ENGLISH 392C:  
HISTORY AND THEORY OF MEDIA  
WINTER 2004

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HH 265  
Office hours: Th 2-4 and by appointment  
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course website:  
http://homepage.mac.com/andrewmcmurry/392/392cindex.htm

Overview:  
This course explores the practical and theoretical issues raised by our everyday technologies of representation including written, spoken, and gestural language, print and visual media, photography and film, audio recordings, computer-mediated communications, and interactive digital media. We will take a not-quite-chronological tour through the media universe, and we will be especially interested in those media that have emerged in the last 25 years. Emphasis will be placed on the material nature of all communication. The class format will be a combination of lecture, discussion, and audio-visual presentation. The texts are often difficult, but I will provide you with weekly study guides to help you read and respond. All students are expected to come to class prepared to participate.

Texts:  
New Media Reader (NMR), edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort  
The Medium is the Message, by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore  
Reserve readings (RR) at the circulation desk, Dana Porter  
Online readings (OR)

Assessment:  
Midterm test: 30%  
Project: 30%  
Final Examination: 30%  
Response postings: 10%

Tests: These will be based on the readings and the class lectures.

Project: A “mediography” of either an emerging medium or a recently deceased one. The mediography is an annotated scrapbook that profiles the career and speculates on the media-effects of the technology under discussion. You may use McLuhan’s Laws of Media as probes to help initiate your thinking, but I’m open to any other methodology: semiotic, rhetorical, ethnographic, grounded theory. As well, you may use any medium to deliver your finished project, but paper or web-based projects are ideal. No matter how you organize your scrapbook, there should be a clear thread that ties the project together. In other words, this is not a random collage; it is a selective presentation of data in support of an argument. Requirements: At least 1500 of your own words.

Jan 5: start thinking about a medium that interests you
Jan 26: submit a one paragraph proposal by email (put “392c proposal” in the Subject box)
Mar 29: projects due

A more detailed project description will be available on the 392c website.

Response postings: Each week you’ll post a response to the week’s readings on our web forum at www.nicenet.org. You can respond to anything you read. They are ungraded, but you will receive one percent for each one you turn in. Requirements: the response should be at least one fully realized paragraph, and it should be focused and specific. You must submit it by 2 PM each Monday before class to receive credit.

You’ll need this registration key to join our forum: C83545397
Schedule:

Jan 5: Introduction
Overview of course, media, and early history of communication

Jan 12: The literate revolution
Walter J. Ong, “Some psychodynamics of orality,” selection from chapter 3 from Orality and Literacy, (RR)

Ronald Deibert, chapter 4 from Parchment, Printing, and Hypermedia (RR)
Gutenberg Bible (OR) http://prodigi.bl.uk/gutenbg/background.asp

Jan 26: Marshall McLuhan
McLuhan and Fiore, The Medium is the Massage
Supplemental: two selections by McLuhan (NMR 193)

Feb 2: “Ear” technologies
Diane Zimmerman Umble, “Sinful Network or Divine Service: Competing Meanings of the Telephone in Amish Country” (RR)
Kate Fox, “Evolution, Alienation and Gossip,” (OR) http://www.sirc.org/publik/gossip.shtml

Feb 9: The age of mechanical reproduction; mid-term test
Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (OR)
download “benjamin-1.pdf” from homepage.mac.com/andrewmcmurry

Feb 16: Reading week

Feb 23: “Eye” technologies
Raymond Williams, “The Technology and the Society” (NMR 291)
Film: Manufacturing Consent: Thought Control In A Democratic Society

Mar 1: Origins of the “new media”
Vannevar Bush, “As We May Think” (NMR 35)
Ted Nelson, “Proposal for a Universal Electronic Publishing System and Archive” (NMR 441)
“Personal Dynamic Media,” Alan Kay and Adele Goldberg, (NMR 393)

Mar 8: Hypermedia/hypertext.
Stuart Moulthrop, “You Say You Want A Revolution?” (NMR 691)
One of the following (available at Dana Porter circulation desk):
Shelley Jackson, Patchwork Girl
Michael Joyce, Afternoon: a story
Tim McLaughlin, Notes Toward Absolute Zero
Judd Morrissey and Lori Talley, My Name is Captain, Captain
Stuart Moulthrop, Victory Garden
Rob Swigart, Downtime

Mar 15: Immersive media and ubiquitous computing
Sherry Turkle, “Video Games and Computing Holding Power” (NMR 500)
Howard Rheingold, “Smart mobs,” (OR)
http://www.edge.org/3rd_culture/rheingold/rheingold_print.html
Interview with Howard Rheingold, (OR)
http://www.tompeters.com/cool_friends/content.asp?id=48

Mar 22: Immediate media, invisible media
Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” (NMR 516)

Mar 29: Project symposium: projects will be shared during this final meeting