Spring, 2017 ENG 6939: Topics in Texts &Technology "Citizen Curatorship"

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CNH 126, 6:00pm—8:50pm Wednesdays
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"Citizen Curatorship" T&T Course description

This course will focus on citizen curating, which offers opportunities to non-professional curators who are interested in the art of creating exhibits from archived materials. We will curate both on-site and digital/online exhibitions. The course will have three purposes:

1. To explore the history and theories of curating
2. To engage in hands-on curating work, creating exhibits both online and offline
3. To work with partner institutions, including the RICHES project, to learn and teach the principles of curating to others

We will make our exhibits from archival materials stored in libraries, archives, museums, and private collections. The seminar will involve collaboration with the John C. Hitt Library, the Regional Center for Collecting the History, Experiences, and Stories of Central Florida (RICHES), and other partnering entities. Students enrolled in the seminar may have the option to work as interns in the RICHES program and/or other programs. During their internships, students will develop their skills in archiving, preserving, digitizing, and tagging, and will create curated exhibits, both in public spaces and online.

We are in the first year of a two-year IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) grant to develop Citizen Curating. For the grant, we have promised three exhibits per year. Our first year exhibits will memorialize the Pulse Nightclub shootings upon the first anniversary of the event, which is June 12. We plan to produce one exhibit online, one on campus, and one off-campus, likely in partnership with one or more community groups. Our class will certainly focus on the first two and maybe (depending on circumstances) the third.

Not only are you (under our supervision) going to be involved in producing these exhibits, but you will also be involved in producing a *Guidebook for Citizen Curators*, which will explain to others how to do their own citizen curating projects.

Our class will be focused on both concept and design. In other words, we need to think about our *purpose*, *research topic and question*, and *methods* before we produce our exhibits. Thus we introduce the metaphor of the "menu." Our menu involves four "courses." The general theme of the first three courses is 'fixed' (only one option for now) while the subcategories under each are your choice.

1. Our first course—**purpose**—is fixed; it will be to involve the public in **consulting on public policy issues** (aka a fifth estate). However, you will be able to select from a number of public policy issues related to the Pulse shooting. These include disasters, education, the law and policing, political inclusion/power/discourse (particularly as they relate to gender, race, and sexuality), the decaying public sphere, employment, security, guns, hate speech, suicide, violence and terrorism, religion, mental illness, media representations and access, technology, healthcare, public monuments and history, and other issues that may be relevant. Most importantly, we will consult on how to think and how to live—on what counts as knowledge, on values, on behaviors, on reasoning, and on wisdom.

2. Our second course—**research topic**—is fixed. It is **ideology**. And our research question about it is, "What is the relationship between collective identity and personal identity?" Within ideology, we will select from several issues, such as subject formation, ignorance, intolerance, denial, delusion, and domination (among others). The key to understanding ideology is to identify our "blind spots." When we discover our blind spots, we put these in our exhibits. We consult (or, as Ulmer says, deconsult), about our blind spots.

3. Our third course—**method**—is fixed. It is **the puncept of "Pulse."** The puncept, invented by Gregory Ulmer, is an alternative to the concept and is part of Ulmer's larger project, which he calls "choragraphy." The puncept gathers together discourses based upon the similarity of their terms (the way a pun does). Thus we gather together all the meanings of the word *pulse* and note its use in various discourses (such as medical, electrical, musical, religious, and military). We gather its etymology - its origins in Latin and French (which relate to food, to violence, and to healing). We note its presence in other words, such as *impulse*, *repulsive*, and *compulsion*. From these words, we form patterns and conduct additional research as the patterns suggest we do, relating this work back to our purpose and research question.

4. Our fourth course—**design**—is relatively open. During the course, we will introduce to you a number of exhibition design strategies, **from the educational to the rhetorical to the experimental**. You will select (and can mix) the ones that promise the greatest impact. In our projects, we will practice primarily Rhetorical and Experimental modes, though we will study Educational modes as well.

   - **Educational Exhibits –** These exhibits seek to inform and educate the public. For example, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. educates the public about the events of the holocaust, but does not present clear arguments about its causes.
   - **Rhetorical Exhibits** – These exhibits present a thesis and use curated materials as support. For example, photographer Sebastião Salgado's exhibits argue that the flow of global capital creates refugee crises, and his images amount to evidence for his claims.
   - **Experimental Exhibits** – These exhibits seek new ways of composing with archival materials, but may have rhetorical or educational aims as well. Experimental exhibits may focus on issues related to the ethics of curating, such as witnessing, working with difficult material such as racist artifacts, or on intellectual property rights and censorship. Experimental exhibits may present different forms of curating, making use of sampling and collage, presenting multiple perspectives on the same materials (i.e. from a social scientist's perspective, a legal perspective, a philosopher's perspective, etc.), or employ

avant-garde genres such as Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, Georges Bataille's *Heterogeny*, or Gregory Ulmer's *Mystory.*

The seminar addresses several problems related to curating:

1. **Multiple and overlooked perspectives:** Student curators can provide unique perspectives on archival materials otherwise missed by trained professionals. Robert Ray recommends we "gamble more recklessly: by ignoring disciplinary boundaries, by listening to 'outsiders' or even dilettantes, by suspecting experts and, in particular, by adapting for research the methods of the twentieth century's avant-garde arts and non-traditional sciences." By involving outsiders and by experimenting with curatorial practices, we intend to bring multiple unique or under-represented perspectives to archival materials, and to bring these perspectives into the lives of more people. Additionally, we introduce different disciplinary frames: among them historical, technological, discursive, and philosophical.
2. **Archival illiteracy:** Many ordinary citizens, including many students, do not know how to use archives, including digital archives, effectively. The Citizen Curator project trains students and other citizens to access and use archival materials. Training will follow the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) "Standards for Literacy" as well as the "ACRL Standards for Technological Literacy."
3. **Adapting to new technologies:** Technological and social changes have shifted the focus of communicative practice from speech and writing to curating. Many archives are multimedia and contain documented sounds, images, and written texts. These documents can be fragmented, manipulated, juxtaposed, and synthesized in endless configurations. Also, digital platforms can be adapted to include public participation in ongoing discussions about key issues of public significance. Training people to manage public forums and to curate electronic texts helps them adapt to the technological shift.
4. **Inaccessible documents:** Many archives, such as libraries and museums, have only small portions of their holdings accessible to the public at any one time. The Citizen Curator project helps make more materials from the archives available to the public.
5. **Emergent crises:** As public crises emerge, such as those affecting climate, public health, and the economy, we need a citizenry that can access many types of digital archives and participate in discussions that address these problems. Therefore, the Citizen Curator project trains students and citizens to deal effectively with emergent problems by teaching them to provide critical materials to the public and to provide forums for the public to discuss emerging crises.

Required Readings

1. Ulmer, Gregory. *Electronic Monuments*. University of Minnesota Press; 2005. **ISBN-10:** 0816645833. **ISBN-13:** 978-0816645831
2. All other readings will be in webcourses.

Deliverables

The midterm paper (20% of course grade) will outline strategies for approaching the curated exhibits. Annotated bibliographies (20% of course grade) will enable us to cover more scholarly ground. Final projects will include group work on a curated exhibit (40% of course grade) that will have an onsite and an online presence. Final projects also require

papers that contribute to a *Guidebook for Citizen Curators* (20% of course grade). For the papers, students may choose to work in teams, each writing a chapter (12-15 pages) of a longer manuscript. Here are the major topics for the guidebook:

1. How ordinary people can take ownership of their historical, cultural, and intellectual legacies,
2. How to think critically about the ways in which information and misinformation has shaped our views of the past and present,
3. How to think rhetorically about effective communication with diverse audiences,
4. How to work with various genres of curating, including educational, rhetorical, and experimental genres,
5. How to involve broader communities of archivists, educators, experts, and organizers in curating.

A previous T&T course began work on the guidebook. You can adapt their writing or start fresh. This booklet, once compiled and edited, will be available free of charge to attendees at our exhibits and public presentations. In addition, it will be available online as a downloadable file.

Course Objectives

- To train students to work in critical studies of texts and in the production of texts.
- To identify the aesthetic features of texts.
- To identify the methods of composition practiced by the producers of texts.
- To experiment with methods of texts production.
- To write persuasively about the "how" and "why" of such experiments, particularly your own. Each act of composition involves developing the "rules of the game," a set of constraints about what is and isn't allowed. You will learn to explain and justify the rules of the game for your own compositions.
- To learn how to read and incorporate elements from difficult works, including avant-garde texts, theories that account for visual texts' methods and meanings, and written accounts of complex historical events in your own writing.
- To create a bridge between criticism and practice, as numerous authors and artists like Breton tried to do. In other words, criticism is not separate from the concerns of artists; it has its own compositional principles and is open to invention. Occupy criticism!
- To learn about the recent movements in context by exploring the transformational ideas and events of the past 180 years, including the triumph of science over religion, the invention of photography, audio recording, and the cinema, the rise of modern cities, the emergence of trains and automobiles, the arrival of mechanized warfare, the theories of Marx and Freud, Feminism and Structuralism, and the rise of Taylorist economies, which include liberal democracies and fascist and communist states. This historical context supplied the problems that our artists and authors addressed, provided them with means for addressing those problems, and allowed them access to markets that had not previously been available.

Grading

Midterm paper   100 points
Annotated bibliographies (2)   100 points (See http://guides.ucf.edu/tandt for examples)
Curated exhibits   200 points (see http://riches.cah.ucf.edu for examples)
Final papers (for *Guidebook*)   100 points
Total   500 points

A = 465-500   A- = 450-465
B+ = 435-449   B = 415-434   B- = 400-414
C+ = 385-399   C = 365-389   C- = 350-364
D+ = 335-349   D = 315-334   D- = 300-314
F = Below 300