Hacking the Book – ENGL 394
Time and Location TBD

Contact information:
Brandon Walsh
walshb@wlu.edu
Leyburn 218

This course considers literary experiment instigated by the Internet and exercised on both analogue and digital platforms. When we think of "hacking," we frequently think of solitary computer programmers in dark rooms. But hacking also implies a culture of profane disruption that closely mirrors developments in literary experimentation over the last seventy years. In this course, we will explore how new media affects the potential for literary experiment in the form of the printed book and how digital explorations offer new ways of engaging with textuality. We will read literature of and about the Internet as well as older texts that serve as precursors for the literary experiments of today. Authors include John Barth, Jean Baudrillard, Jorge Luis Borges, William Gibson, Kenneth Goldsmith, Seth Grahame-Smith, Shelley Jackson, Tom McCarthy, Vladimir Nabokov, and Mark Sample. In this course, we will act as scholar practitioners, reading, writing, and thinking critically, but also experimenting with forms, media, and technology. We will become textual hackers ourselves, exploring literary experiment in a variety of hands-on forms. Assignments include two papers and four digital or analog "hacks": a Twine hypertext story, a cut up literature experiment, a Time Mapper spatial project, and a Twitter bot.

Course objectives:

As a course available for English major credit, students will learn how to

1. write clear, persuasive analytical essays driven by argument about texts;
2. read closely, recognizing subtle and complex differences in language use;
3. seek out further knowledge about literary works, authors, and contexts, and document research appropriately, adhering to the highest standards of intellectual honesty;
4. broaden the range of literary texts and performances from which they can derive pleasure and edification.

In addition, this course has its own particular course objectives. Students will also learn to

5. think critically about the relationship between technology, media, and the book;
6. play and experiment creatively with literary forms;
7. reflect critically on the results of those activities;
8. become strong writers and thinkers together through the experiments.

Student progress towards these objectives will be measured by two papers (5-6 pages) as well as by four experimental assignments, each of which is accompanied by a polished reflection (1.5-2 pages): a Twine hypertext story, a cut up literature project, a Time Mapper spatial project, and a Twitter bot. The papers and assignments inform one another and are meant to reflect critically on each other.

Required texts:

The following are required and can be found at the bookstore:

Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*
William Gibson, *Neuromancer*
Seth Grahame-Smith, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*
Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island*

Other assigned readings can be found on our course Sakai website.

Course requirements:

The basic requirement of this course is active, creative, and consistent engagement with the course material in both written assignments and discussions. Because much of our class time will be devoted to discussion, you must come to class having done the readings for that day and be prepared to discuss them.

You will write extensively in this course. First, you will produce critical reflections on the course topic, on literary experiment in the digital age, as would be typical of any English class. Second, you will do a lot of experimenting, hacking, and playing with a variety of digital humanities approaches to the book. You will frequently be frustrated by these exercises, and not all of your approaches will

be as successful as others. You will be graded based on your engagement with the experiments, not by how successful they are. You can use these experimental "hacks" to inform your written assignments. The course asks you to think of yourself as a scholar practitioner, one who thinks, tinkers, and writes all at once.

Grading:

Class participation: 10%
Paper 1: 25%
Paper 2: 25%
Twine story assignment and reflection: 10%
Cut up literature assignment and reflection: 10%
Time Mapper assignment and reflection: 10%
Twitter bot assignment and reflection: 10%

Class participation:

Your participation grade is based on both the quantity and quality of your participation. In particular:

- An **A** means that you contribute to the vast majority of the discussions, that you have both done the readings and thought about them, and your contributions are highly productive. That is to say, you push the discussions in new, important, and interesting directions, raise substantive questions, and make links between readings and some of the larger themes of the course. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished markedly.
- A **B** means that you contribute to most of the discussions. You have done the readings and can talk about them. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be diminished.
- A **C** means that you don't participate a lot. When you talk, you show that you have done the readings, but do not fully engage with them. If you were not a member of the class, the quality of discussion would be somewhat diminished.
- A **D** means that you rarely contribute to class, and that when you do, your contributions do not reflect knowledge of the readings.
- An **F** means that either I don't know who you are or that your contributions are detrimental to class discussion (i.e., disruptive or disrespectful).

    In-class exercises may also count towards your participation grade.

Course policies:

- Please consider this syllabus as a working draft: there may be corrections and changes as the course goes along. You are responsible for any changes mentioned in class, including changes to the class schedule or course policies. If you have to be absent, be sure to find out what went on.
- Cell phones should not be seen or heard in class. Don't even think about texting in class.
- Computers are great! And useful! And fun! We will regularly use them in this course. But they can also be detrimental to the quality of class discussions. Please only use your laptops when explicitly instructed to do so by me, during our digital lab components. Your participation grade will suffer if it appears that you are using your laptop for anything other than engaging with the course.
- All papers must be typed, double-spaced, with 1-1.25 inch margins and in a 12-point font.
- Due to the intense nature of spring-term courses, for every day (including weekends) your paper is late, I will deduct two-thirds of a grade. That is, an A will become a B+, an A- will become a B, etc. Papers handed in on the day they are due but after the deadline are also late.
- If you need an extension on a paper, please contact me 24 hours in advance of the paper's deadline. Note that you must have a valid reason, such as an illness or a family emergency.
- If it becomes clear that the class as a whole is not doing the assigned readings, I may give unannounced quizzes on the readings.
- If you fall asleep in class, I will lower your course grade. Please reschedule your nap time.
- I will also lower your grade if you have problems coming to class on time.

Absence policy:

Active participation in the course is mandatory, as is your attendance. If you anticipate a conflict, you must let me know before the semester starts.

A Note on Plagiarism:

The following is taken from the Washington & Lee Catalog, as well as the Executive Committee website (http://www.wlu.edu/x8198.xml):

"'Plagiarism' describes the use of another's words or ideas without proper acknowledgment. The students of Washington and Lee University have considered plagiarism a violation of the Honor System in the past; therefore, all forms of plagiarism including Internet plagiarism are taken very seriously….Plagiarism takes many forms, including the wholesale copying of phrases or texts, or the use of ideas without indicating the source. Certain facts must also be properly acknowledged."

The library also has the following page with links to cites discussing what plagiarism is and how to avoid it: http://library.wlu.edu/research/ref/cite_plag.asp.

As your papers approach, I will be talking about this subject in more detail, as well as how to properly cite your sources.

Accommodations policy:

Washington and Lee University makes reasonable academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. All undergraduate accommodations must be approved through the Office of the Dean of the College. Students requesting accommodations for this course should present an official accommodation letter *within the first two class days of the term* and schedule a meeting outside of class time to discuss accommodations. It is the student's responsibility to present this paperwork in a timely fashion and to follow up about accommodation arrangements. Accommodations for test-taking must be arranged with the professor at least a week before the date of the test or exam, including finals.

Sakai site:

The syllabus, along with any classroom handouts and assignments will be on the course's Sakai site, available at https://sakai.wlu.edu/.

Schedule:

Day	Date	In Class (AM – 2hrs)	In Lab (PM – 2 hrs)
WEEK 1			
1	TBD	*Neuromancer*	Hypertext Creations with *Twine* workshop
2	TBD	*Neuromancer*	Play Zork together in class, discussion of Zork
3	TBD	Excerpts from Shelly Jackson, *My Body*, available from electronicliterature.org	Discuss your Twine projects, project time
Thursday: Hypertext Assignments and Reflection Due			

Day	Date	In Class (AM – 2hrs)	In Lab (PM – 2 hrs)
WEEK 2			
1	TBD	Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths"	Cut up literature workshop and discussion
2	TBD	*Pale Fire*	Visit to Special Collections
3	TBD	*Pale Fire*	Discuss your analog hacks, project time
Thursday: Paper 1 Due Friday: Cut Up Literature Assignment and Reflection Due			

Day	Date	In Class (AM – 2hrs)	In Lab (PM – 2 hrs)
WEEK 3			
1	TBD	Borges, "The Library of Babel"; Jean Baudrillard, excerpt from *Simulacra and Simulation*, Tom McCarthy,	Time Mapper workshop

		"Writing Machines"	
2	TBD	*Satin Island*	In-class viewing and discussion: interview with Ingo Niermann and Tom McCarthy, "Art is a Haven, but Where's the Crane to Unload?," available from [YouTube](#)
3	TBD	*Satin Island*	Discuss your spatial projects, project time
Thursday: Time Mapper Assignment and Reflection Due			

Day	Date	In Class (AM – 2hrs)	In Lab (PM – 2 hrs)
WEEK 4			
1	TBD	*Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (first half only), John Barth, "Literature of Exhaustion"	Twitter bot workshop
2	TBD	Kenneth Goldsmith, "Why Appropriation?"; "Metropolitan Forecast" and "Islam," available from "[Poetry Foundation](#)"	"On Uncreative Writing" lecture by Kenneth Goldsmith screened in class, available from [YouTube](#)
3	TBD	"A protest bot is a bot so specific you can't mistake it for bullshit," Mark Sample; familiarize yourself with @WhitmanFML, @KimKierkegaard;	Discuss and troubleshoot your bots.
Thursday: Paper 2 Due Friday: Twitter Bots and Reflection Due			