

## Gen Ed 1034: Texts in Transition

Fall 2019

Lectures: MW 3-4:15pm (Sever 210)

Sections: W 4:30-5:30pm (Robinson 107, Sever 104) and Th 3-4pm (Barker 316)

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/61336>

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### Instructors

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### Teaching Fellows

David Nee, [dnee@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:dnee@fas.harvard.edu) (Head TF)  
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### Course Description

We live in a moment of rapid changes in the ways we communicate. As our writing becomes ever more digital—and paradoxically both more ephemeral and more durable—the attitudes and tools we have for preserving our culture seem more complex and fluid. This course studies how written language—text—travels through time and across media. We will ask: how good are texts for capturing, transmitting, and preserving human experience? How have texts come down to us from the distant past? How do we ensure that what we write today will survive into the future? As we investigate contemporary approaches to cultural preservation, we will consider how pre-modern European cultures transmitted and transformed texts, and created institutions that we still rely on today, including museums, libraries, and archives. Each week you will observe or apply methods of preservation, restoration, destruction, translation, and transmission in an attempt to preserve a personal artifact. We will also read works of literature that reflect on questions of durability, ephemerality, and written memory. By the end of the course, you should be a more thoughtful curator of your own textual presence and media ecology around you.

### Course Objectives

As a student in this course, you will:

- Develop long-term thinking about the transmission of written culture.
- Use past examples to illuminate our current media ecology.
- Appreciate the effect of technologies, institutions, and individuals in making texts durable or ephemeral.
- Prepare to make decisions that will affect the preservation of the texts we write today

## General Education Requirements

This course fulfills the General Education requirement in Histories, Societies, Individuals or Aesthetics & Culture. Students seeking to fulfill their Gen Ed distribution requirement (Arts and Humanities or Social Sciences) and freshmen are welcome. This course counts for the “pre-modern” distribution requirement for History concentrators. No prior college level background is expected.

## Course Books (on order at the COOP and on reserve in Lamont)

Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book* (MIT Press, 2018); \$12.95 on amazon. ISBN: 978-0262535410

Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection* (Penguin, 1994); \$13.80 on amazon. ISBN: 978-0140446029

(recommended) Ted Chiang, *Exhalation* (Knopf, 2019); \$17.71 on amazon; ISBN 978-1101947883

Other readings will be supplied on a fair use basis in paper copies in class or in pdfs on the Canvas site.

## Course Requirements

- Attendance at lectures and sections, including participation in at least one of the arranged outings (options and dates below).
- 10 short assignments as per syllabus (at most 500 words each)
- Capstone Project comprising
  - Presentation in class on your capstone project on Wed Dec 4 from 3-5:30pm—please reserve this time—no section that week
  - Submission of an essay version of your capstone project (1500 words) plus a short reflection paper discussing your decisions along the way and what you felt you learned in the process (500 words).

## Capstone Project Description

For this project, please select a text you care about and that you would like to see transmitted to the future. This could be something you or someone you know has written or something that has come down in your family; or a text you admire but that you feel has been underappreciated or is in need of attention. We will offer a list of suggestions and are happy to hear your ideas before you settle (with the approval of an instructor) on your topic in Week 4.

Many of the short weekly assignments are designed to help you curate this text; you can draw on these short assignments in preparing the capstone presentation to the class and the final submission of the capstone project and reflection paper.

- In week 4: select your text and create a label for it
- In week 5-6 compose some paratexts for your text
- In week 7 use your text to create another text, e.g. parody, imitation, extension.
- In week 8 consider what kind of institutional collection would be a good fit for your text
- In week 9 post your digitization of your text (or part of it) and comment online on the posts of two other students
- In week 11 ponder the pros and cons of different media options for transmission (at least one digital and one “legacy” option).

**Choose your outing: choose one of these four options** (no written assignment, but attendance will be taken)

- Option A: Attend Stallybrass-Chuong talk at Harvard's Humanities Center (Wed Oct 23, 5:30pm, Barker 133)
- Option B: View "Ex-Libris," a documentary about the New York Public Library (3hr17mn)— a screening will be scheduled in Week 8 (Sunday Oct 27, details TBA)
- Option C: Guided visit to Harvard MetaLAB in Week 9 (Fri Nov 8, 2pm, Deknatel Lecture Hall)
- Option D: Visit Boston Antiquarian Society on Sat Nov 16 (details TBA)

### **Course Policies**

*Grades.* Attendance and Participation (20%), 10 Short Assignments (40%), Capstone Project (40%). To pass the course, students must complete all requirements.

*Attendance.* Attendance is required at all meetings of this course, both lectures and sections. More than one absence without a documented excuse may result in a lowered final grade. If you are obliged to miss class because of a serious illness, family emergency, or other extreme circumstance, please contact your instructor as soon as possible to develop a plan to keep you from falling behind. You will be responsible for any material you miss. Religious holidays that are recognized by the university are an acceptable reason for absence. You will be given an opportunity to make up the work. If the university policy does not cover your situation in this matter, please consult your instructor.

*Submitting Work/Late Assignments.* All assignments should be submitted via the course Canvas site. Students may submit one of the 10 short assignments up to 48 hours late without penalty; after one late submission, others may be penalized with a lower grade.

*Academic Integrity.* Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs. Read more about the Honor Code at <https://honor.fas.harvard.edu>.

*Collaboration Policy.* Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers or course instructional staff, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing, you must also acknowledge this assistance.

*Accommodations for students with disabilities.* Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the [Accessible Education Office \(AEO\)](#) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term, September 18. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a

timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

*Laptop / Tablet / Mobile Device Policy.* Laptops, tablets, and phones can be a distraction to students in class; they can also provide occasions for learning. We ask that you do not use your computers, tablets, or phones in class unless it is during time specified by your instructors. During most class meetings, you will not need a computer, but occasionally we will have in-class exercises that involve the use of a laptop or mobile phone. Your instructors will inform you in advance about when use of electronic devices is appropriate to the work of the course.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### **Week 0: What is transmission?**

**Wednesday September 4:** Introduction: what is a text? What is transmission? How and why do texts travel through time? How and why do we preserve texts for the future?

**No section**

**ASSIGNMENT 0:** find some text on the Harvard campus or nearby Cambridge (for reporting in next class—nothing written required).

## UNIT ONE—MATERIAL TRANSMISSION

### **Week 1: texts in physical forms**

**Monday September 9:** physical remains from antiquity and the texts that come with them; Sappho's poems, Pompeii graffiti, Horace.

**Wednesday September 11: visit to Harvard Art Museums** to sample various textual remains: coins, stamps, clay tablets, inscriptions.

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** introductions; discuss poems.

#### Readings for Week 1:

Amaranth Borsuk, ch. 1: "The Book as Object"

Classical writers on texts and posterity: Plato, *Phaedrus* 274e-277a; Sappho, *Fragments* 2, 16, and 58; Catullus 95; Horace, *Odes* 3.30; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.871-879; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.1, 1.2, 3.2, 4.72, 6.61, 7.51, 13.1; Excerpt from "Life of Adam and Eve"; Shakespeare, *Sonnet* 55

**ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE Friday 5pm:** compose a label describing the text and the medium of one object of your choice in the Museum bay/or related galleries—focus on the relationship between the text and its material form. (250 words)

### **Week 2: preservation and loss of ancient texts in the Middle Ages**

**Monday September 16:** medieval manuscripts, paths of transmission for ancient literature.

**Wednesday September 18: Visit to Houghton Library**—manuscripts and early printed books.

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Chaucer

### Readings for Week 2

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, and “Adam Sciveyn”

**ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE Friday 5pm:** close reading of a text that has been assigned in weeks 1 or 2 (of your choice) on the theme of durability/ ephemerality (500 words).

### **Week 3: impacts of the Renaissance: finding and printing texts**

*Please come to office hours this week or next to discuss your choice of text for the final project*

**Monday September 23:** humanism, recovering lost texts, how to preserve damaged and fragmentary works

**Wednesday Sept 25:** invention of printing, reactions to printing (redundancy, distribution, overload, loss of value).

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Petrarch

### Readings for Week 3

Amaranth Borsuk, ch. 2: “The Book as Content”

Francis Petrarch, *Letters to his Friends*: 3.18 (to Giovanni dell’Incisa on searching for manuscripts), 18.2 (to Nicholas Sigeros on receiving a copy of Homer); *Letters to the Ancients* 24.3-4 (to Cicero), 24.7 (to Quintilian), 24.8 (to Livy), 24.12 (to Homer)

Johan Gerritsen, “Printing at Froben’s: An Eye Witness Account,” *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991): 144-63.

**ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE Friday 5pm:** in the year 1500 you have discovered a long lost ancient text. Discuss the pros and cons of manuscript versus print as the best of preserving and disseminating the text in both the short long term and the short term. (500 words)

### **Week 4: impacts of the Renaissance: repairing and correcting texts**

*Please come to office hours this week to discuss your choice of text for the final project*

**Monday September 30:** humanists and the editing of texts.

**Wednesday October 2:** Erasmus and textual interpretation in the era of the Reformation

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Erasmus

### Readings for Week 4

Desiderius Erasmus, *New Testament Scholarship* (selections)

**ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE Friday 5pm:** choose the text that will be the object of your final project; write a label for it (iterating assignment 1: 250 words).

## UNIT TWO: CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

### **Weeks 5: paratexts and interpretation—managing transmission (part 1)**

**Monday October 7:** types and functions of paratexts; inside the book, alongside the book; preface, dedication, index, errata, title page with image, commendatory odes, self-presentation; mediating texts for readers.

**Wednesday October 9:** no class (Yom Kippur)  
**No section this week;** no reading; work ahead for Week 6

### **Week 6: paratexts and interpretation—managing transmission (part 2)**

**Monday October 14:** no class (University Holiday)

**Wednesday Oct 16:** ways of repurposing texts: commonplacing, excerpting, extractions, collections of quotations, examples, *sententiae*.

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Shakespeare paratexts

#### Readings for Week 5 and 6

William Shakespeare, front matter to *The First Folio* (1623)

William Shakespeare, preface to the *Sonnets* (1609)

Commonplacing of Shakespeare.

**ASSIGNMENT 5-6 DUE Friday 5pm:** compose paratexts for your text; a commentary plus 2-3 others of your choice: e.g. preface, dedication, index, errata, title page with image, commendatory ode, florilegium, prayer or other of your invention (500 words).

### **Week 7: transmission by transforming: imitation, invention, adaptation, forgery**

**Monday Oct 21**—making old texts new by imitating and rewriting them.

**Wednesday Oct 23: Visit to Weissman Preservation Center**—practices and ideals of repair

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Montaigne.

**Choose your outing, option A: Wed Oct 23, 5:30pm in Barker Center 133** an academic talk by Jennifer Chuong on printer's waste found in marbled end papers from the 18<sup>th</sup> century: "The Fluid Surface: Marbling and Overmarbling in Early America," with comment by Peter Stallybrass.

#### Readings for Week 7

Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*: "To the Reader" (p. 3), "We reach the same end by discrepant means" (pp. 5-8), "On fear" (pp. 13-16), "On educating children" (pp. 37-73), "On the cannibals" (pp. 79-92), "Of giving the lie" (pdf)

John Florio, *The Essayes or Morall, Politike, and Militarie Discourses of Montaigne* (front matter, "To the courteous reader," dedicatory poem by Samuel Daniel)

**ASSIGNMENT 7 DUE Friday 5pm :** just as Montaigne made old texts new by writing his Essays, use your text to create another text: e.g. a parody, an extension, an imitation, a reply (e.g. to a letter). (500 words)

## **UNIT THREE—THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN TRANSMISSION**

### **Week 8: institutions of transmission**

**Choose your outing, option B: Sunday Oct 27, evening:** viewing of the movie *Ex-libris* (3h30 minute movie; details TBA)

**Monday Oct 28:** the role of book markets and book collecting.

**Wed Oct 30:** multiple functions of libraries—some history of Harvard libraries

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Borges

Readings for Week 8

Jorge Francisco Borges, "The Library of Babel"

Eric Lindquist, "Books and the Iniquity or Wearing of Time," in Yvonne Carignan ed. *Who Wants Yesterday's Books?* (2005), pp. 5-34.

Matthew Battles, "Books for All" in *The Library: An Unquiet History*

**ASSIGNMENT 8 DUE Friday 5pm:** Imagine, and describe a rationale for, a special collection, or specialized library, that would include the text you've chosen; discuss the role of the book market and library policies needed to build such a collection and acquire your text in particular. (250-500 words)

**Week 9: the promise of new technologies**

**ASSIGNMENT 9 part 1 DUE before Monday lecture:** make your text or a portion of your text available for display digitally; provide an editorial introduction for your text online (on canvas site)

**Monday Nov 4:** visions of tech fixes for our transmission and storage needs. Facsimile technologies; the boom and bust of microfilm, and its unexpected legacy for digital forms.

**ASSIGNMENT 9 part 2 DUE before section:** comment on the digitized texts of two other students.

**Wednesday Nov 6:** impacts of digital media on the experience of texts (changes in reading, note-taking), access to texts (changes in what buying means), libraries (changes in acquisition, storage and providing access)

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss "Cold Storage" + annotation exercise

Readings for Week 9

Amaranth Borsuk, ch. 4 : "The Book as Interface"

Nicholas Basbanes, "Deep Sleep," in *Patience and Fortitude: A Roving Chronicle of Book People, Book Places and Book Culture* (New York: 2001)

View "Cold Storage" film about the Harvard Depository on Youtube (30 mins)

**Choose your outing, option C: Fri Nov 8, 2pm, Deknatel Lecture Hall:** visit MetaLAB on Harvard campus

**Week 10: the economics of preserving texts today**

**Monday Nov 11:** The expenses of libraries; choices librarians make in preserving texts for the future.

**Mon-Tues ASSIGNMENT 10 DUE Tuesday midnight:** please record your text consumption and library use on Monday-Tuesday. List what you read, in what format or medium, and where, as per a google form we will distribute.

**Wednesday Nov 13: panel with Harvard librarians**—copyright and open access, e-resources contracts, collective collecting, library ethnography

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** visit to Widener + discuss log of text and library use

Readings for Week 10

Steve Batt, "Inflation-adjusted expenditures of Academic Libraries, 1963-present"  
Laura Newton Miller, David Sharp, and Wayne Jones, "70% and Climbing: E-Resources, Books, and Library Restructuring"  
Tony Harava, "What is the State of the Big Deal?"  
Lindsay McKenzie, "University of California cancels deal with Elsevier" (20 March 2019)  
Aaron Perzanowski and Jason Schultz, "The Promise and Perils of Digital Libraries," in *The End of Ownership*

**Choose your outing, option D: Saturday Nov 16:** Visit the Boston International Antiquarian Book Fair

### **Week 11: archives**

**Monday Nov 18:** how do we preserve and transmit texts that are not in libraries?

**Wednesday Nov 20: Visit to the Harvard University Archives.** accessioning, arranging materials, uses of archives, choosing what to keep and what to give away.

**Sections meet Wed/Thurs:** discuss Ted Chiang

#### Readings for Week 11

Ted Chiang, "The Truth of Fact, the Truth of Feeling" in *Exhalation*, pp. 185-212. May also be available here:

[https://web.archive.org/web/20140222103103/http://subterraneanpress.com/magazine/fall\\_2013/the\\_truth\\_of\\_fact\\_the\\_truth\\_of\\_feeling\\_by\\_ted\\_chiang](https://web.archive.org/web/20140222103103/http://subterraneanpress.com/magazine/fall_2013/the_truth_of_fact_the_truth_of_feeling_by_ted_chiang)

Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance? Preserving the Past in a Digital Era," *American Historical Review* 108:3 (2003), 735-62.

**ASSIGNMENT 11 DUE Friday 5pm:** discuss the pros and cons of choosing among the media options currently available for preserving and disseminating your text for both the short and the long term. Consider at least one digital technology and at least one "legacy" technology (i.e. manuscript or print) in weighing two or three options. This is an iteration of the assignment in week 3 comparing the virtues of manuscript versus print ca 1500.

### **Week 12: summing up**

**Monday November 25.** Lecture: preparing for the showcase

**Wednesday November 27.** no class (Thanksgiving)

No section; no reading. Work toward final project

### **Week 13—showcasing student projects**

**Monday December 2.** Final lecture. Decisions future generations will make regarding the preservation of past texts.

**Wednesday Dec 4 (3-5:30pm)—last day of class: showcase of final projects in Lamont Forum Room.**

No section; no reading.

**DUE on Wednesday December 11, 5pm: final project and reflection paper** (discuss your decisions throughout the curation exercise in light of what others worked on; consider



counterfactuals). Compare the past/future fate of the adopted text with that of others considered in the course.