

LITR S106/ HUMS S106

Archive, Book, Record:
An Introduction to Yale's Special Collections

Summer 2024 • MW 9:25-12:00

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Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

What kinds of materials are preserved in the special collections of libraries and museums and how did they get there? How do we use these materials to reconstruct untold histories, to resurrect lost lives and their stories, and to study the making of cultural artefacts? This course offers a hands-on introduction to Yale's Special Collections through an investigation of personal archives (including letters, photographs, drawings, audio recordings, etc), rare books (broadly defined—including manuscripts, atlases, scrolls), and other ephemera that constitute the human record (clothes, playing cards, teeth, ceramics, among others). We will read foundational texts in critical archival studies and the history of the book, taking a wide-ranging, inclusive, and global approach—and will put them in dialogue with materials from Yale's Special Collections. The class will emphasize a hands-on creative-critical approach: students will be encouraged to explore book arts techniques alongside archival and book historical research. All classes will meet at the Beinecke library and students will work with rare materials in each session while also developing a final project based on these materials. Limited to 10 students.

Important In this course we aspire to be a diverse and inclusive learning community. By sharing our thoughts and questions, by listening with care and with open minds, we will work collaboratively to move past the paralysis that often occurs in well-meaning conversations on institutional structures, politics, and other controversial issues. I welcome students of all backgrounds, in all disciplines, those who have studied book history or done archival work before and those who are coming to these subjects for the first time.

Texts

Most of our readings will be available via Canvas.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introductions

M 5/27 –

Reading:

- Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archive* (selections)
- Michel-Rolph Trouillot, from *Silencing the Past* (selections)
- Ken Liu, “The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species”

In-class Activity: Exploring Materiality

**Come prepared with one book or material object (pamphlet, newspaper, magazine, old photos/film, letters/notebooks etc) you would like to physically take apart to think closely about its materiality. Do not bring something precious: you will be cutting, tearing, opening, investigating. Booktrader on York Street has many interesting books under \$5 that can be used for this purpose. Please also bring an Xacto knife or cutting implement with you if you can.

Assignment: Please read the [Guide to Using Special Collections at Yale University](#) and familiarize yourself with how to [request materials](#) at the various repositories.

W 5/29

Reading:

- Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library”
- Amitav Ghosh, “Unpacking my Grandfather’s Library”
- Ulises Carrion, “The New Art of Making Books”

In-class Activity:

- From Keri Smith, *This is Not A Book*
- Archival Detective work: what stories can we tell from a letter?

Week 2: What is an ARCHIVE?

M 6/3 –

Reading

- Trevor Owens, “[What Do You Mean by Archive?](#) Genres of Usage for Digital Preservers”
- Michelle Caswell, “[The Archive“ is Not An Archive:](#) Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies” (2016) → read the section “Archival Studies: An Intellectual History,” p. 4-10.
- Read the following definitions from the [Dictionary of Archives Terminology](#):

- [“Archives”](#)
- [“Record”](#)
- [“Document”](#)
- [“Papers”](#)
- [“Value”](#)

In-class Activity: Looking at Archival Material in class: What are we looking for? How do we find it?

W – 6/5

Reading

- Cvetkovich, “The Artist as Archivist, the Archive as Art” in *Barbara Hammer, Evidentiary Bodies*
- Hyman & Leibsohn, “Washing the Archive” *Early American Literature* 55:2 (2020)
- Luster, Dominique. [“Archives Have the Power to Boost Marginalized Voices.”](#) TEDx Pittsburgh. June 29, 2018 (8:23 min)
- Search in Archives@Yale and find one personal archive that interests you. Make a list of all the different kinds of documents contained in that archive; write down some preliminary thoughts on what we can and cannot learn from the different kinds of materials.

In-class Activity: Looking at Finding Aids and Archival Material in class: How to take notes and begin to tell a story.

Week 3: What is a BOOK?

M – 6/10

- Borsuk, from *The Book* (selections)
- Christopher de Hamel, from *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* (selections)
- Yael Rice, “The Global Aspirations of the Mughal Album,” in *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*

In-class Activity: Looking at manuscripts from across the world in the Beinecke’s collections

W – 6/12

Reading

- Trettien, from *Cut/Copy/Paste* (selections)
- Brotton, from *A History of the World in 12 Maps*
- Darnton, “The New Age of the Book”

In-class Activity: Looking at books from across the world in the Beinecke’s collections

Week 4: What is a RECORD?

M 6/17

Reading

- Kate Eichorn, "Introduction" to *The Archival Turn in Feminism*
- Carolyn Steedman, from *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002).
- Good, [A Gentle Introduction to Metadata](#)

In-class Activity: Looking at ephemera/records from across the world in the Beinecke's collections

W 6/19

Reading:

- Northern Arizona University Institute for Native Americans, "[Protocols for Native American Archival Materials](#)" (2007)
- Brooks, from *Liner Notes for the Revolution* (selections)

Assignment/Activity: Looking at Indigenous and African-American records in the Beinecke's collections

Week 5: Project Week

M 6/24 – Working on Projects – Individual Tutorials

W 6/26 -- Working on Projects – Individual Tutorials/ Final Presentations

F 6/28 – FINAL PROJECTS DUE

Course Policies and Requirements

I. ASSIGNMENTS

- Weekly Assignments:** You will be required to do short weekly writing assignments (2-3pp) based on the materials we encounter in the class.
- Book/article presentation:** You will prepare a short presentation (5-7 minutes) to help lead off discussion during one of our sessions. Sign-ups will be on the first day.
- Final Projects:** You will design a final project of relevance to your particular research/archival interests in conversation with the instructors. This could take the form of a standard research essay, the beginnings of a finding aid, an extended description of an object in the collections, a

creative book arts-related project etc. Previous students have produced artist's books, digital archives and exhibits as well as done original archival research papers.

Requirements for written assignments: All written assignments should be typed in a regular 12-point font, with 1-inch margins, proofread and carefully revised. Sloppy work is a mark of disrespect to all of us and we urge you to avoid it. You will be penalized for persistent technical errors (spelling mistakes, large font, short length, etc.).

II. GRADES

The grading structure for the course is as follows:

Participation: 20%

Weekly Assignments: 30%

Presentation: 10%

Final Project: 40%

III. CLASS RESOURCES

The Canvas site for this course will contain a number of supplementary materials to help you enrich your understanding of the topic. Please check the site regularly.

Yale Library websites: The YUL websites contain a wealth of materials accessible via search engines and finding aids. It is part of the work of this course for you to learn to use them effectively. We will expect that you are familiar with basic search practices and metadata; if you are unsure of your ease with navigating these resources, please let us know and we can help!

IV. YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Attendance: This course will rely on lively interchange: therefore attendance and *active* participation are required. This means having read the texts, explored the relevant resources and thought about the keywords before you come to class; having some specific responses to these prompts that you are willing to share; being sufficiently alert to join in a lively conversation, and being willing to participate in readings and exercises assigned. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a lower grade for the course. If you have to miss a class, please email me beforehand to let us know.

Lateness is disruptive and disrespectful to all of us, so please make sure you get to class on time. Our classroom is hidden away and a bit hard to find – please plan accordingly!

Communication: You are required to check your school email. From time to time, I will send out emails to you and the class: you are responsible to ensure that I have the correct email for you!

V. MISCELLANEOUS POLICIES

Extensions and Late Work: I'd like to get comments back to you as soon as possible, but can only do this if I receive your work promptly. I am not unreasonable, so please email me if circumstances hinder you from finishing an assignment on time. Do not email me for an extension the night before, unless you

have an officially sanctioned excuse or a very creative explanation. Extenuating circumstances I understand and tolerate; procrastination I understand but do not tolerate or encourage. A good paper takes time and forethought!

Accessibility Statement:

Your success in this class is important to me. We will all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or that form barriers to your inclusion, please let us know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies that can enable you to succeed in the course. I encourage you to visit [Student Accessibility Services](#) to determine how you could improve your learning as well. If you need official accommodations, you have a right to have these met. There is also a range of resources on campus, including the [Writing Center](#), [Residential College Tutors](#), and [Academic Strategies](#).

Plagiarism: Yale considers plagiarism, or academic dishonesty of any kind, a serious offense. To me, it is the worst offense you can commit in an academic context: it is disrespectful not only to your source, but to your own intellectual integrity. Forms of plagiarism include submitting papers, or portions of papers, written by other people as your own, as well as presenting someone else's ideas as your own without acknowledging the source. You are responsible for understanding what constitutes academic dishonesty and avoiding it. I encourage you to review the following resources so that you understand what exactly constitutes plagiarism – when in doubt, or if you have questions, don't hesitate to talk to me: <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>
<http://hnn.us/articles/514.html>

Always acknowledge the work of others — doing so does not diminish your work, it enhances it.

University Policies: I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observance of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically challenged, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; and harassment or discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual or affectional orientation, age or handicap, or any other basis for prejudicial treatment. I urge you to become familiar with the respective University regulations and to bring any questions or concerns to my attention.