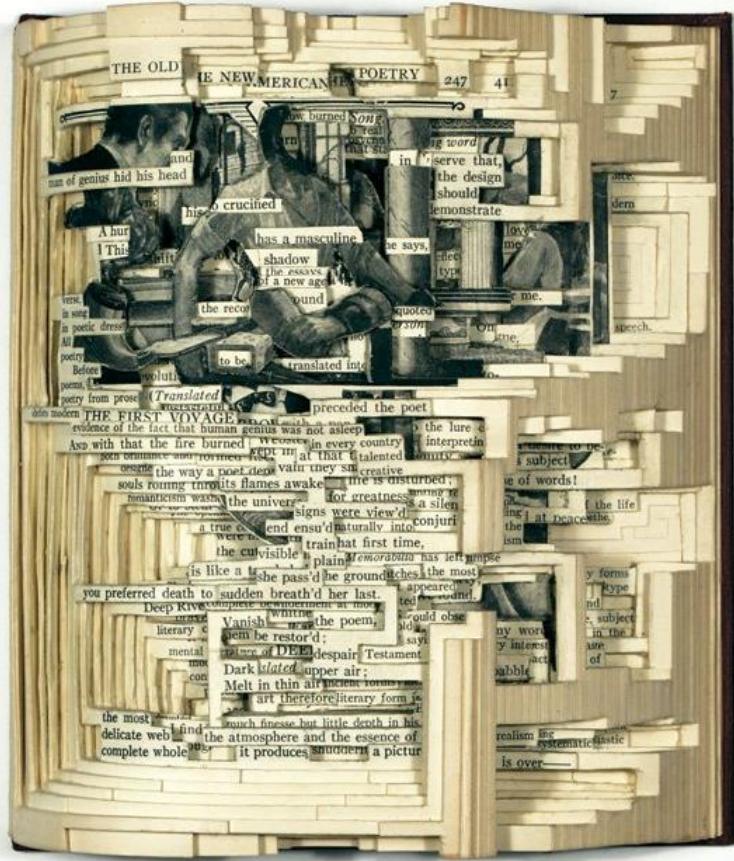


**ENGL 759C:  
BookLab: How to Do Things with Books**



[Brian Dettmer](#), *Prose and Poetry of the World* (2011)

Spring 2019  
University of Maryland  
Dr. Matthew Kirschenbaum  
he/him/his

Tuesdays, 3:30 – 6:00pm (Tawes 3250)  
Office Hours: by appointment (email [mgk@umd.edu](mailto:mgk@umd.edu))

**Introduction**

The bite of lead 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 our 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 (movable) type, bookbinding, 3-D printing, altered and treated books, and so on. 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 historical predecessors like Blake; we will examine the genre and form of the chapbook in the poetry and small press world; 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 spend time with graphic novels and other innovative approaches to the space of the page; 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 several critics and artists, as well as excursions to the nearby studios of Pyramid Atlantic (one of the preeminent book arts studios in the country)—as well as the Folger Shakespeare Library’s conservation lab.

### **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* (Grey Wolf, 2014); any edition; used copies—i.e., older printings and editions—especially welcome

In addition, I recommend either (or even both) of the following:

- Keith Houston, *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time* (Norton, 2016)
- Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oak Knoll, 1995)

While Borsuk’s *The Book* is an excellent overview and introduction, Houston’s *The Book* provides additional detail. Gaskell, meanwhile, remains the standard introduction to bibliography, which is to say the organized study of books as physical objects. Its detail and authority is unsurpassed. Copies of both are available in BookLab.

### **Grading and Requirements**

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

- Final Project: 50%
- Participation: 20%
- Book Report: 15%
- Discussion Postings: 15%

Final Projects will take one of four underlying forms: a traditional seminar paper contributing original scholarship to some aspect of book history or book studies; an assemblage of Amaranth Borsuk's *Abra* Kit (may be done by two persons as a pair); an assemblage of a Kit for Book History or a Critical Bibliographical Fabulation, modelled on the University of Victoria's [Kits for Cultural History](#) and/or Daniela Rosner's methods (may be done by two or more persons collaboratively); or last, a complete book of your own making, which might take the form of a limited edition chapbook, a treated or altered book, or something else. All of these options will be presented to you in more detail, and you will be expected to meet with me to discuss your final project at least once before the end of the semester.

The Book Report will be based on any one book, either creative or scholarly, [on the shelves](#) in BookLab. It will have two components: a write-up according to a template I will distribute, and a lightning presentation (5 minutes, strictly timed) to the class. It may be completed at any time during the semester, must be completed by [April 16](#).

Participation, which is closely tied to attendance: if you're not here, you're not participating. Note that the participation grade does not distinguish between Excused and Unexcused absences.

Finally, Discussion Postings, which should be framed as responses to the assigned readings and/or the reserve materials in BookLab. The requirement is for a minimum of three substantive posts throughout the semester: at least one must be posted [before Feb. 26](#); at least two must be posted [before March 26](#); and at least three must be posted [by April 30](#). These will be evaluated by me collectively as opposed to individually, and I will also take into account commenting in response to the postings of others.

### **About BookLab**

BookLab (Tawes 3248) will function as a direct annex for our work, both during our class meetings and outside of class. 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 press 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 well 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 two GAs, Mal Haselberger and Britt Starr. Open hours 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, you are expected to be present for class meetings—remember, missing a single graduate class is the equivalent of missing a full week of undergraduate classes. Moreover, given the hands-on nature of this class in particular, much of our work will simply be unreproducible outside of scheduled class sessions. If you accrue multiple absences, whether excused or unexcused, I reserve the option to request 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.

**Religious Observances:** The University of Maryland policy “Assignments and Attendance on Dates of Religious Observance” states that students should not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances and that, whenever feasible, they be allowed to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of any intended absences or need for other accommodation for religious observances in advance.

**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 that too 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. Some weeks include suggestions for review readings, usually relevant sections of Borsuk as well as the corresponding sections in Houston and Gaskell. 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 working with them. Budget an average of one hour for a typical week's reserve readings, though it's possible to spend considerably longer if you take an interest.

#### 1/29 Openings

Reading: Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book*; Anakana Schofield, "[What We Gain from Keeping Books](#)"

Viewing: "[Marie Kondo Organizes a Bookshelf](#)"

#### 2/5 The Natures of the Book

Readings: Ken Liu, "[The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species](#)"; Adrian Johns, from *The Nature of the Book*; Leah Price, from *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, "Reader's Block"; Jessica Pressman, "Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*: Memorial, Fetish, Bookishness"; Matthew Kirschenbaum, "Bookscapes: Modeling Books in Electronic Space"

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, *Blooks: The Art of Books that Aren't*; Jerome Rothenberg and David Guss, eds., *The Book, Spiritual Instrument*

#### 2/12 Papermaking (class meets at 4pm at [Pyramid Atlantic Art Center](#); guest instructor Ms. [Gretchen Schermerhorn](#))

Readings: Jonathan Senchyne, "Rags Make Paper, Paper Makes Money"; Senchyne, "Paper Nationalism: Material Textuality and Communal Affiliation in Early America"

Review Borsuk, 1-60; or Houston, 3-76; or Gaskell 57-77

In BookLab: Paper samples; Nicholas A. Basbanes, *On Paper: The Everything of its Two-Thousand Year History*; Mark Kurlansky, *Paper: Paging Through History*



- 2/19 Papermaking (class meets at 4pm at [Pyramid Atlantic Art Center](#); guest instructor Ms. [Gretchen Schermerhorn](#))

Viewing: Watch “How to Operate a Book,” “The Anatomy of a Book,” and “The Making of a Renaissance Book,” all on [the Rare Book School YouTube channel](#)

Review Borsuk, 1-60; or Houston, 241-328; or Gaskell 78-117

In BookLab: Daniel Wakelin, *Designing English*; Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters*

- 2/26 Unnam'd Forms Symposium, with Mr. [Russell Maret](#) and Dr. [Whitney Trettien](#) (1:30 – 5:30pm, schedule to be distributed)

Readings: Ulises Carrion, “The New Art of Making Books”; Whitney Trettien, “Media, Materiality, and Time in the History of Reading: The Case of the Little Gidding Harmonies”; browse [Thresholds](#) journal; browse [Russell Maret's website](#); Johanna Drucker, “[The Virtual Codex: From Page Space to E-Space](#)”

**Reminder:** Discussion Posting Due

- 3/5 Letterpress

Readings: 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?” Jerome McGann, from *A New Republic of Letters*, “A Page from Cooper”

Review Borsuk, 61-109; or Houston, 102-152; or Gaskell, 9-56, 118-141

In BookLab: Letterpress samples; Chris Fritton, *The Itinerant Printer*; LetterMPress (on iPad)

- 3/12 Letterpress

Readings: browse [The William Blake Archive](#); 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](#)”

Review Borsuk, 112-195; or Houston, 155-218; or Gaskell, 154-185

In BookLab: 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

3/19 **SPRING BREAK**

3/26 Not For You

Reading: Mark Danielewski, *House of Leaves*

In BookLab: Other Danielewski titles

**Reminder:** Discussion Posting Due

4/2 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*; Drucker, "The Myth of the Democratic Multiple"

Review: Borsuk, 197-258

In BookLab: *Abra* app (on iPad), *Abra* (1913 Press edition); Rollin Milroy, *About Agrippa: A Book of the Dead*; Borsuk and Brad Bouse, *Between Page and Screen*; Augmented reality pop-up books

4/9 3D Printing

Readings: Jentery Sayers, et. al., "Between Bits and Atoms: Physical Computing and Desktop Fabrication in the Humanities"; Cory Doctorow, "[PrintCrime](#)"; Philip K. Dick, "Pay for the Printer"; Beth Driscoll and Claire Squires, "[Serious Fun: Gaming the Book Festival](#)"; browse [3Dhotbed: Extending Bibliographical Pedagogy through Additive Manufacturing](#)

In BookLab: Chris Ware, *Building Stories*; *The Best of McSweeney's*; Anne Carson, *Nox*; *The Book of Pop-Up Board Games*

4/16 3D Printing

Readings: Sayers, et. al., "[Kits for Cultural History](#)"; browse University of Victoria's [Kits for Cultural Research](#); Daniela Rosner, from *Critical Fabulations: Reworking the Methods and Margins of Design*, "Why Fabulate Design," "Approaching Design as Critical Fabulations," "Fabulating in Practice"

**Reminder:** Book Reports Due

4/23 The Other BookLab (class meets 4pm at [Folger Shakespeare Library](#); hosted by Ms. Renate Mesmer)

Readings: Josephine Livingstone, "[What Do Our Oldest Books Say About Us?](#)"; Sam Knight, "[Do Proteins Hold the Key to the Past?](#)"



In BookLab: Agustín Berti, et. al., *La Biblioteca Roja*; Fernando Báez, *A Universal History of the Destruction of Books*

4/30 Paper Machines (guest instructor Dr. [Kari Kraus](#))

Readings: Kari Kraus, et. al., “Bibliocircuitry and the Design of the Alien Everyday”; Trettien, “[Creative Destruction/Digital Humanities](#)”; Squires and Driscoll, “[Oh Look, a Ferry; Or, the Smell of Printed Books](#)”

In BookLab: [Papier Machine Kit](#) and other soft-circuitry materials

**Reminder:** Discussion Posting Due

5/7 Citizenry

Reading: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*; Donald F. McKenzie, “Oral Culture, Literacy, and Print in Early New Zealand”; Price, from *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain*, “It-Narrative and the Book as Agent”; browse [BookCrossing](#) website

In BookLab: Editions and printings of *Citizen*; the *New England Primer*; Patricia Crain, *The Story of A*

5/14 The Deep Time of the Book

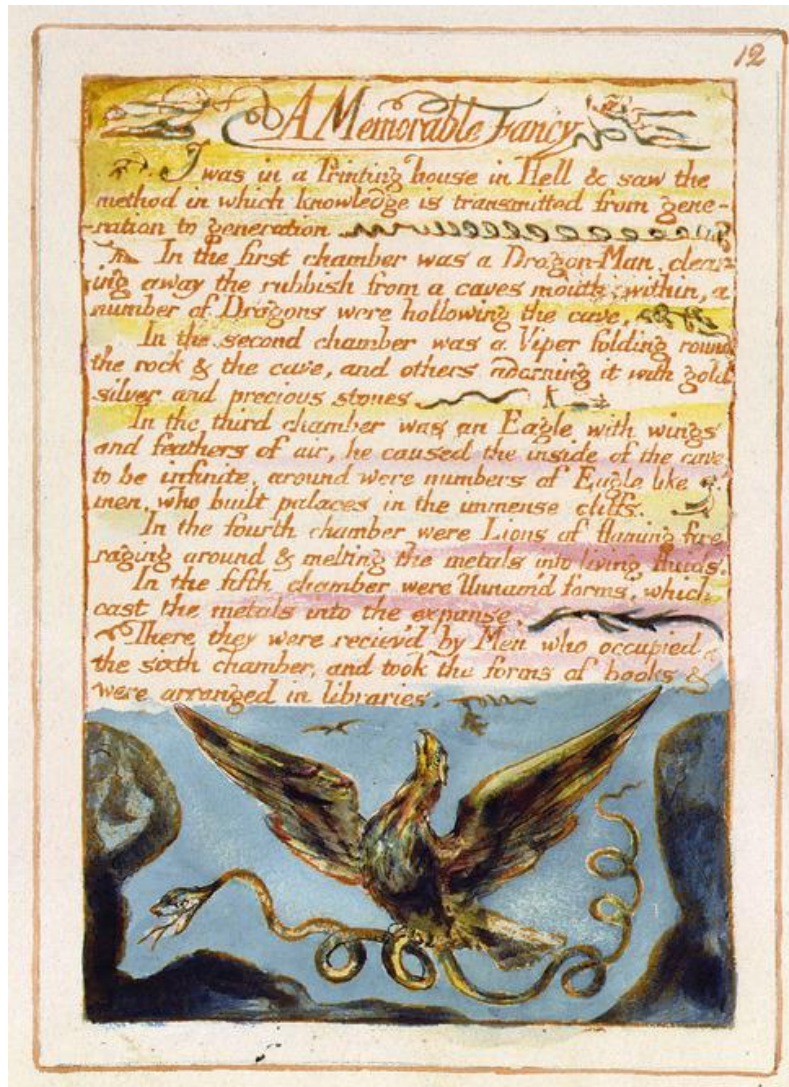
Readings: Craig Mod, “[The ‘Future Book’ is Here, But it’s Not What We Expected](#)”; Robin Sloan, “[he wakes up kicking](#)”; Christian Bök, “[The Xenotext Works](#)”; Joshua Schuster, “[On Reading Christian Bök’s The Xenotext Book One 10,000 Years Later](#)”; Merve Emre, “[This Library Has New Books By Major Authors but They Can’t be Read until 2114](#)”; Bethany Nowviskie, “[Speculative Collections](#)”

In BookLab: Bök, *The Xenotext*; *Hotel of the Mysteries*; William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *Cradle to Cradle*; Katie Holten, *About Trees*, Robin Sloan, “The Sleep Consultant”

5/20 **Final Projects Due (12 noon)**

*Version 1.4 January 28, 2019. For suggestions and contributions to this syllabus I am grateful to Amaranth Borsuk, Ryan Cordell, Kari Kraus, Jentery Sayers, and Whitney Trettien.*





William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, copy G, plate 15 (1818)  
 Houghton Library, Harvard  
 via [The William Blake Archive](http://www.williamblakearchive.org)