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Chapter Author(s): Lisa Gitelman

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The phrase “new media” is an element of elite discourse; it is used more often by professors than by anyone else. Taking the titles of books published in English as a rough way to estimate usage, it would seem that new media as such first became a concern among educators in the 1960s. So new media arrived in something of the same fashion as “new math,” as a result of anxieties about American competitiveness that accompanied technological advances amid the Cold War. (The new media in question then were instructional media, like educational broadcasting, filmstrips, transparencies, and language labs.) Anxiety lingers as part of the “new media” formulation in interesting ways, but this history was eventually superseded and forgotten, as the phrase came to refer more certainly in the 1990s to computers, digital networks, and associated technologies. This new usage is evidenced by a flood of publications, which has included such classics as Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999) and Lev Manovich’s *The Language of New Media* (2001). Books like these seek to understand just what is so new about the new media they address. They are classics because scholars and students still learn from them, but the media that seemed so new at the turn of the new century are of course old—or at least older—by now. Newness is a matter of perspective and a moving target.

Much of the utility of the phrase “new media” inheres in its lack of specificity. To study new media today generally means to study the contemporary moment, paying

particular attention to the sociotechnical conditions of networked communication. Related designations abound—like “cyberculture,” “hypertext,” “the network society,” “emergent media”—yet have had less staying power as digital technologies and the study of digital technologies have coevolved over recent years. The perennial newness of new media seems appropriate somehow and in keeping with the temporalities of digital media, especially the frenzied pace of network growth, technological innovation, and updates. But the onrush of technological change and the forever-arriving horizon of obsolescence have also been structured partially according to anxieties about a sense of ending or of limitation, such as in terms of processing speeds and code longevity: Moore’s Law (1965) predicts an exponential increase in processing speeds that many worry can’t or won’t continue for much longer, while the coming of the year 2000 raised concerns that computer systems would fail because of the way programmers had rendered dates. A number of observers have also noted that digital media effectively mean the end of media history, since “everything” will soon come in ones and zeros, bits and bytes, and so all media will be unified as one medium (Kittler 1999, 1–2; Lunenfeld 1999, 7).

“New media” is a tag for present-mindedness, then, but one that calls as much attention to time—to newness and oldness—as it does to today’s media system and its exceptionalism. One result has been increasing attention to “when old technologies were new,” as Carolyn Marvin so aptly put it (Marvin 1988). Another result has been increased attention to what Raymond Williams identified as “residual” cultural forms (Acland 2007), as well as to the ways that new media can eventually become habitual, transparent, intuitive, unexceptional, and thereby difficult to see. The studies of old media and new are thus productively mutual, overlapping, and entangled. Like sepia-filtered Instagrams, the arrow of media history points both ways.