

## **Understanding New Media**

Media 280

Monday and Wednesday, Summer 2008 11:40am – 2:50pm

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Office hours: By appointment

### **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. 3 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 response to each reading. I'm not looking for a grand thesis here, just considered responses to the reading. Every response should use the reading.
- There will be 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. This should be a paper of professional quality, free from spelling and grammatical errors, well thought out and well structured.

### **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](http://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.

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 and Presentation	25%
Responses to reading	45%

**Course Schedule**

**Class 1 M June 2nd**

**Introduction**

Go over syllabus.

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

View film *Nanook of the North*. View *Metropolis*. Look at examples of Machinima.

**Class 2 W June 4th**

**Art, Mass Production, and Aura 1**

Discuss Benjamin.

View Dziga Vertov's *The Man With the Movie Camera*.

**Reading Due**

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

**Analysis 1 Due**

Write a one page analysis of *The Work of Art*.

### **Class 3 M June 9th**

#### **Art, Mass Production, and Aura 2**

Discuss Horkheimer & Adorno.

View Refenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*

#### **Reading Due**

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

#### **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 4 W June 11th**

#### **Structuring Information**

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

#### **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>

#### **Analysis 3 Due**

How do the systems the two authors envision 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 the world?

### **Class 5 M June 16<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Technological Determinism & The Social Construction of Technology**

Discuss McLuhan, Williams, and Winner

#### **Reading Due**

-Playboy Interview with Marshall McLuhan  
Handout  
-*The Medium is the Message* by Marshall McLuhan  
The New Media Reader pgs 203-209  
-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

#### **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 a one-page analysis of the two texts highlighting Williams' critique of Technological Determinism.

## **Class 6 W June 18th**

### **Interactivity in Art**

Discuss Authors, view examples of interactive art.

#### **Reading Due**

- Happenings* by Alan Kaprow  
The New Media Reader pgs 83-88
- Intermedia* by Dick Higgins  
Handout
- 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 7 M June 23rd**

### **WWW and Community**

Discuss Turkle, Etzioni.

#### **Reading Due**

- Excerpt from *Life on Screen* by Sherry Turkle  
Handout
- Are Virtual and Democratic Communities Feasible* by Amitai Etzioni  
Handout

#### **Analysis 6 Due**

Write a one-page response to the reading.

## **Class 8 W June 25th**

### **Nonlinearity**

Discuss William Burroughs, Nonlinearity in literature as it appears in both contemporary and past cultures. View I.F. works. Discuss using Arseth's theoretical framework.

#### **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
- 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 you experience with Curses, relating it to this weeks reading or another of your choice.

### **Class 9 M June 30<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Surveillance**

Discuss Arge and Foucault. Final topics due.

#### **Reading Due**

-Panopticism by Michel Foucault  
-*Surveillance and Capture* by Philip Agre  
The New Media Reader pgs 737-760

#### **Analysis 8 Due**

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

### **Class 10 W July 2nd**

#### **Design**

Discuss Norman and design principles. Examine class drawings. Bad Design Scavenger Hunt.

#### **Reading Due**

-*The Psychopathology of Everyday Things* by Donald Norman  
Handout

#### **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 11 M July 7th**

Present Group 1

### **Class 12 W July 9th**

Present Group 2

### **Final Papers Due July 9th**

#### **The Final:**

For the final paper you will write a close analysis of one technological artifact or event. The

subject may be a website, the work of a new media artist, a particular new media technology, or some other object that falls within the purview of the class. The paper will not be evaluated on its breadth so the more narrow the focus the better. You should site at least five sources that were used in your research, two of which may be found in the reader and the remaining three elsewhere. The paper should be 9 pages in length. You will also be required to give a class presentation of your research around 6 minutes in length. We will further discuss the final paper and presentation later in the term.

**This Syllabus subject to change.**

### **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.

#### **\* Absence policy**

Attendance to all classes is required and attendance is taken at each class. A significant part of your final grade will be determined by class attendance. If you need to miss a class, contact the instructor prior to the date and make alternative arrangements. After the fact explanations do not work. More than three absences will result in an 'F' (failure) for the class. No exceptions. This is standard policy across digital media courses. Class begins on time, so you must be punctual. Two late arrivals equal one absence.