The question about which I am focusing this class is **How do we—as both composers and readers—make meaning with and from new media texts?**

Underlying this question, of course, is a more basic question—**What is new media?**—and we will consider this more basic question at the beginning of the class and it will quietly underlie all our...

1. We'll begin with a quick discussion of what new media texts are.

2. To set a ground for comparison between...

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**Note:** The number below do not refer to weeks; they instead simply indicate the order of the parts of class.

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Read more...
The question about which I am focusing this class is **How do we—as both composers and readers—make meaning with and from new media texts?**

Underlying this question, of course, is a more basic question—*What is new media?*—and we will consider this more basic question at the beginning of the class and it will quietly underlie all our semester’s work: after all, the name new media implies that there has been a noteworthy, if not profound, transition away from “old” media. We could spend the entire class comparing “old” media to “new” and asking after the degree of difference and what is at stake in positing such a sea change.

And I am interested in that degree of difference and what is at stake, precisely because I believe that what is at stake could be considerable, for a number of reasons—but it will take me a few paragraphs to build those reasons, and building to those reasons leads me back to focusing on the question of how we make meaning with and out of new media texts.

We can take it as a given, I think, that *new media texts* are a post-desktop-computer result, tied to how anybody with access to a stable electric grid, a computer with lots of RAM, enough money for software, ideas (or at least clip media), and time can mix what in recent times has been mostly held separate in texts: sound, animation, type, still photography, alphanumeric symbols, drawings, video, etc. In addition, anyone with Internet access can forgo the Hollywood movie or New York book publishing and marketing systems to make her mixmaster texts public. That is, the means of both production and distribution of texts have expanded and shifted...

But have the means of meaning-making changed? (And how do shifting means of production and distribution contribute to the kinds of meanings that a text can make?)

If new media are new because they allow us simply to mix together old, once separate, media, then does a composer or consumer of new media simply need a familiarity not only with...
now works work out also with, simply, the conventions or typography and film and visual & aural composition, and so on, in order to understand a text being built or read? Or will thinking about new media in such cut-and-paste terms, focusing separately on the different media, result in texts where the different media hold separate from each other, where they only run parallel (like those train tracks that never meet) and bring to the text only those meanings that they were capable of making in "old" media?

Everyone in this class knows that making meaning from texts doesn't happen in some vacuum space between a composer's or reader's head and the pages at hand. There are whole cultures, long unnegatable histories, and uncountable naturalized practices wrapped around, shaping, supporting, embedded in, and shaped by composers, readers, and texts. If changes in practices change texts (as, for example, changes in people's understanding of childhood gave rise to children's illustrated books in the nineteenth century), then can changes in texts change practices? If, that is, we work to make new media texts really new, can we shift in some way how race or gender or class work? (Or for John) can we enhance the effectiveness of highway safety practices?)

If we work to make new media texts new, how then must we think about how they make meaning? What must composers know? What must readers know, if they are to be able to understand and want to read texts that don't look like "old" media?

In this class, then, I want to focus on these issues through exploring how several different theorists argue that new media texts make meaning. The theorists we'll be reading have backgrounds in design, film, rhetoric, sociolinguistics and literacy, and computer arts [there are, certainly, other approaches to explore; if there are other approaches that interest you, you can follow them out as part of your own research work in class—see the section on possible project questions for more information]. I'll be asking you to read these theorists and then to use their arguments to analyze pieces of new media, to see what we learn through their approaches. I'll also be asking you to make your own pieces of new media, following the ideas of the people we read, also to see what you learn from their approaches.

Throughout, I want you to be attentive as possible to how you make meaning out of the new media texts we read, and to how you—and others—make meaning out of the texts you make. This will be close and attentive work, where we will move back and forth from fine details—color, typography, arrangement,
and so on—to the overall shape of a text and on to the effects a
text has with particular readers.

My goals for the class, then, are that when we reach May you
will have much practice in:

**Analyzing how all the elements of a piece of new
media—yours or someone else’s—come together to create
overall effects.**