

Understanding New Media

Media 280

Monday Room: 543 and Wednesday Room: 504, Fall 2008 4:10pm – 5:25pm

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Course Description

This class covers the convergence of media, communications technologies, art, design, and culture. It is intended to familiarize students with important approaches in new media, focusing on the history of the medium and the conceptual history of interactivity in art and communication.

“All media were once new media”, states cultural theorist Lisa Gitelman as she begins her book *New Media 1740-1915*. Historicizing media, whether “new” or otherwise is important if we are to understand what has led to the present cultural milieu in the west and elsewhere. By looking at past as well as current technologies we will draw a thread through what often appear to be disparate objects and tie them to one another within the flow of history.

New media do not inhabit one discipline in particular and so fall under the rubric of “multimedia”. As multimedia, this class will necessarily include studies from a series of diverse disciplines: art, science, philosophy, cultural theory, and history.

Many of the ideas surrounding media are both difficult and highly abstract and so art will play an important role in this class. Using the work of artists we will examine the theories presented in this class as they manifest themselves in concrete art objects.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of some major themes in media theory.
- Develop an understanding of the history of new media.
- Gain knowledge of new media art and artists.

Student Responsibilities

- Turn in work on time. Late work will not be accepted.
- Spend the appropriate amount of time and effort completing assignments. Time working outside of class is required!
- Participate in class.
- Be present! Attendance is mandatory. 4 absences = a failing grade.
- You are responsible for signing the role. This is how I know that you were present.

Course Requirements

- Students will write a semi-weekly 1-2 page response to the reading. I’m not looking for a grand thesis here, just considered responses. Every response should use the reading!
- There one final research paper with MLA documentation 9-10 pages. You will also be required to do a presentation based on your final research project.

Required Texts

- *The New Media Reader* edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort.

The reader is available for purchase from Shakespeare and Co. There will also be a copy on reserve at the library. You may also attempt to find a used copy on the web. www.addall.com is a used book search engine I’ve found handy.

- Other readings will be available on the Internet or I will give out copies in advance.

Method of evaluation:

Your grade will be based on class participation, responses to reading, and a final paper and presentation. No late assignments will be accepted. Any papers that are found to be guilty of plagiarism will result in a **failure** in the course. No exceptions!

Plagiarize:

1. To use and pass off as one's own (the ideas or writings of another).
2. To appropriate for use as one's own passages or ideas from (another).

Source: The American Heritage College Dictionary. (1997). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Plagiarism:

is the act of presenting another person's literary, artistic, or musical work as one's own. For example, a student who copies from reference books has committed plagiarism. A work need not be identical to the original to be plagiarism. But it must be so similar that it has obviously been copied.

from: <http://lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/facres/plagiarism.html>

More information on plagiarism can be found at:

<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/qpp.html>

Grades will be based on the following percentages:

Participation and Attendance	30%
Final Research Paper	20%
Final Presentation	5%
Responses to reading	45%

Course Schedule**Class 1 Wednesday August 27****Introduction**

Go over syllabus.

What is "New Media"? What is "Old Media"?

View film *Nanook of the North*.

Class 2 Wednesday September 3rd**Introduction Continued**

View *Metropolis*. Look at examples of Machinima.

Class 3 Monday September 8th**Walter Benjamin: Art, Mass Production, and Aura 1**

Discuss Benjamin.

Reading Due

The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical Reproducibility by Walter Benjamin
Handout/Online

Analysis 1 Due

Write an analysis of *The Work of Art*.

Class 4 Wednesday September 10th

Walter Benjamin: Art, Mass Production, and Aura 2

View Dziga Vertov's *The Man With the Movie Camera*, Films by Martin Arnold, discuss Brecht's Theory of Alienation.

Class 5 Monday September 15th

Adorno and Horkheimer: Art, Mass Production, and Aura 1

Discuss Horkheimer and Adorno's Essay *The Culture Industry* in relation to Benjamin's essay.

Reading Due

-*The Culture Industry* by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer
Handout/Online

Analysis 2 Due

We begin our term with two foundational works written in first half of the twentieth century. Compare and contrast Adorno and Horkheimer's chapter in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to Benjamin's essay.

Class 6 Wednesday September 17th

Adorno and Horkheimer: Art, Mass Production, and Aura 2

View Refenstahl's *Triumph of the Will, They Rule* by Josh On

Class 7 Monday September 22th

Structuring Information 1

Discuss Bush, Borges. The birth of the Internet.

Reading Due

-*The Garden of Forking Paths* by Jorge Luis Borges
The New Media Reader pgs 29-34
-*As We May Think* by Vannevar Bush
The New Media Reader pgs 35-47
-Spend a few minutes reading *Victory Garden* by Stuart Moulthrop
<http://www.eastgate.com/VG/VGStart.html>

Class 8 Wednesday September 24th

Structuring Information 2

Folksonomies, Information Architecture. Explore the del.icio.us social book-marking system.

Reading Due

Folksonomies by Adam Mathes (Optional)

Online

Analysis 3 Due

Borges' labyrinth and Bush's Memex present different ways of structuring information. How are those methods of structuring information different, how are they the same? Do they reflect different ways of understanding the world? Do they attempt to make it more logical? Do they present different viewpoints concerning society's ability to make sense of his world?

Class 9 Monday October 6th

The Medium is the Message

Discuss McLuhan. View Net.art.

Reading Due

-Playboy Interview with Marshall McLuhan

Handout/Online

-*The Medium is the Message* by Marshall McLuhan

The New Media Reader pgs 203-209

Class 10 Tuesday October 14th

Technological Determinism and The Social Construction of Technology

Discuss Williams and Winner.

Reading Due

-First Chapter *Television: The Society and the Technology* by Raymond Williams

The New Media Reader pgs 289-300

-*Do Artifacts Have Politics?* By Langdon Winner

Handout/Online

Analysis 4 Due

Two very important thinkers in the study of media and society, Williams and McLuhan also present opposing views on to how we might understand media's relationship to society.

Write an analysis of Williams highlighting how his essay might be a critique of McLuhan.

Class 11 Wednesday October 15th

Interactivity in Art 1

Discuss Alan Kaprow , John Cage, Fluxus.

Reading Due

-*Happenings* by Alan Kaprow
The New Media Reader pgs 83-88
-*Intermedia* by Dick Higgins
Handout/Online

Class 12 Monday October 20th

Interactivity in Art 2

Reading Due

-*The Construction of Change* by Roy Ascott
The New Media Reader pgs 127-132
-*Responsive Environments* by Myron W. Kruger
The New Media Reader pgs 377-389

Analysis 5 Due

Do the approaches to art discussed in the readings challenge the traditional roles of artist/spectator? If they do challenge those categories, do they do so in significant ways? Why would an artist want to challenge those roles anyway? More importantly, how does interaction change our relationship to media/technology in substantial ways according to the authors?

Class 13 Wednesday October 22nd

Interactivity in Art 3

View documentation of interactive art and media.

Class 14 Monday October 27th

Technology and the Body 1

Discuss Virilio

View works by body modification artists STELARC, Orlan, etc.

Reading Due

-Except from *The Art of the Motor* by Paul Virilio
Online/Handout
-Man-Computer Symbiosis by J.C.R. Licklider
The New Media Reader pgs 73-82

Class 15 Wednesday October 29th

Technology and the Body 2

View works by Eduardo Kac, etc.

Analysis 6 Due

Does technology extend physical and mental abilities? If so, is there anything lost in the process? Does the modification of the body with technology enlarge or contract our definition of what it means to be "human"?

Class 16 Monday November 3

Virtuality and Semiotics

Intro to semiotic theory. Discuss various concepts of "virtuality".

Reading Due

Disneyworld by Jean Baudrillard

Handout/Online

Class 17 Wednesday November 5th

Nonlinearity 1

Discuss William Burroughs, Nonlinearity in literature as it appears in both contemporary and past cultures.

Reading Due

-The Cut-Up Method by William S. Burroughs

The New Media Reader pgs 89-91.

-Prose and Anticombinatorics by Italo Calvino

The New Media Reader pgs 183-187

Class 18 Monday November 10th

Nonlinearity 2

View I.F. works. Discuss using Arseth's theoretical framework.

Reading Due

-Nonlinearity and Literary Theory by Espen J Aarseth

New Media Reader pgs 761-782

Analysis 7 Due

Take a few minutes and play/read Curses, a work of interactive fiction

Curses is available on the New Media Reader CD. You can find by opening the CD -> Go to the "Programs" folder -> Interactive Fiction -> Curses.z5

You may also download Curses here:

<http://wurb.com/if/game/55>

There are instructions on how to play in the README.txt but on OSX you should download the following application to read the text:

<http://www.logicalshift.co.uk/mac/Zoom-1.0.4.dmg>

On windows you can use the Frotz.exe app included in the New Media Reader or download it here:

<http://www.malinche.net/windowsfrotz.exe>

The story begins very dryly, but changes drastically as you progress.

Write a page about your experience with Curses, relating it to this weeks reading or another of your choice.

Class 19 Wednesday November 12th

WWW and Community

Discuss Turkle, Etzioni.

Reading Due

-Excerpt from *Life on Screen* by Sherry Turkle

Handout/Online

-*Are Virtual and Democratic Communities Feasible* by Amitai Etzioni

Handout/Online

Class 20 Monday November 17th

WWW and Community 2

Analysis 8 Due

Write a response to the reading.

Class 21 Wednesday November 19th

Surveillance

Final Paper Topics Due!

Discuss Foucault and "Panopticism".

Reading Due

-*Panopticism* by Michel Foucault

Handout/Online

-Surveillance and Capture by Agre

The New Media Reader

Class 22 Monday November 24th

View the work of the Institute for Applied Autonomy, The Yes Men, etc.

Analysis 9 Due

Consider a current issue that would be an applicable example of surveillance and discuss it in terms of insights and analysis provided by the readings.

Class 23 Wednesday November 26th

Design

Discuss Norman and design principles.

Reading Due

-*The Psychopathology of Everyday Things* by Donald Norman

Handout/Online

Class 24 Monday December 1st

View drawings.

Analysis 10

Design a product that combines the following into one item:

- i. AM-FM radio
- ii. Mp3 player
- iii. CD player
- iv. Telephone
- v. Telephone answering machine
- vi. Clock
- vii. Desk lamp

Class 25 Wednesday December 3rd

Bad Design Scavenger Hunt.

Class 26 Monday December 8th

Present Group 1

Class 27 Wednesday December 10th

Present Group 2

Class 28 Monday December 15th

FINAL PAPERS DUE !!!!!

Present Group 3

New Media Department Policy and Information

* If you have a disability which will affect your coursework, please notify the instructor within the first two weeks of class to ensure suitable arrangements and a comfortable working environment. Contact The Office for Students with Disabilities, Hunter East 1119 Phone (212) 772-4882 or 4891, TTY: (212) 650-3230.

* This is a list of numbers which you can use if there is an emergency or crisis situation on the Hunter campus or if you need assistance at other times. Security -B125 West - 772 – 4444; During business hours: Medical Office - Room 307 North - 772 – 4800; Office of Student Services - 1119 East - 772 – 4882 4891 (crisis counseling available), The Women's Center - 801 East - 772 – 4931.

Hunter's Reading/Writing center is where students receive tutoring in reading and writing skills, critical reading, and the writing process. Students can apply for a weekly appointment with a tutor and/or use drop-in services during scheduled hours. Students may also attend workshops offered at the Center throughout the academic year.
<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/>

*** Statement on Originality of the Work**

All work completed for this course must be completed by the student enrolled in the course. All work for this course must be made in this course and not fulfilling the requirements of another prior or current course unless pre-approved by the instructor. Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense which will result in penalties ranging from reduction of class grade to failure in the course. Plagiarism occurs when the ideas, images, and words, published or unpublished, of others are presented as one's own without citing the original source.

Plagiarism also occurs when the papers, research, or creative works of another person are presented as one's own work.