which a student consults a source, changes a few words, and presents the ideas as his/her own, is plagiarism. Plagiarism and cheating of any kind on an examination, quiz, or assignment will result at least in an "F" for that assignment and may also lead to an "F" for the entire course. Plagiarism and cheating subjects a student to referral to the Office of Student Conduct for further action. See the UCF Golden Rule for further information (<http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu/>). I will assume for this course that you will adhere to the academic creed of this University and will maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. In other words, do not cheat by giving answers to others or by taking them from anyone else. I will also adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity, so please do not expect me to change your grade illegitimately or to bend or break rules for one person that will not apply to everyone.
14. Disability Accommodation: The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource Center Rm. 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116.

Required Texts

- Course pack
- Ulmer, Gregory. *Electronic Monuments*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2005. ISBN: 0-8166-4583-3
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* 2nd edition. University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0-226-02598-5
- Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex (aka Oedipus the King)*.
- Mitchell, WJT. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 0-226-53231-3
- Graham, Beryl, and Sarah Cook. *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*. MIT Press ISBN: 978-0-262-01388-8

Grading

Presentations	2@ 20 points	40 points
Response papers	6@ 10 points	60 points
Midterm Project	1@ 20 points	20 points
<u>Final project</u>	<u>1@ 80 points</u>	<u>80 points</u>
Total		200 points

Grading scale

A = 183-200	B- = 160-162	D+ = 137-139
A- = 180-182	C+ = 157-159	D = 123-136
B+ = 177-179	C = 143-156	C- = 120-122
B = 163-176	B- = 140-142	F = Below 120

Schedule

Note: Dates after numbers are due dates (not start dates).

Week 1 (August 25): Introduction/Food

- Discuss syllabus and course project.
- Distribute course packet.
- Watch *Food, Inc.* (in class).

Week 2 (September 1): Monuments/Intro to Biocultural Diversity Loss/Sophocles

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - Ulmer, Gregory. "Abject Monumentality."
 - Montenegro, Maywa and Terry Glavin. "In Defense of Difference."
 - Mauer, Barry. "Proposal for a Monument to Lost Data."
 - Mauer, Barry. "Lost Data, 2."
- Read Sophocles: *Oedipus Rex*.

Week 3 (September 8): Debord/Bataille/Arendt

- Read the following essay from the course packet:
 - Debord, Guy. "A Sick Planet."
 - Kosalka, David. "Georges Bataille and the Notion of the Gift."
- Read the Introduction through the end of Section II in Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

Week 4 (September 15): Leiris/Biodiversity/Arendt/Ulmer

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - Leiris, Michel. "The Sacred in Everyday Life."
 - The selected readings from *Biodiversity Loss*.
- Read Section V in Arendt's *The Human Condition*.
- Read the Introduction and Part I in Ulmer's *Electronic Monuments*.
- **Group 1 presentation.**

Week 5 (September 22): Arendt/Ulmer

- Read Section VI in Arendt's *The Human Condition*.
- Read Part II in Ulmer's *Electronic Monuments*.
- **Group 2 presentation.**

Week 6 (September 29): Biodiversity/Ulmer

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - The selected readings from *Barriers and Bridges to the Renewal of Ecosystems and Institutions*
- Read Part III in Ulmer's *Electronic Monuments*.
- **Group 3 presentation.**

Week 7 (October 6): Biocultural Diversity/Ulmer

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - The selected readings from *On Biocultural Diversity*
- Read Part IV in Ulmer's *Electronic Monuments*.
- **Group 4 presentation.**
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Week 8 (October 13): Biocultural Diversity/Mitchell

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - The selected readings from *Ethnobiology and Biocultural Diversity*
- Read Part I in Mitchell's *Picture Theory*

Week 9 (October 20): Food/Mitchell

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - The selected chapters from *Food for Thought*
- Read Part II in Mitchell's *Picture Theory*
- **Group 1 presentation.**

Week 10 (October 27): Poetry/Mitchell

- Read the following essays from the course packet:
 - Chapter 20 from *The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry*
- Read Part III in Mitchell's *Picture Theory*
- **Group 2 presentation.**

Week 11 (November 3): Animals/Mitchell

- Read the following texts from the course packet:
 - The selections from the journal *Proteus on Humans and Animals*
- Read Part IV in Mitchell's *Picture Theory*
- Watch *Gates of Heaven* (in class)
- **Midterm proposals due.**

Week 12 (November 10): Poetry/Graham and Cook

- Read the following texts from the course packet:
 - Chapter 21 from *The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry*
 - Robert Frost's "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening"
- Read Part I in Graham and Cook's *Rethinking Curating*
- **Group 3 presentation.**

Week 13 (November 17): Music/Graham and Cook

- Read the following chapters from the course packet:
 - Feld's "The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop"
 - Taylor's "A Riddle Wrapped in a Mystery: Transnational Music Sampling and Enigma's 'Return to Innocence'"
- Read Part II in Graham and Cook's *Rethinking Curating*
- **Group 4 presentation.**

Week 14 (November 24): Graham and Cook

- Read Part III in Graham and Cook's *Rethinking Curating*

Week 15 (December 1): Presentations

- Group demonstrations and discussions of monuments.

Week 16 (December 8): Finals

- Projects due