New Media Theory (ENLS 475/COMM 475)

Course Description and Objectives

This course will explore the conceptual frameworks and theories that are essential to an understanding of modern media, a succession of new media including photography, film, and digital media. We will focus on theories of semiotics, ideology, psychoanalysis, narrative, modernism, and postmodernism, which have formed the bases for analyzing forms of reproduction from the mechanical to the digital. We will consider the interrelationships—linkages and ruptures—between different media and the process of remediation in which the content of a new medium is the older medium that it has replaced. We will end by examining digital media in the context of social/cultural/political formations—gender, race, community, public sphere, and global flows.

The course work will further develop students’ critical abilities as they engage in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in the reading and writing assignments. The class presentations (two journal entries must be presented) will build oral communication skills. This course is meant to supplement courses in the history of media and to provide a theoretical foundation for the production of a range of media.

Policies

Students are allowed to miss only one unexcused class session without penalty. Students who know that they must miss a class session must contact me ahead of time to request an excused absence. Papers that are late due to unexcused absences will lose one letter grade for each day late. In addition, students should be on time for class; I will not review material that students miss because they are late (without an excuse).

Plagiarism, which is the use of someone else’s ideas or words—including Internet sources—without giving the other person credit/citing the other person as author, will not be tolerated. Please read carefully the Tulane Honor Code. I will take plagiarism cases to the Honor Board.

Assignments:

- Journal: 2-3 pages per week (responses to reading) = 30%
- 5-6 page paper (media analysis/critique) = 30%
- Take-home final: 12-15 page paper on a theoretical question = 40%

Required Texts

Books:

Course Packet:
• Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. “Constituents of a Theory of the Media.” *New Left Review*
• Kittler, Friedrich. Excerpts from *Literature, Media, and Information Systems.* (G & B Arts International)
• Williams, Raymond. “From Medium to Social Practice.”

Plus a number of video and film screenings.

Units

Key Terms

1. What Is a Medium?
   Readings: Bolter, Kittler, McLuhan, Mitchell, and Williams

2. What Is a Sign?
   Readings: Barthes (in *Media and Cultural Studies*), Saussure, and Silverman

Image/Text/Narrative

Readings: Bolter, Kittler, Landow (in *Reading Digital Culture*), Mitchell, and Murray
Major Theoretical Approaches: From Mechanical to Digital Reproduction

Readings: Adorno and Horkheimer (in Media and Cultural Studies), Benjamin, Manovich, and Metz

Digital Culture: Spectatorship/Psychoanalysis/Politics/Public Sphere

Readings: Critical Art Ensemble, Enzensberger, Hall (in Media and Cultural Studies), Hayles, and Poster; from Reading Digital Culture—Laurel, Stone, and Turkle