



Knowing New Media

“[I]t is only on those terms, standing aside from any structure or medium, that its principles and lines of force can be discerned. For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary.”

— Marshall McLuhan: *The Medium is the Message*

“Media history offers nothing less—if also a great deal more—than the material cultures of knowledge and information.”

— Lisa Gitelman: *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*

“I call that we resist the dominant notions of what it means to be technologically "literate" or "advanced" (with roots in manifest destiny) and that we critically reflect on struggles for and engage with discussions about digital and visual rhetorical sovereignty, or the inherent right for indigenous communities to claim and shape their own communication needs (as well as the rhetoric of their identities) in digital and visual spaces.”

— Angela Haas: “Wampum as Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice”

“It seems impossible to know the extent, content, and effects of new media. Who can touch the entire contents of the World Wide Web or know the real size of the Internet or of mobile networks?”

— Wendy Chun: *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*

Course Description

Media, at the most simple level, are that which come “in between.” Media connect people, cultures, places, objects, and concepts, and they are doing so at accelerating speed. The promises of so-called “new” media are great: flattening divisions, increasing dialogue, and promoting difference. But there are dangers, as well.

In the past year, we have begun to see widespread and damaging effects of new media technologies. Data leaks, voter interference, and the material effects of communication technologies on the environment—to name only a few—have challenged the celebratory, often utopian perspective on technological development that has characterized technological culture until only recently. As scholars have argued across disciplines, it is time to challenge and reroute our narratives of technology. But how?

This course explores theories and methods of new media studies both inside and outside of rhetoric and composition to consider how we might understand and critique our conceptions of technology. Given that technology has become centralized in our lives, we will mine cross-disciplinary and transnational conversations for ways of “standing aside” from media technologies, as McLuhan encourages, to see them in new ways. Assessing perspectives from rhetoric and composition, cultural studies, feminist theory, German media philosophy, and other areas, the purpose of this course is to find positions from which to see new media in novel ways. Our inquiry will focus on the following questions:

- What are the primary concerns of new media scholarship? What were its foundational questions/assumptions, and how have they been reworked and revised over time?
- What methodologies have been employed in order to study media?
- Where do we locate the “newness” of new media? Does “new” refer to a particular medium/set of media technologies (e.g., digital media) or is “new” relative (e.g., the phonograph before it became sedimented in cultural practice)?
- To what extent does new media inform and become informed by questions culture, identity, and subjectivity? How do these authors address (or avoid) particularities of subjectivity and identity in their work?
- What is the relationship between materialities (technical, social, gendered, raced, economic, etc.) of media and subjectivities/identities? How have scholars weighed the liberatory possibilities of new media against their constraining aspects?

Assignments

Reading Responses

In the course, you will write weekly reading responses summarizing and synthesizing arguments from the assigned readings. These responses serve two purposes. First, they will offer practice in generously and generatively engaging with multiple complex arguments, a central practice only to academic work but to participation in public life. Additionally, these responses will serve to prepare you for class discussions. Coming to class with a shared understanding of the texts will foster a deeper and more incisive dialogue about the assigned material. Your responses should be as close to and no more than 1 single-spaced page, including your heading and title, and each response must engage *all* of the reading for the week.

Media Issue Report

Midway through the semester, each of you will produce a two-page single-spaced report of a “media issue” in current affairs. This report will be the setup to your final project, an annotated bibliography. While I am relatively open to what constitutes such an issue, you will identify your issue and informally present it in class on week before the due date in order to ensure your success in the assignment. This document should not be a scholarly analysis but rather, simply, a report on the contours of the issue. I expect that you will primarily cite new and other *reputable* popular press outlets, though you are welcome to employ readings from the course to the extent that doing so is necessary.

Position Paper and Annotated Bibliography

Because new media studies is a diverse and far-reaching field—in fact, new media studies is better understood as an umbrella term for a wide swath of diverse fields—it is very unlikely that you will be in a position to contribute new knowledge in the form of a seminar paper to these conversations at the end of the course. Instead, your final project will consist of an annotated bibliography and a five- to seven-page position paper, *double-spaced*, directed at what you see to be a pressing concern in new media studies (likely, the one you identified in your Media Issue Report). The annotated bibliography must consist of a minimum of ten scholarly sources, two of which must be monographs. Your position paper will take the knowledge you gained from your annotated bibliography and from class readings to answer the following questions using you:

- What is the importance of the issue you are raising? In what ways should it be understood as a media issue?
- What theories are useful to understand the issue? What methods and modalities would be effective analyzing and engaging with it?
- Finally, what would a focused, longer-term project on your issue look like? What texts/artifacts/phenomena would you “read” in this project? What would your *imagined* arguments be?

Remember that this project is *not* a seminar paper, and thus you are not being asked to contribute new arguments to the field(s) of new media studies. Rather, think of this more as a set-up to a larger project you might carry out in later work or, at least, as a way of

developing some expertise in a media issue of importance to public life. Your projects will be assessed on their engagement with existing scholarship, the alignment between your topic and your proposed theories/methods for studying it, and your fulfillment of the requirements of the assignment, which will be discussed in greater detail in class. My holistic feedback will focus primarily on the “next steps” I see for what will certainly be the interesting, engaging, and necessary projects you propose.

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Introductions

- McLuhan, Marshall. “The Medium is the Message.” *The New Media Reader*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, MIT P, 2003, pp. 203-209.
- Manovich, Lev. “What is New Media?” *The Language of New Media*, MIT P, 2002, pp. 18-61.
- Selfe, Cynthia and Richard Selfe. “The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 4, 1994, pp. 480-504.

Week 2: Media Narratives and Histories

- Gitelman, Lisa. “Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects.” *Always Already New: Media History and the Data of Culture*, MIT P, 2006, pp. 1-24.
- Haas, Angela M. “Wampum As Hypertext: An American Indian Intellectual Tradition of Multimedia Theory and Practice.” *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2008, pp. 77–100.
- Banks, Adam. “Oakland, the Word, and the Divide: How We All Missed the Moment.” *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, NCTE, 2011, pp. 827-868.

Week 3: Methodological Challenges

- Wysocki, Anne and Johndan Johnson-Eilola. “Blinded by the letter: why are we using literacy as a metaphor for everything else?” *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*, NCTE, 2011, pp. 717-738.
- Gitelman, Lisa. “Epilogue: Doing Media History.” *Always Already New: Media History and the Data of Culture*, MIT P, 2006, pp. 151-158.
- Ball, Cheryl. “Show, Not Tell: The Value of New Media Scholarship.” *Computers and Composition*, 2004, 403-425.

Week 4: Software Studies

- Manovich, Lev. “Introduction.” *Software Takes Command*, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 1-51.
- Chun, Wendy. “Order From Order, or Life According to Software.” *Programmed Visions: Software and Memory*, MIT P, 2011, pp. 101-132.
- Vee, Annette. “Introduction: Computer Programming as Literacy.” *Coding Literacy: How Computer Programming is Changing Writing*, MIT P, 2017, pp. 1-42.

Week 5: Reading, Writing, and Surveillance

- Emerson, Lori. "Postscript: The Googlization of Literature." *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*, U of Minnesota P, 2014, pp. 163-184.
- Beck, Estee. "A Theory of Persuasive Computer Algorithms for Rhetorical Code Studies." *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*, 2016, <http://enculturation.net/a-theory-of-persuasive-computer-algorithms>

Week 6: Media Embodiment

- Dolmage, Jay. "Writing Against Normal: Navigating a Corporeal Turn." *composing(media) = composing(embodiment)*, edited by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki, UP of Colorado, 2012, pp. 110-126.
- Arola, Kristin. "It's My Revolution: Learning to See the Mixedblood." *composing(media) = composing(embodiment)*, edited by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki, UP of Colorado, 2012, pp. 213-226.
- McCorkle, Ben. "Whose Body?: Looking Critically at New Interface Designs." *composing(media) = composing(embodiment)*, edited by Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki, UP of Colorado, 2012, pp. 174-212.

Week 7: Mediating Gender and Sexuality

- Rhodes, Jacqueline and Jonathan Alexander. *Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self*. Computers and Composition Digital Press/Utah State University Press, 2015. <https://ccdigitalpress.org/book/techne/>
- Hicks, Marie. "Luck and Labor Shortage: Gender Flux, Professionalization, and Growing Opportunities for Computer Workers, 1955-1967." *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost its Edge in Computing*, MIT P, 2017, pp. 99-148.

Week 8: Mediating Race

- Noble, Safiya Umoja. "Searching for Black Girls." *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism*. New York UP, 2018, pp. 64-109.
- Nakamura, Lisa. "Alllookslike? Mediating Visual Cultures of Race on the Web." *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures on the Internet*. U of Minnesota P, 2008, pp. 70-95.
- Herzig, Rebecca. "The Matter of Race in Histories of African American Technology." *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study*, MIT P, 2004, pp. 155-170.

Week 9: Media Archaeology

- Zielinski, Siegfried. "Fortuitous Finds Instead of Searching in Vain: Methodological Borrowings and Affinities for an Anarchaeology of Seeing and Hearing by Technical Means." *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*. MIT P, 2006, pp. 13-39.

- Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "‘Every Contact Leaves a Trace’: Storage, Inscription, and Computer Forensics." *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. MIT P, 2008, pp. 25-73.

Week 10: Media, Politics, and Capitalism

- Ohmann, Richard. "Literacy, Technology, and Monopoly Capitalism." *College English*, vol. 47, no. 7, 1985, pp. 675-689.
- Berardi, Franco. "The Soul at Work." *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Semiotext(e), 2009, pp. 74-105.
- Lovink, Geert. "Techno-Politics at Wikileaks." *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*. Polity, 2011, pp. 176-186.

Week 11: Non-Western Media

- Queen, Mary. "Transnational Feminist Rhetorics in a Digital World." *College English*, vol. 70, no 5, 2008, pp. 471-489.
- Yoda, Tomiko. "Girlscape: The Marketing of Mediatic Ambience in Japan." *Media Theory in Japan*, edited by Marc Steinberg and Alexander Zahlten, Duke UP, 2017, 173-199.
- Kraidy, Marwan M. "The Rise of Transnational Media Systems: Implications of Pan-Arab Media for Comparative Research." *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, edited by Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, Cambridge UP, 2012, pp. 177-200.

Week 12: Media Manifestos

- Zielinski, Siegfried. "Vodemecum for the Prevention of *psychopathia medialis* [Manifesto]." [... *After the Media*]. Univocal, 2011, pp. 255-264.
- Stolley, Karl. "The Lo-Fi Manifesto." *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2016, <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/20.2/inventio/stolley/>

Week 13: Media Futures

- Kember, Sarah and Joanna Zylińska. "Mediation and the Vitality of Media." *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*. MIT P, 2012, pp. 1-29.

Week 14:

- *No reading*

Week 15:

- FINAL PROJECTS DUE