Digital Culture and the Humanities

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Course Description:

In thinking digital culture with the humanities, this course pursues two main lines of inquiry. First, we will consider how new media and digital technologies have been discussed in the humanities. With what terminologies and investments do scholars inquire after new media and digital technologies? How are new media and digital culture thought to reconfigure (inter)disciplinary fields in the humanities, affect the humanities’ place in the university, inform theories of culture, and determine the shape of intellectuals’ conversations with broader publics? Second, we will consider how, as humanities scholars, we are to read the cultural texts of new media and digital technologies. What are we to make of academic and non-academic cultural productions that have new digital technologies as their medium? What is the work of representation in the age of digital cultural production?

To pursue these dual lines of inquiry, we will examine scholarship about digital technologies and new media, and we will examine too scholarly projects using new media. We will discuss new keywords to humanities treatments of the digital, and we will interrogate how old keywords in the humanities are being redeployed, reworked, or disregarded in discussions of the digital. Toward this latter end, during some weeks, we will place scholarly works that are not explicitly about the digital, alongside those works that are. Throughout the course, we will pay critical attention to the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and language—categories of identity, power, representation, and social organization—play in discussions of the digital. Because of concern for these categories, we will dwell at some length on the meanings and repercussions of the digital for several fields that have centrally thematized these categories: American studies, black studies, women’s studies.

This course is open to graduate students and upper division undergraduates. This course is cross-listed in American Studies, Cultural Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, Media and Communications, and Technocultural Studies.

Assignments:

1. Keywords: In the first week of the course, students will be given a list of keywords from which each student is to choose three to pursue throughout the quarter. Posting to the course blog, students are to trace the varied meanings ascribed to these words by different authors. What theoretical work are these words made to do? Consider the relationships between the three words under consideration. Students’ blog entries will form much of the basis of our
conversation in class. Length of entries for any given word may vary from week to week.

2. *Reading Digital Texts*: This assignment is meant to develop students’ skills in analyzing texts on digital media and texts about digital media. Students will choose a particular media—internet, GPS, cellular phones, digital film, databases, etc., or even some cross-use of several of these media—to analyze. Students will either pick one particular textual manifestation of this media (for example, a particular internet site, browser, or communication tool, or a particular GPS interface, or a particular make of cellular phone) and analyze it, or they will take the entire category of a media type as a text for analysis (for example, all cellular phones or the cellular phone as a figure; or the internet as such). Next, students will choose several scholarly sources (some but not all of which may be drawn from assigned readings) with which to analyze these media texts. Even as students draw from scholarly sources for their analyses of texts that are examples of digital media, they will also be analyzing the scholarly texts they have chosen that are about new media. Pursuing the dual lines of inquiry for the course, the main questions to bear in mind are, then: How do we read scholars engagements with new media and digital technologies? How do we read texts using digital technologies or how do we read digital technologies/new media as texts?

3. *Proposal for a Digital Project*: By the end of the course, students will submit a proposal to carry out a project of their own that uses new media technologies. Students might consider writing a proposal for a new pedagogical method that uses new media. Students might write a proposal for a project that uses new media to connect academic and non-academic publics in intellectual conversation. Another possibility might be to write a proposal for how the humanities should relate to new media, digital technologies, and digital culture more generally. Or, one could write a proposal for an academic piece (an article, for example), to be published on a digital medium (like those we saw from *Vectors*, for example). These are examples, and not the only options. Students must clear their idea for a proposal with the instructor, before proceeding to carry out the assignment.

**Reading Schedule:**

**Week 1:** Genealogies for Digital Humanities?


**Week 2: Treating Rhetorics of the Digital**


**Week 3: Powers, Technologies, States**


**Week 4: Representation and Capitalist Democracy**


**Week 5-6: The Social Construction of Race and Digital Aesthetics**


**Week 7: Digital Places, Space, Geographies, Mapping Technologies**


**Week 8: Pedagogy & the Politics of the University**


**Week 9-10: Interdisciplinary Formations**


