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AME 294: Media Editing

A New Definition of Media and the Editing Process

When trying to establish a definition for media editing, one can start by taking a look at each individual word, although, as we will see, the words are almost inseparably linked. Media can, very broadly, be defined as the *non-material* artifacts created and exchanged or distributed (see paragraph 2). Editing is the act or process of creating, modifying, structuring and presenting. Media editing, thus, is the process of non-material artifact creation.

This definition of media needs to be more clearly defined.   Notice the use of the contradictive term "non-material artifacts", which is done to point out the misleading nature of the term media. For example, a book (in form) is a singular medium, while the book as a whole is a piece of media, which, in Latin, is the plural form of medium. This leads many to conclude that media is simply the tools in which we use to store and deliver information. Although this definition does justice in recognizing the information's importance to the existence of the medium, it fails to realize the power and affect of the tools existence on the information itself. For, if it not for the medium, information would only be able to be exchanged through individual contact (i.e. spoken word, gestures, etc.), or in other words, the human body would be the only medium of exchange. The message *and* the medium are equally important and should not be separated when thinking of media. In summary, media is an entity of the creation of information (non-material), the exchange of which is facilitated by a medium (artifact) beyond that of the human body.

As stated previously, editing is a process of creation. It is, basically, the first step of media and, as you will see, *it is impossible to have un-edited media!* Throughout the editing process the editor, or team of editors, has three main focuses: content, form or structure, and what tool(s)/medium(s) to use.

Content and form are almost always working off of each other in a delicate balancing act. For instance, take a look at this picture I designed and my notes below it: http://www.flickr.com/photos/47123850@N07/4326525819/in/pool-mediaediting. I started

off with content as my main focus (which isn't always the case) but keeping form in mind also affected how the piece turned out.

The symbol of the band's song that inspired the piece was my first course of action and, with the picture I decided to place it in, it just so happened to end up in the upper left. This was a purely content driven decision, which I followed up with two structural balancing acts, that just so happened to also keep in line with my desired content. These acts were to place lyrics from the song in the lower left and to fade in a photograph of a sunset (also a reference to the song lyrics) on the right side of the composition. The three points of the composition create a triangle which coincides with the eternal and harmonious feel of the song. Along those same lines, having the only words of the composition in the lower left is considered structurally pleasing to the Western eye. Finally, the song is about natural beauty, which I matched by simply having all the content depicting nature. The point I wish to make is that every decision, whether it be driven by content or form, is a function of the editing process.

 A third function of that process is deciding what tool(s) and medium(s) to use. If we take a look at my picture again, we would find that I used a total of four mediums/tools: a computer, a digital camera, a graphic design tool (GIMP) and a social networking tool (Flickr). Now, can you imagine how different the effect would be if I recreated the exact piece on a large canvas with spray paint, and I exhibited it in a museum? Would it even be possible? This decision, then, is a part of the editing process and can be just as important as form or content.

Let's stop, briefly, to confirm two of my previous notions, the first being that it is impossible to have un-edited media. Media, as stated, must be exchanged on some form of medium, and since the act of choosing which medium to use is a part of editing: all media is edited. If this logic is too obtuse for you, let's look at it another way. If I decide to take a picture of my cat to share with the world, I could potentially do it a million different ways. I could take a close up, long shot, wide shot, I could take several pictures and string them together to portray action, I could capture just his paw, I could make it abstract by compiling some household goods together and calling it my cat or by adding a weird title like "The

Machine is the Creator Beyond the Fish Bowl", or any number of possibilities which would all be decisions of content and/or form, thus, editing.

My other point is to reconfirm the inclusion of information within the definition of media. Let's take a look at a tool like GIMP, which serves the purpose of allowing us to edit the information being exchanged through the computer medium. GIMP itself, moreover, is a construct of the exchange of information. The same could be said of the computer medium in which GIMP exists. In fact, the idea of a *digital* graphic editor only exists because of the existence of the computer medium. In essence, it would be foolish to simply call media the tools of information exchange, when they themselves are an exchange of information and their existence can create more information for there to be exchanged.

Media must involve exchange or distribution. The term and its practice have a strong network or social connotation to it. Think again on the example me of taking a picture of my cat.   If I take the photo and show it to no one, it is simply archiving, or storing information, it is not media. Although, it is editing as there still is a process of creation, or modification, or organization, and so on. However, the second I start showing that picture to people it becomes a form of media. In practice, keeping your network or audience in mind is probably the most important part of media editing.

We formulate new or modify information for the sole purpose of it being exchanged. Whether we are creating the theory of relativity, making a film on political revolution, or simply commenting on a friend's photo on Flickr, it is done through the entity that is media for the purpose of exchange within a network.   It is this idea, this tie to our global collective of networks (big and small), that makes media so powerful. It has the power to inform, deceive, create, destroy, entertain, inspire, and influence. It is ruled by none and yet we all contribute. In the end, we are all media editors.