

Winter 2016: ENG 7006

Media Theory/ Media Practice

A quick and dirty distinction between new media studies and the digital humanities might go like this: the former makes knowledge about digital media, while the latter makes knowledge with digital media. This course is dedicated to discovering what can happen to each of these practices when we pursue them simultaneously.

The course will run in two concurrent halves. The “media theory” half of the course will consist in a substantial preparation in the field of media theory as a body of thought and theoretical mode of analysis, including its historical origins as well as its contemporary practice. This portion of the course will cover the history of theories of media (what we might call both “classical” and “contemporary” media theory), media archaeology, games studies, software studies, critical code studies, and the rise of digital humanities as a set of scholarly practices. We will read work by thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, Donna Haraway, Friedrich Kittler, N. Katherine Hayles, Alexander Galloway, and others.

The second half of the course, dedicated to “media practice,” will consist largely in lessons in how to program computers, in various ways relevant to “the digital humanities.” This will not, quite, be a digital humanities preparation as such—the goal is not a fully professionalized set of DH skills. Rather, the approach we will take is “coding slowly,” in which students learn the basics of programming as a set of practices and as a habit of mind, which might then serve as a base for other DH practices. Topics will include the foundations of computer programming (variables, control structures, conditionals), elementary computer graphics, interaction, textual manipulation, and prototyping. In addition to the humdrum business of WordPress blogs, we will work primarily with p5.js, Makey Makey, and Twine. Working with these tools will entail a substantial preparation in JavaScript.

Final projects can take just about any form, from traditional papers to typical DH projects to “critical making” as a form of research. Students will be encouraged to work in groups.

Thursdays, 6–9:45pm
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