

## Seminar in Digital Rhetoric English 671 Spring 2009

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### **Course Description:**

“It is within the media that the battle ought to be established.”

– J. Derrida (“Philosophie des Etats Généraux,”  
in *Etats Généraux de la Philosophie*. Paris, 1979)

“The students are helping to invent the future of writing. This attitude and relationship to learning has to be made explicit and encouraged, since students are unaccustomed to working in an experimental way.”

– G. Ulmer (*Internet Invention*. Florida, 2003)

We interact with digital information constantly and thus participate in digital culture whether we realize it or not. Digital rhetoric has irreversibly infiltrated our lives, and so it deserves intense scholarly attention beyond simply acknowledging that more people write and communicate with computers. Digital rhetoric entails more than critiquing writing we encounter in digital environments or producing simple web texts; instead, studying digital rhetoric requires examining theoretical and ideological issues involved in the shift from writing in a text-only medium. Accordingly, digital rhetoric does not just mean that more people write with computers or that more people are online; rather, it entails larger cultural shifts in recognizing new patterns of thinking, rethinking familiar conceptualizations about both the self and human interaction, and re-envisioning attitudes and expectations toward reading, writing, and rhetoric, regardless of the physical presence of machines. We will interrogate how central tenets from post-structural and postmodern theories (especially regarding identity and community) play out in the digital realm. We will also study scholarship in New Media, where we encounter practices largely alien in print culture such as database thinking, speculation, research as juxtaposition, pattern recognition, lack of clarity, and networking, to name only a few.

It is important to know that media work on two levels, as Lisa Gitelman explains in *Always Already New*: on the first, a medium is a technology enabling communication; on the second, a medium is a set of associated “protocols” or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems that need to be understood. Delivery technologies become obsolete and get replaced; media, on the other hand, evolve. Understanding these cultural practices is central to studying Digital Rhetoric. However, studying them from a distance is not adequate; rather, we will participate in them directly. Hence, digital writing performs and analyzes and critiques. Instead of only critiquing digital culture as is usually done by writing academic papers, we will

critique digital culture within the medium itself. We will be introduced to a set of theoretical problems put forth mainly by Roland Barthes, Giorgio Agamben, and Greg Ulmer. We will work through these problems by creating short projects. We will then perform the theories we study by making short digital movies and/or web-based multimedia projects. No previous experience with digital writing is needed. You will learn everything you need to know in class.

**Required Texts:**

Agamben, Giorgio. *The Coming Community*. Trans. Michael Hardt. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU P, 2006.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Critical Edition. Corte Madera, CA: Ginko P, 1994, 2003.

Miller, Paul D. Ed. *Sound Unbound: Sampling Digital Music and Culture*. Cambridge, MIT P, 2008.

**Required Articles (all accessible on e-reserve):**

Anderson, Chris. Introduction. *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*. New York: Hyperion, 2006.

Barthes, Roland. "The Third Meaning." *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.

Burke, Kenneth. "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy." *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*. Ed. Don M. Burks. West Lafayette, IN.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978.

Gitleman, Lisa. Introduction. *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge: MIT P, 2006.

Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "Hamlet.doc? Literature in a Digital Age." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 17 August 2007. B8 - B9.

Pink, Daniel. Introduction. *A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Ulmer, Greg. "Forword/Forward (Into Electracy)." *Literacy Theory in the Age of the Internet*. Eds. Todd Taylor and Irene Ward. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. iv – xii.

---. "A Night at the Text" *Yale French Studies* 1987. 38 – 57.

---. "The Object of Post-Criticism" *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. Post Townsend: Bay, 1983. 83 – 108.

**Required On Line Reading – Browse through site links if no specific title is indicated (pdfs located on Ning site):**

Boyd, danah. “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life.” <http://www.danah.org/papers/WhyYouthHeart.pdf>

DJ Spooky (Paul D. Miler) <http://www.djspooky.com/index2.html>;

Ellison, Nicole, Charles Steinfield and Cliff Lampe. “Spatially Bounded Online Social Networks and Social Capital: The Role of Facebook.” (pdf)

Galloway, Alex. “What is Digital Studies?”

< <http://www.manovich.net/Galloway-digital-studies.html>>.

Greenaway, Peter. <http://petergreenaway.co.uk/> (Particularly *Prospero's Books*)

How to Make a Digital Flick. <<http://www.newvenue.com/flicktips/intro-index.html>>.

*Hyperrhiz: New Media Cultures* <http://www.hyperrhiz.net/>

Interactive Works by Eric Loyer <http://www.marowmonkey.com/lair/04.htm>

Jarratt, Michael. “Defining Heuristics.” < <http://www.yk.psu.edu/~jmi3/defheu.htm>>.

Jenkins, Henry. “Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” (pdf)

Kelly, Kevin. “Becoming Screen Literate.” The New York Times Magazine 21 November 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/magazine/23wwln-future-t.html?ref=magazine>

Lampa, Graham. “Imagining the Blogosphere: An Introduction to the Imagined Community of Instant Publishing.” In *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs*, ed. Laura Gurak, Smiljana Antonijevic, Laurie Johnson, Clancy Ratliff, Jessica Reyman. <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. On google books.

Naim, Moises. “The You Tube Effect.” Foreign Policy. (Jan/Feb 2007):

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=3676](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3676)

Nelson, Jason. “Panhandle.” <<http://www.heliozoa.com/panhandle.html>>. [www.rhizome.org](http://www.rhizome.org)

“Remix Planet.” *Wired* 13.07. July 2005. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/intro.html>

Technorati [www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)

Rheingold, Howard. “Using Participatory Media and Public Voice to Encourage Civic Engagement.” (pdf)

Ridolfo, Jim and Danielle Nicole DeVoss. *Composing for Recomposition : Rhetorical Velocity*

and Delivery. *Kairos* 13.2 (2009). <http://kairos.technorhethoric.net/>

Ulmer, Greg. "Toward Electracy: A Conversation with Gregory Ulmer." *Beehive* 3.4 (2000): [http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content\\_apps34/app\\_a.html](http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content_apps34/app_a.html)

Steuer, Eric. "The Remix Masters." *Wired* 12.11 (November 2004). <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.11/beastie.html>

Thompson, Clive. "This is Your Brain on Video: How the Language of YouTube is Changing the Way We Think." [http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/17-01/st\\_thompson](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/17-01/st_thompson)

Wieshaus, Joel. "Imaging EmerAgency: A Conversation with Gregory Ulmer." [http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern\\_culture/current/9.1weishaus.html](http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/current/9.1weishaus.html).

(Selections from) *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular* <http://www.vectorsjournal.org/> (see particularly N. Katherine Hayles "Narrating Bits" at [http://vectors.iml.annenberg.edu/narrating\\_bits/](http://vectors.iml.annenberg.edu/narrating_bits/))

Web Style Guide <http://www.webstyleguide.com/>

The You Tube Effect (<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.12/>) (Please read cover story, "The Secret World of Lonelygirl15," and "Murder on Myspace")

Zappen, James. "Digital Rhetoric: Toward an Integrated Theory." *Technical Communication Quarterly* 14.3 (2005): 319 – 25. <http://www.rpi.edu/~zappenj/Rhetoric/DR/Readings/DigitalRhetoric2005JPZ.pdf>

### **(Highly) Recommended Readings:**

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. [http://pixels.filmtv.ucla.edu/gallery/web/julian\\_scaff/benjamin/benjamin.html](http://pixels.filmtv.ucla.edu/gallery/web/julian_scaff/benjamin/benjamin.html).

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. (selections from) *A Thousand Plateaus; Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Eisenstein, Sergei M. *Battleship Potemkin* (DVD)

Liestol, Gunner, Andrew Morrison, Terje Rasmussen. *Digital Media Revisited: Theoretical and Conceptual Innovations in Digital Domains*. Boston: MIT P, 2003.

Polyani, Micheal. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. New York, Harper & Row, 1964.

Ulmer, Greg. *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy*. New York, Longman, 2003.

### **Attendance:**

Attendance is mandatory. This is a graduate seminar; thus, the class in itself would not function without your participation. Even more so than other seminars, this is NOT a lecture-only course. As Ulmer mentions, you, the students, are involved in inventing what writing in digital environments will become; thus, it will not be about mastery but of continual reinvention, and this is not possible if you are not present in class. Part of the graduate experience includes working in a space where you learn to negotiate the needs of others with your own and learn rhetorically accurate ways to communicate your experiences and your learning. Therefore, **if you miss more than four classes**, I will lower your course grade by a letter grade. In other words, you cannot get an “A” with five absences. Chronic lateness is also unacceptable, as is coming to class unprepared/unread. I will not grant incompletes.

### **Course Requirements:**

The fundamental requirement for this course is that you come well prepared to actively participate in every class. Careful reading of the assigned “texts,” substantial class and Beachboard participation, and satisfactory completion of **all assignments** are required to pass the course. Many of the readings are online; therefore, I expect you to have already engaged with them substantially before coming to class. Since the terrain of digital studies is largely uncharted, it will be up to you to engage with the readings both hermeneutically and “heurectically,” wherein the terrain you travel becomes discovered as you are traveling. Thus, while we will discuss the texts/sites on various days, it is also important that you go back over and study them many times on your own and with others. You will begin to do this through your short responses and, in more detail, through your multimedia text and seminar paper.

### **Grade Distribution:**

Two short projects	30%
Readings Presentation	5%
Reading Notes	20%
Seminar Paper	20%
Multimedia Project and presentation	20%
Participation (in class and online)	5%

**Course Objectives:** Upon completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Apply both traditional cultural studies practices (critiquing our consumption of digital writing spaces) and emerging digital studies practices (participating in the production of digital writing spaces) and discern rhetorically appropriate ways to do so;
- Evaluate digital writing and its interdisciplinary capability; delineate pertinent theories for digital writing across pertinent disciplines;
- Recognize the importance of the notion of juxtaposition, which guides production in digital writing: the idea that when unlike items are brought together, alternate (or third) ideas emerge;
- Compose within the culture of digital writing by creating video or multimedia texts;
- Differentiate among ways meaning is produced in digital culture;
- Actively participate in uncovering new possibilities for digital writing with the realization that the field is still emerging;

- Discern the value and necessity of digital writing both in and out of the university;
- Analyze varying theories of subjectivity and articulate the theory that best embodies the digital writing experience;
- Represent an engaged understanding of the theories and practices studied by way of both traditional, textual argumentation and multimedia writing.

### **Brief Explanation of Requirements:**

Two Short Projects: You will create two projects that address some aspect of the readings. The topics of these projects will evolve from the readings and will take on a theoretical issue presented in them. Your project should include both a media and a written element. For the written part, you will set up the paper by explaining the issue and referring to at least three others who have worked on the same issue. You will then contribute to the issue's scholarly conversation by making your own argument about the issue. The media element (audio, video, web-based or a combination) will present the argument in the medium in which you chose to work.

Presentations and Weekly Reading Notes Posts: Each of you will prepare one presentation in response to the readings. You should talk about at least one of the assigned readings and can put together something for us to view as you see fit. The purpose of these presentations is to jump-start the discussion and to provide your colleagues with your take and analysis of the texts under discussion. For each presentation, you must provide a short but thoughtful "text" for your classmates either by way of a handout or something multimedia posted on BB. **You must read at least three other primary or secondary sources** and discuss particular connections you made with the particular text and theorist. You might, after explicating your understanding of the reading, provide a reading of a digital text or popular source by way of the theories you are presenting. In addition to other crucial information, your handouts must include a short (at least three entries) annotated bibliography of your primary or secondary works. Additionally, I am not interested in simply a compilation of material you located on the web. We can all access this information on our own, so your presentation should be more focused.

You should visit the Ning site daily and fully participate in it by customizing your page, blogging, and uploading content. You **must also** use the site to post your reading notes and responses. Almost each week that we have readings assigned (10 weeks total) you are required to post. Posting reading responses on Ning allows your work to become public and networked, thereby taking reading response out of the merely introspective realm. Posting also allows a conversation to occur and forces you to respond to others' ideas, readings, and connections. Your notes/commentaries **MUST** go beyond "I like or dislike" or "I agree or disagree." Here is a format to use for posting your notes/commentaries (you can modify this format as the semester progresses):

First, briefly summarize the section of the text or site to which you are responding. Use quotations and really show us that you have not only read the text but thought about it as well. Next, provide your commentary about the selection you just summarized by taking a concept, issue, conflict, theme, etc. and exploring it. What connections did you make? What questions do you have? You might also point us to an example of what you're talking about. These examples can come from articles, blogs, etc. and should be relevant to the material we are working with. The length of your posts should be 3 – 4 substantial paragraphs at minimum. You

also can comment on someone else's post, but you must provide material from the readings to fulfill this requirement. Responding to someone else's post will alleviate repetition and begin conversation and networking. I expect you to refer to each other's posts regardless of if you are making a new post or commenting on someone else's. DO NOT assume your post exists in a vacuum. **I will not tolerate a list of individual posts** that do not attempt to create a conversation. I also will not tolerate repetitiveness; therefore, you **MUST** read your colleague's posts before writing your own. If you repeat what's already been said without any acknowledgement of previous posts, **you will not receive credit for your post.** This shows us that you are not reading the posts and thus are not attempting to join the conversation. While this is a requirement, I expect you to approach the work as you would approach any intellectual conversation. **READING NOTES/COMMENTARIES SHOULD BE POSTED BY 3 PM EACH WEDNESDAY.** Please do not post your notes during class. If you are late posting your notes, your grade will be lowered. I add that the goal of this assignment is to foster sustained intellectual inquiry and exchange, and I will expect you to treat others with respect, regardless of the possible level of disagreement. I fully expect you to visit the site often enough to stay current in the discussion.

Multimedia Project: This video or multimedia presentation will grow from your work in the course and will respond to a set of issues raised in the readings. You can think of it as a "post-critical" object, rather than the usual critical essay we write in graduate seminars. This will not be a critical analysis of the texts we read, but instead will be a performance of your responses to them. It will take on the same topic you address in your seminar paper and will "argue" by way of a different medium. If you do a video, you will first shoot footage and then spend time in workshop editing through juxtaposition. You will present your project-in-progress during the last week of class. I encourage you to use Windows Movie Maker or iMovie, and you will receive all instruction on the program during class and on Ning. Additionally, you can also find several how to videos and have many of your technical questions answered by doing a simple search on Google or YouTube.

Seminar Paper to Accompany Multimedia Project: Since we are living in a time on the cusp where traditional literate practices are still highly valued, you will write a 12 – 15 page paper responding to one or more problems raised in the readings and explaining what you hope to accomplish in your multimedia text. This paper will include discussions of the theories you put to work; it will contain an argument; it should also demonstrate that you know how to conduct graduate-level research by integrating several sources (apart from what is on the syllabus) that help you make your argument.

Participation: As I've already said, I expect you to participate in class. When we work on writing and multimedia activities in class, I expect you to fully participate. I do not tolerate wasting class time that I have devoted to working on projects, etc. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, you can use the Ning site to post what you might have said in class. These posts, of course, are outside of the reading notes requirement. As you will see, taking a risk and putting your thoughts out there will pay off in the end.

**Late Assignments:**

Late assignments will only be accepted if you speak to me about your situation **before (not on)** the due date. Otherwise, work handed in late will be penalized a letter grade for each class period it is late. If you are absent (or more than 15 minutes late) on the day of your in-class presentation, **you will simply receive no credit** for your presentation. Even if you are absent, you are expected to turn in the assigned work on time by way of digital drop box or a classmate.

### **Special Conditions:**

If you have a disability that requires special accommodations, please see me within the first week of class to arrange such accommodations.

## **Schedule**

(All readings should be completed on the date listed below; readings and due dates are subject to change)

### Week 1

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| M | 1/26 | Introductions; Why Digital Rhetoric? Videos; critique vs. participation; creating a digital identity   |
| W | 1/28 | The Structure of New Media; the “grandfather” of media studies; <b>Readings:</b> McLuhan xi – 38; 52 – 105; 110 – 124; Working with McLuhan; Sign up for Presentations (notes due) |

### Week 2

- |   |     |  |
|---|-----|--|
| M | 2/2 | The History of New Media; <b>Readings:</b> selection from the rest of McLuhan, especially 459 – 558; Zappen; Presentations |
| W | 2/4 | The Language of New Media; <b>Readings:</b> Manovich 1 – 49; Gitleman; technical instruction; Presentations (notes due)    |

### Week 3

- |   |      |  |
|---|------|--|
| M | 2/9  | Subjectivity and New Media; <b>Readings:</b> Barthes “The Third Meaning”; Ulmer “The Night at the Text”; Kelly; Presentations                        |
| W | 2/11 | Defining Electracy; <b>Readings:</b> Kenneth Burke, Greg Ulmer “Forword/Forward (Into Electracy)” and “Beehive Interview”; Presentations (notes due) |

### Week 4

- |   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| M | 2/16 | Electracy, Juxtaposition, and Meaning; <b>Readings:</b> Ulmer “The Object of Post-Criticism”; Presentations |
| W | 2/18 | <b>Project #1 Due (short presentations in class)</b> (notes due)  |

### Week 5

- |   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| M | 2/23 | New Logics; <b>Readings:</b> Pink; “Remix Planet” (including Steuer and Goetz); Presentations |
| W | 2/25 | Heuretics; <b>Readings:</b> Weishaus; Jarratt; Presentations (notes due)                      |

### Week 6

- |   |     |   |
|---|-----|---|
| M | 3/2 | Digital Communities; <b>Readings:</b> Agamben; Jenkins 1 – 24; Presentations            |
| W | 3/4 | NO CLASS; Digital Communities and Web 2.0; <b>Readings:</b> Jenkins 25 – 92 (notes due) |

### Week 7



M 3/9 Digital Communities; **Readings:** Jenkins 169 – 260;  
W 3/11 Web 2.0; **Readings:** Lampa; Rheingold; (notes due)

Week 8

M 3/16 Participatory Culture; **Readings:** Jenkins (article); Ridolfo and DeVoss  
W 3/18 Audio/Video: **Readings:** Thompson; Miller pages TBA (notes due)

Week 9

M 3/23 Audio; **Readings:** Miller pages TBA; Presentations  
W 3/25 **Project #2 Due; Readings:** “The You Tube Effect” and other Readings

**SPRING BREAK 3/30 and 4/1**

Week 10

M 4/6 Practices of New Media; **Readings:** Hayles (in *Vectors*); “Worlds of Warcraft” on iTunes U (link posted on Ning) (presentations)  
W 4/8 **Readings:** Alt-X.com; Selections from *Vectors* ; *Hyperrhiz* (presentations) (notes due)

Week 11

M 4/13 **Readings:** Peter Greenaway; Nelson; Loyer (presentations)  
W 4/15 **Readings:** Kirschenbaum; Anderson (presentations) (notes due)

Week 12

M 4/20 **Readings:** boyd (two selections)  
W 4/22 Technical Instruction

Week 13

M 4/27 Practicing the Practices of New Media: Exercises in class  
W 4/29 Technical instruction; **Readings:** Movie Maker Tutorials

Week 14

M 5/4 Practicing Digital Rhetoric; **Readings:** Illogic of Sense: The Gregory L. Ulmer Remix;  
Presentations  
W 5/6 Seminar Paper and Multimedia Workshop (notes due)

Week 15

M 5/11 Seminar Paper/Multimedia Project Presentations  
W 5/13 Seminar Paper/Multimedia Project Presentations

**Seminar Paper and Multimedia Project Due on 5/20 by midnight on Ning site**