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Final Essay

TRANSFORMATION OF CURRICULA VIA NEW FORMS OF MEDIA

Throughout this semester, I have been introduced and exposed to a virtual world of digital that I did not know. While I always considered myself tech-savvy, it wasn't until this class that I realized just how digitally *illiterate* I actually was. Sure, it is one thing to constantly be engaged in social media, and to know how to type efficiently, but it is entirely another thing to know the intricacies of the digital world. While after completing this class I still don't claim to know enough (and in fact know very little still seeing as how vast the digital field is), I was inspired by the creative aspects that were introduced through digital literature works. Not only are great works of art capable of being presented through a digital medium such as the paintings of Mark Rothko in Jeremy Douglass's (2009) presentation on cultural analytics, but also because it is such an expansive category, even scientific research can and *is* being expressed through it including Larry Smarr's project on the human body (Robbins 2012). These innovative, and multimodal works not only transform the way we absorb knowledge, but also transform the way in which we think. For this reason, the digital world and media scape is highly important to the field of education and should be utilized more in curricula.

In this essay I will argue for the digital transformation of traditional forms of academia, more specifically the online/digital representation of traditionally written research papers. In taking a written paper and presenting it in a digital form that incorporates various mediums through which to display and exchange knowledge, it will not only have added educational value through its highly interactive and innovative design, but it also helps to build on the strengths of students of the new generation. Hyper-cognition, and multimodal ways of learning is most beneficial to younger generations that were raised in a media-rich environment, and in turn should be reflected in curricula. While some would argue that education is already becoming "re-mixed" by this new generation of learners, it is largely up to the older generation of

educators how to respond to it. To choose whether to accept the re-imagination of education, or remain static in an evolving digital age remains the central theme of this paper, and one that I address through discourse on literacy, hyper-attention, and comparative media.

LITERACY

On the first day of class, we were asked to define what it meant to be digitally literate. While answers varied from knowing how to code, to knowing proper online etiquette, it is safe to say that there was really no clear consensus on a set definition. Perhaps what would have made the question more definitive would be whether or not there is a distinction between literacy as defined within a school setting, and literacy as defined beyond the school walls. Such a distinction is addressed in Lalitha Vasudevan's article, "Education Remix: New Media, Literacies, and the Emerging Digital Geographies"(2010), where she gives multiple examples of "literacy" and the political implications behind it.

Part of the difficulty for educators to construct meaningful curriculums is the national and local policies that continuously constrain definitions of literacy. Standardized tests are the national means for measuring literacy, even though literacy extends beyond words on paper. As noted in educator and student feedback in multiple case studies, students demonstrate literacy through a range of communicative practices such as text messages, personal profiles on social media outlets, email, Wikipedia interactivity, blogs, and picture and video exchanges. These forms belong to what Vasudevan (2010) defines as the *digital landscape*, and what the new generation of students is continuously transforming. Yet, while these students were excelling outside the schools' definitions of "literacy", there was a clear disconnect when tested on traditional norms of literacy. Vasudevan argues that perhaps it is not the students' own accord for their academic shortcomings but rather that there is a "need for current

educational practices – such as assessment, curriculum development, instruction – and educational geographies – including classrooms in schools and even afterschool programs – to be reconceptualised in light of evolving digital capacities"(2010:66). Too often are students, especially those within the margins of Western society, continuously let down by the education system. Rather than continue to push them towards the peripheries, educators and policy-makers should instead employ more inclusive and holistic perspectives on learning, including what it means to be "literate".

HYPER-ATTENTION

In a new era where hyper attention is now seemingly the mode of cognition for younger generations versus the deep attention of older generations, educators must adjust curricula and teaching styles to fit their students' needs. As a "victim" of hyper attention myself, I find it easier to surf the web, learn from a variety of different mediums, and jump from source to source, than read a lengthy article or write a traditional research paper. This is why I find it more beneficial to engage readers in a digitalized form of learning, that encompasses different forms of media, and that parallels a hyperactive web surfing event.

When presenting (and developing) a traditional research paper, while it is a great skill to have in your academic toolkit, it is too often a medium that is geared towards a very small audience-those in academia. Furthermore, with our changing cognitive styles, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to fully engage in the deeply attentive research methods that lengthy papers call for. In Katherine Hayles (2007) article, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes", she addresses the different modes of cognition - hyper and deep attention - and the historical values that are associated with it. While it is often true that traditional educational systems value deep attention, Hayles reveals that it is a relative luxury that traces back to the simple act of *reading*. When thinking about reading, we are also constructing discourse around social, cultural, economic, and political issues. In the past, and even in some cases now, reading was largely considered a leisure activity, and mainly afforded to the privileged.

Perhaps that concept is still true today, as deep reading is typically found in institutions of higher education, which to some extent is afforded to the privileged. Nevertheless, the invention of the Internet makes reading available and accessible to a wider audience, and in effect changes the modes of cognition for many. This reinforces the need for more works to become digitized, so as to engage larger audiences in discourse surrounding digital media and literacy.

Keeping with the topic of attention, it is important to understand the political and social implications as well. Although the very discourse on attention is only 100 years old (according to Crary's factory-work theory), we cannot have a discussion without including the market's role. It is not secret that there is a large profit to be made off of prescription drugs that counter-balance "learning disabilities" such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and industrialized countries in particular are increasingly producing more diagnoses (Hayles 2007). ADHD is usually diagnosed to individuals who show signs of inattentiveness, hyperactive behavior, and impulsive behavior. Especially within the classroom setting, the characteristics of ADD/ADHD are seen as socially unacceptable and disruptive behavior (Loe & Feldman 2007). One advantage of incorporating digitized works in the classroom is the potential to harness these creative energies, and what Hayles (2007) refers to as "seeking stimulation", through different digital outlets. The modification of traditional curricula could potentially combat the medicalization of a social construct, and inadvertently help to channel students' energies into a different medium of learning, rather than trying to suppress their thoughts. As Hayles wrote in regards to the neurological make-up of the new generation, "Children growing up in media-rich environments literally have brains wired differently from those of people who did not come to maturity under that condition"(2007:192). This evidence of alone should be enough to convince educators around the world to adjust their teaching styles to fit the learning styles of their students.

When interacting with the digitized version of my research paper, I purposefully allow the information to be presented in a variety of different forms that work to serve

different learning styles (visual learning, auditory learning, etc.). While I did not utilize a medium that encourages tactile learning, as some of us observed in the presentation at Cal State San Marcos, there are ways to incorporate those modes of learning (i.e. the piece on breathing, the dancer wearing the goggles, or even the use of touch-screens to interact with a work).

COMPARATIVE MEDIA

The question then that my argument brings up is how to effectively integrate media into an academic world. As I addressed in my introduction, representing a traditional research paper through a digital medium is one way of creating discourse around digital literature within a classroom, and a seemingly simple way of constructing a comparative media analysis. This process is also characterized, as "remediation" for by representing one media within a different media, you are changing the information and the way it is processed. This is also a characterization of the new digital media, and Comparative Textual Media (CTM).

In CTM, a binary between print and digital does not make for a strong argument because more often times than not, print has been digitalized. For this reason, it is difficult to reference a traditional research paper as being void of digital representation, as print and digital are both symbiotic terms. Thus when I do make a comparative media analysis of a traditional research paper versus a digitally represented version, I aim to identify the difference between its form of presentation rather than its development. While the development of my research paper was purely through digitalized mediums (online articles, online journals, and online books), its first form of presentation was through "print" (albeit digital print). During its second stage of development (and what my website demonstrates), it not only was *developed* through digitalized mediums, but it was also *presented* through digital mediums. Keeping in mind Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman's introduction of their book, *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*, we see that "The deepening complexities of the

media landscape have made mediality, in all its forms, a central concern of the twenty-first century"(2013:ix). As we discussed in class, the format informs the content and influences *how* people read, where people read, etc. (i.e. scrolls, standing, in arenas, chained books in monasteries, etc.). This is why the medium in which information is presented is critical to the understanding of the content, and why the way in which the content of my research paper is understood will differ depending on whether it was in "print" or through a digitalized form.

Another important comparison that I made between my digitalized paper and *media framework* as defined in Hayles and Pressman (2013) is the connections to other media forms that it fostered. While the large majority of my paper referenced online video clips, I was able to utilize other forms of media including audio, visual effects, digitized manuscripts, photos, digitized paintings, annotations, and more. This also fosters collaboration between other disciplines, and something that as an anthropologist, I strive to do. Presenting information via more holistic methods, again engages readers/users who are inclined to think cognitively in a hyper-fashion.

This also alludes to the fact that while information processing, the delivery format, content and data are all important in media studies, even more critical is the understanding of the ecology, economics, politics, culture and history behind it. Understanding the democratization of knowledge, and the social and cultural nuances that come with media provides for a more robust discussion and overall understanding of media studies. This holistic perspective is crucial when engaging in media studies, and something that can be easily demonstrated through digital literature.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the media landscape is rapidly changing and in effect changing the way people think. The academic success of students' largely depends on whether or not institutions of education choose to accept this fact and adjust their curricula accordingly. Instead of solely relying on traditional modes of teaching and learning, more effort should be made in engaging media frameworks into curricula. In a new era

where cognitive modes are being transformed by new media, channeling students' hyper attention and developing their digital skills through digital literature are crucial to their academic success. Online tools such as Omeka and Scalar not only inspire innovative mediums for teaching and learning, but also help students hone their creative thinking and building skills through its interactive design. Its accessibility to users not only creates a public educational forum where collaboration and convergence can take place, but also makes it largely accessible to a wider audience, which in turn makes knowledge more easily disseminated.

As an aspiring high school social sciences teacher, I can envision teaching my students how to create websites and projects that not only showcase their research, but also help to build their digital toolkit. Engaging students in these interactive digital literacy projects not only teaches them the technical skills necessary in this era of technology, but it also teaches them to critically analyze media so that they are not just the users. This translates to safer usage of the Internet, the questioning of security, copyright issues, advertisement, network protocol, the motives of the government, and other larger questions of the digital age that we addressed throughout the semester. That is not to say that traditional forms of learning and cognition should be completely abandoned in classrooms, when in fact there are multiple benefits to harnessing deep cognitive thinking, and traditional writing tools. In a culture of convergence, we see the endless possibilities of engaging both old media and new media, so who is to say that one form of cognition is better than another, or that one form of media is more attractive than another? Rather, my aim was to bring to the discussion various ways in which school curricula could be transformed so as to be inclusive of as many learning styles and frames of thinking as possible. Only in that regard will "literacy" become universal.

O ko'u aupuni, he aupuni palapala ko'u. Kauikeaouli, 1825

My Kingdom shall be one of literacy.

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