

ENGLISH 400: NEW LITERACIES, CULTURES, AND TECHNOLOGIES OF WRITING

**Cr. 3**



*Burow-Flak.*

New media—a still-forming term that defines amalgams of text, hypertext, digital image, sound, and video--have been changing the ways we communicate, interpret, store, and retrieve information, much less interact socially and even change the world. In recent decades, the study of how media of expression affect what we say has been experiencing a renaissance: a renaissance that has been changing the shape of English studies as we know it. This, in a nutshell, is what this course is all about: the changes that new media have brought us and how the study and production of English literature have responded. Sociologist Marshall McLuhan, responding to television culture nearly half a century ago, famously wrote that “The medium is the message.” Literary historians who study the evolution of printed texts in the field loosely defined as “the history of the book” have been making a similar argument. Looking back at the evolution of print culture, they are studying how the printed page has affected the control, characterization, and production of various forms of literature. Rhetoricians and scholars of literacy, incorporating forms of critical theory and anthropology, have correspondingly been studying and defining social networks and other internet communities. Writers themselves, finally, have had to reshape not only the form, but also, sometimes, the content of their work as they construct creative, academic, and informative texts. This process has been true for English majors as well as they enter the job market, take on extracurricular activities, undergo their classes at VU, and otherwise interpret, create artistic work, teach, and communicate in the culture around them. In response to such advances in communication and theory, this course adopts components of both theory and practice. That is, the course features texts, both traditionally written and electronic, that theorize, imaginatively portray, and encapsulate new media. The course also requires practice writing about, or interpreting new media both in traditional academic formats--that is, written essays--and in new media itself: that is, via electronic discussion, web-delivered hypertext, and digital video. Assignments include a midterm and a final exam, two papers, periodic postings to the course discussion board and wiki, and the shooting and editing, in groups, of a 5-8-minute video. Units and Selected Texts at a Glance I. New Media: What Are They? • Manovich, Lev. “What Is New Media? Eight Propositions” II. Literacies: What Kinds of Knowledge and Learning Do Computers Effect? • Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* • selected readings and video and new media and education III. Codex: What Was

New About Older Forms of Emerging Media? • A World Incribed: The Illuminated Manuscript (video) • Eisenstein, Elizabeth. The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe • McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (excerpts/ handout) • Birkerts, Sven. The Gutenberg Elegies (excerpts/ handout) • Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. IV. Hypertext and Web 2.0: How Has Non-Linearity Become Part of Our Expression? • Borges, Jorge. The Garden of Forking Paths (available online) • Videos, Michael Wesch on web 2.0 • Jackson, Shelley. Patchwork Girl (CD-ROM) and related readings and video • John Cayley, "Windsound" and selected Flash poems (online) V. Visual Arts: What in New Media Is Beautiful? Is Real? • Antonioni, Michaelangelo. Blowup (film) • Hawthorne, Nathaniel. "The Artist of the Beautiful" • Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction." • Online records of installation pieces • Baudrillard, Jean, Simulacra and Simulations (excerpts; available online) VI. Cyberpunk, Cyborgs, and Comics: What in These Emerging Traditions is Enduring? Innovative? Real? • Haraway, Donna "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (available online) • Anderson, M.T. Feed • Satrapi, Mariane. Persepolis • McCloud, Scott. Understanding Comics

[Class blog on Stephen Johnson from previous semesters](#)

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