

2316: Literature and Culture--“Coming to Terms with The Information Age”

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Fact: the amount of information to be had from one edition of *The New York Times* exceeds the amount the average American in the 1800s could expect to learn over the course of his entire life. Look it up.

But does all this information, the raw data we take from newspapers, the facts we glean from the Internet, help us understand our lives more productively? Does all this information illuminate the world, or does it obscure it?

This course will begin with these questions in an examination of the culture of technology and the age of information. We will look at technologies we use every day, including language and writing. We will debate, among other things, the popularity of memes, the ubiquity of social media and reality television, the inescapability of celebrity, the commodification of the self, the limitations of facts, the elusiveness of truth, the disappearance of the body, and the obsolescence of sincerity. To do so, we will study *nonfiction*: memoir, autobiography, journalism, documentary film, and personal essay (which can be defined to include viral videos, blogs, even tweets). We will use the particular questions nonfiction helps us learn to ask, while interacting with the stories it tells us about our selves, our homes, and our relationships.

Students will present on the assigned texts and lead class discussions, as well as contribute weekly to a course blog. Students will write two longer pieces of creative nonfiction: a memoir/biography and a personal essay. Finally, students will pitch, design, and produce a semester project that culminates in a substantial experiment with nonfiction and a public presentation or performance.

Course Texts:

Excerpts:

Selections from OffCite (Blog) and *Cite: The Architecture and Design Review of Houston* (Print Journalism)

Tours from Hear our Houston (Audio; Web)

Selections from *The Annotated Emerson*, including “Self-Reliance” and “Experience,” edited by David Mikics (Print)

Books:

Home and Exile, by Chinua Achebe (Memoir, Personal Essay)

Mirage, by Wolde Ayele (Memoir)

Notes from No Man’s Land, by Eula Biss (Journalism, Personal Essay)

Lifespan of a Fact, by John D’Agata and Jim Fingal (Journalism)

Brother, I’m Dying, by Edwidge Danticat (Biography)

Zeitoun, by Dave Eggers (Biography)

Trespasses, by Lacy M. Johnson (Memoir)

Persepolis, by Marjane Satrapi (Graphic Novel)

Consider the Lobster and *A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again*, by David Foster Wallace (Personal Essay)

Films

Waste Land, by Lucy Walker (Documentary Film)

Stick 'Em Up, by Alex Luster (Documentary Film)

My Winnipeg, by Guy Maddin (Documentary Film)