

**THE HOURS: A COMMUNITY OF ONE'S OWN**  
**HOW TRADITIONAL MEDIA WELCOME NEW MEDIA**

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I'm probably not the only one who enjoyed reading Michael Cunningham's 'The Hours', tracing it back to Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway and rereading parts of Hermione Lee's biography, who could not wait to watch Stephen Daldry's 'The Hours'.

And it is even more improbable that I am the only one who has grown fascinated by the possibilities a screen can offer, who enjoys the feeling of immersion when looking up information, loitering from one screen to another, who appreciates the efficiency of buying on line and who is definitely hooked on her mailbox.

The shock of recognition was one of the pleasures, 'The Hours' offered me. It challenged me to discover the acts of remediation. Could it be, I wondered, that films such as 'The Hours' and 'Adaptation' are making a strong case for a new medium?

So, in this essay I will discuss two questions:

- How do traditional media pave the way for digital media?
- Which new formats are possible in new media?

This article will be a collage of theoretical frameworks from the fields of old literacy, visual and digital literacy on the one hand and samples of Daldry's 'The Hours' on the other.

Metaforms, lack in the old media, desire for a new way of representation, and remediation are four arguments that justify the nascence of a new medium.

Interactive stories, games, vertical portals and virtual communities are formats 'The Hours' calls for. They offer us an increased feeling of transformation, immersion and agency, which are the aesthetics of new media.

## 1. Paving the Way

### 1.1 Metaforms

In *Interface Culture* Steven Johnson expands on the theme of metaforms indicating the need for a new medium. He draws our attention to the many parasite forms that are mushrooming as a response to the information overload. Parasite forms prefer interpretation and evaluation to narration. They ‘riff, annotate, dismantle, dissect, sample. Everything they do refracts back onto some other ‘straight’ media, on which they rely for their livelihood’ (Johnson, 26-27).

What unites the diverse strains of this emergent species is a shared belief in the need for information filters –data making sense of other data. (...)

‘The parasite form... is a response to the question: ‘what does all this information mean? Which sources are the most reliable ones? How does this information relate to my own particular worldview?’ That response arrives as a kind of hybrid, a mix of metaphor, a footnote, translation, and parody.’ (Johnson, 33)

Obviously, the book is the medium that is being discussed in ‘The Hours’. The adaptation as a whole can be seen as a localization of Mrs Dalloway in time and place. We are offered some ‘samples’ out of Mrs Dalloway, ‘it is a beautiful day;’ ‘a woman’s whole life in one day; I don’t think...but also less obvious ones such as Greek voices and the flowers.

Daldry shows us the process of writing in Virginia Woolf’s story: first sentence, Virginia constructs the suicide while walking, she announces her change of mind while entertaining her family, Leonard and Virginia discuss ‘why somebody must die’, she can’t go to bed until she has defined her heroine’s destiny.

The book is also frequently commented upon. Nelly doesn’t think much of Virginia who would rather write than give her instructions. One of the stock phrases in the film is ‘I have read the book’ it isn’t easy,

Finally, the representational powers of the book are being discussed.

Clarissa is being recognised as the protagonist of Richard’s book by the florist, Lewis and Laura. Each time, she has to assert the fictional qualities.

Richard protests the limitations of the representational powers of his novel.

On the other hand, books can connect us to our Other Self. Instead of studying her own reflection in the mirror, Laura Brown starts reading Mrs Dalloway, recognising the contrast between outer confidence and inner turmoil, an interpretation given to Kitty. On a more implicit level, 'The Hours' discusses the identity of the film as its ability to record reality. ( Manovich in Lunenfeld, 174).

All protagonists feel the pullulating force during that one day. The film, however, shows and thus activates but one life. But it is apparently not able to record the other future, unless... it adopts the principles of new media. In juxtaposing the linear narration of one life, evoking the unremediated film, and the interconnected narrative of three lives, representing the adapted film, 'The Hours' pushes the envelope of the hyperfilm.

The hyperfilm tries to make sense of a multimedial world in a post-modern time where reality as an assemblage of several futures connected to multiple selves, is a very common thought.

Parasite forms are a clear indication the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs a new medium. The only reason why they remain parasites, is because they overstretch the possibilities of the old medium.

The parasite form is...a television pilot for a series that will run on another medium. ...  
The parasite forms are finally all about meta-information – or better yet flexible meta-information. ...

The digital world is the natural habitat of the metaform. (Johnson, 37)

## 1.2 Lack

It is impossible for traditional media to personalize their artefacts. The only link between the reader and the narrated is the projection of the reader by himself into the story . It is a true tribute to Virginia Woolf that she advocates one of the innovative aspects of the aesthetics of new media. Being chased by Leonard, Virginia pleads vigorously for the right to make her own choices. 'This is my voice. Only I can understand my own condition. If it is a choice between Richmond and death, I choose death.' Thus, she pleads for agency which 'is the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices' (Murray, 126)

Each new medium is justified because it fills a lack or repairs a fault in its predecessor, because it fulfils the unkept promise of an older medium (...) Hypertext brings interactivity to the novel (Bolter and Grusin, 59). Scripting the audience is the major lack of old media.

### 1.3 Desire

Every expressive medium has its own unique patterns of desire; its own way of giving pleasure, of creating beauty, of capturing what we feel to be true about life; its own aesthetic. One of the functions of early artefacts is to awaken the public to these new desires, to create the demand for an intensification of the particular pleasures the medium has to offer. (Murray, 94)

*The Hours* make you long for an encyclopaedic simulacrum: a space you can travel through to check links, compare with Mrs Dalloway, and discuss the different forms of adaptation and its meaning. It would be nice if we would have such a space where both films and novels, critical analyses, biographers were linked to each other, a place where we could communicate with other Woolfians. We could search illness, or Septimus, or Sally, motherhood, gender and we would reach our point of interest in each document immediately. 'The Hours' certainly increases our desire to be a culturally literate person. New media can offer us a vertical portal on Virginia Woolf that would meet this expectation.

### 1.4 Remediation

*The Hours* could have been called 'Remediation' by Daldry and Daldry as it repurposes two novels and a film. In doing so 'The Hours' draws our attention to the need for a new medium.

Repurposing is a transitional step that allows us to get a secure footing on unfamiliar terrain. But it isn't where we'll find the entirely new dimensions of the digital worlds. We need to transcend the old to discover completely new worlds of expression. Like a road sign, repurposing is a marker indicating that profound change is around the bend. (Bolter and Grusin, 59)

This new medium will not only expand our means of expression, but it will also change the traditional media.

What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of the new media. (Bolter and Grusin, 15)

Remediation is achieved by immediacy and hypermediacy at the same time.

New media achieves immediacy when the viewer loiters through the screen into cyberspace. He becomes so absorbed by what he is doing in cyberspace that he does not notice the screen any longer.

Immediacy in two senses: one epistemological (immediacy is transparency: the absence of mediation and presentation, the other psychological (names the viewer's feeling that the medium has disappeared and that the objects are present to him, a feeling that his experience is therefore authentic. (Bolter and Grusin, 59)

The letters and the use of the interior monologue increase our sense of immediacy. In inserting the passages of Mrs Dalloway in 'The Hours', Daldry creates the illusion of immersion as far as the film goes. He highlights the contrast between fiction and reality. Scrolling, clicking, typing on a keyboard, using the mouse, however, make us aware of the computer as mediator.

Hypermedia: epistemological sense: hypermediacy is opacity –the fact that knowledge of the world comes to us through media. The viewer acknowledges that she is in the presence of a medium and learns through acts of mediation or indeed learns about mediation itself.

Psychological: the experience of the medium is itself the experience of the real. (Bolter and Grusin, 59)

In showing the books and papers, the act of writing, printing, reading we become aware of the book as medium. Moreover, the excellent crosscutting allows us to enjoy the

medium film. The most obvious sign of remediation is the drowning scene in the hotel. The film remediated digital animation.

I will focus on 4 characteristics of new media and show how 'The Hours' picked up the glove.

#### 1.4.1 Process

'digital media': 'it is a visual style that, in the words of William J. Mitchell (1994) 'privileges fragmentation, indeterminacy, and heterogeneity and emphasizes process or performance rather than the finished art object (Bolter and Grusin, 31).

Although the three heroines finish their 'production: Virginia nearly finishes her novel, Laura bakes a cake without meaning, and Clarissa organizes a party nobody comes to, the actual achievement is presented as a fait divers.

Richard doubts why he is given the Caruthers Prize: is it my work or my performance they are awarding?

#### 1.4.2 Multivocality

It is typical of new media that one incident is shown from different points of view. The Hours achieves this in showing us two 'clones' of Virginia, living in different places and decades.

Their different identities are positioned with the book as focal point: creator-writer, actor-editor and observer-librarian. As they all respond differently in similar scenes, the impression of multivocality is created. Another way of achieving multivocality is working with the doppelganger metaphor: Virginia-Richard.

Thirdly, we are made aware there is a Second Self for our heroines. The existence of this Other Me who contradicts the shown Me, is also a sign of multivocality.

As a writer, Virginia thinks up the story, hence the interior monologue, sees her own creation, changes it and finally writes it down. Her discussions with Leonard and Vanessa show us a glimpse of 'the life that has been stolen' from her.

Clarissa lives in two worlds: the world of the affluent, mature Clarissa Vaughan and the world of the 18-year old Mrs Dalloway on the beach one summer morning.

Laura lives the life of Richard's mother (wife, mother and reader), a life given to her by Dan, and Mrs Brown who enacts the story of Mrs Dalloway and disappears.

There is a final way Daldry achieves a multipositional view on important issues: appropriation.

The object here is to let the quoted, appropriated author speak for himself or, rather, to permit his text to speak for itself without being summarized, translated, distorted by an intermediary voice. To write in this manner – that is to say, to copy, to appropriate – seems suited to an electronic environment in which text can be reproduced, reconfigured, and moved with very little expenditure of effort. In this environment, furthermore, such a manner of proceeding seems more honest: the text of the Other may butt up against that by someone else; it may even crash against it. (Landow in Lunenfeld, 158)

Having seen 'The Hours' leaves you with the impression you have studied all the possibilities of dealing with Virginia's dilemma: is it worth choosing a life that will kill you? This question is mirrored in Richard's plea: I have no life. You have to let me go and in Laura's conclusion 'I have no regrets. This was death. I chose life'. In the same way, we are offered different views on love:

What is love? Doing things (baking the birthday cake for instance); staying alive; letting go?

'Why does someone have to die?', Leonard asks. 'To make sure the others value their lives more', which is contradicted by Laura: 'it makes you feel worthless'.

You're lucky 'I don't think you can be a real woman if you don't have children', according to Kitty

You so wanted a child; you're a lucky woman; says Laura

Virginia is lucky: two lives: the live she is living and the live she is writing, says Vanessa

In watching 'The Hours' we feel we have covered every angle of these problems which conveys a sense of multivocality.

### 1.4.3 Link

In his essay ‘Hypertext as collage writing’ Landow focuses on the importance of the link

Let me emphasize the obvious – that hypertext is an information technology in which a new element, the link plays the defining role, for all the chief practical, cultural, and educational characteristics of this medium derive from the fact that linking creates new kind of connectivity and reader choice. (Landow in Lunenfeld, 154)

The author introduces his protagonists by navigational links describing place and time.

Navigational and associative links allow us to travel through cyberspace as well as go for more information. Those links are overused and deserve to be ridiculed as was done in ‘Adaptation’: ‘where do I come from?’ ♦ Big Bang.

Digital media are quite rightly looking for a ‘graceful choreography of navigation to lure the interactor through ever more expressive narrative landscapes. ((Murray, 83)

Peter Boyle, the editor, teaches us, however, how links can add meaning to a story. I have tried to categorize the links according to this [adjunct](#).

Sense-of-time link	the audio-visual representation localises the alarm clock
Gesture link	washing and tying hair is one ritual which is not interrupted but Clarissa and Virginia’s face substitute each other in the scene.
Literacy link	writing, reading, saying: ‘Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself’
Repetition link	Flash-forwarding ‘I don’t think two people could have been happier than we have been’
Conversational link	Answering an implicit question <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ‘a woman’s whole life in one day’ links to Richard sitting on his mother’s lap;</li><li>• ‘Why is everything wrong?’ links to birthday cake;</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘she’ll kill herself over something that doesn’t matter’ links to birthday cake picture and recipe ;</li> <li>• ‘You can’t find peace by avoiding life’ links to Laura in her car returning from the hotel;</li> </ul>
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Boyle’s proficiency in linking the three narratives highlights the feeling of loneliness of our heroines.

#### 1.4.4 Transformation

Digital media offer countless ways of shape-shifting (Murray, 154). Daldry adopts these characteristics by presenting a formulaic narrative in three different settings and by morphing Virginia Woolf into Laura, and Clarissa.

Enacted events have a transformative power that exceeds both narrated and conventionally dramatized events because we assimilate them as personal experiences. (Murray, 170)

Richard’s mother enacts Virginia’s novel and becomes Laura Brown.

*The Hours* is a clear example of how a traditional medium refashions itself by appropriating the characteristics of the new media. Although there is no presentation of a computer in the whole film, which is odd in itself since the protagonists are all in content, we feel the medium quite clearly.

### 3. Formats

#### 3.1 Interactive story

Instead of going to a study circle on literature to discuss the latest novel, we could organize LAW-parties: Local Area Writers. We could study the characteristics of stream of consciousness or the art of writing sharp dialogues, and start writing.

In digital media we have to distinguish between the author and the interactor. The interactor contributes his lexia.

The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities. (...) The interactor is not the author of the digital narrative, although the interactor can experience one of the most exciting aspects of artistic creation –the thrill of exerting power over enticing and plastic materials. (Murray, 153)

The procedural author is Daldry who created a story as an assembly of plot points for his three heroines: partner enters, heroine lies in bed, washes her face and ties her hair (meets her alter ego); introduction of anchor character in first life (contester); first challenge (breakfast); second challenge (first act of writing a book, making a cake, organizing a party); meets resistance ( Nelly, cake that doesn't work; Richard who hesitates); has visitors (keepers in first life); flees to Other Land, goes to bed.

In interactive stories the audience can influence events in the story world they are experiencing, similar to Woolf who imagines her heroine's death, but changes her mind. As creator she becomes the audience of her own creation, and while watching she influenced the events.

### 3.1.1 The Violence Hub

One such use of the labyrinth as a means of evoking and controlling terror is a story format increasingly used by my fiction students, a story I have come to call the violence 'hub'. Writers will place an account of a violent incident, ..., at the center of a web of narratives that explore it from multiple points of view. The names in the account ... lead outward with hot links to the satellite files that tell us how the incident appeared to the various people involved (Murray ,135)

The author writes out the disappearance of Laura Brown and the interactors start writing from the point of view of Dan, Kitty, Ray, Richard, the second child, the bellboy of the hotel, literary critics who intervene on behalf of the book.

This collective writing adventure allows us to deal with our anxiety by shaping it 'into a pattern of exploration and discovery'. (Murray, 137)

### 3.1.2 The Journey Story and the Pleasure of Problem Solving

On the computer the journey story emphasizes navigation – the transitions between different places, the arrivals and departures – and the how-to's of the hero's repeated escapes from danger (Murray, )

The author maps the journey and assigns a person to each place. He also writes out a character sheet of the traveller and her main problem. The challenge for each interactor is to keep the traveller as long as possible at his place. If you are very good at it, you acquire the status of traveller.

Clarissa Vaughan walks from the flower shop to Richard's flat to her home; back to Richard, to the hospital and finally home again.

In her quest to find out who she is, she engages into a conversation with the florist, Richard, Lewis, her daughter, Sally. The florist tries to capture her in the book, taps into her fascination for flowers, Richard traps her in their mutual past and his illness, ... All interactors will have to find ways of keeping Clarissa stuck.

## 3.2 Game

As a not too passive member of the audience, a feeling of frustration overwhelmed me. I found it very hard to accept that Virginia and Laura didn't have another choice. What could society have done to alleviate their pain? And this is where games come into play.

Of course, in our times, our protagonists could have experimented with their Other Life, enacting it onto a virtual stage. These games could have given them the possibility 'to look life in the face and to know it for what it is'.

Virtual environments – such as Multi User Domains and Live-Action Role-Playing games – are safe environments as

'the anonymity of MUDs – one is known on the MUD only by the name of one's character or characters – gives people the chance to express multiple and often unexplored aspects of the self, to play with their identity and to try out new ones (Turkle, 12)

We could dramatize London life, Canada or The Beach experience, or it can be a simulation of the conflicting frames our protagonists live in. The game would be the equivalent of the mirror or the book transposing the protagonist from her outer to her inner world.

Every day, and particular every night, thousands of people forsake real life (RL) and meet in virtual space 'in character' (IC) to play out stories based on favorite books, movies, or television shows. This new kind of adult narrative pleasure involves the sustained collaborative writing of stories that are mixtures of the narrated and the dramatized and that are not meant to be watched or listened to but shared by the players as an alternate reality they all live in together (Murray, 44)

In LARPs players are given a character sheet telling her how to act and to relate to others, 'memory packets' (Murray, 118) and a set of goals.

Laura Brown is shy, reclusive, feels awkward to interact, wants not to be disturbed, loves her son, bakes a cake as a token of love for her husband, moves around using her car, goes to hotel, has no choice but to leave, has to wait till death of her son to fly in and visit Clarissa explaining why she fled to Canada.

The transformative powers of enacted events in games are very high 'because we assimilate them as personal experience' (Murray, 170).

### 3.3 Virtual Community

Instead of being a medium for shut-ins and introverts, the digital computer turns out to be the first major technology of the twentieth century that brings strangers closer together, rather than pushing them farther apart. Most of the major innovations of the past hundred years have made it progressively easier to avoid contact – and particularly conversation – with people who aren't colleagues, or family, or friends. The automobile created the isolated cloisters of suburbia; the telephone and the television kept us firmly implanted in our domestic spaces; even the public life at the cinema unfolds under a vow of silence. (Johnson, 65)

All protagonists are shown in their individual cells: Virginia in Hogarth House in rural Richmond, Laura in her house, car or hotel room, and Clarissa clinging to her mobile phone. The three women struggle with the feeling of not belonging, they don't have friends who struggle with similar problems.

Virtual communities organize communication between people, who share the same interests, who recognize each other's stories. Virtual communities are third places 'where communities can come into being and continue to hold together' (...) 'the place we live, the place we work , and the place we gather for conviviality' (Rheingold, 9)

The flower shop and the garden are the only places that are shown as gathering places in *The Hours*. *The Hours* could be both the framework as well as the common ground (Preece, 157) of our community. We could design a garden in cyberspace asking one question: 'what would you do when your loved ones live in one life and you are longing to live another life? A bench would invite us to discuss the suicide scenario and a flowery patch would plunge us in the option of letting go the other life, but the lawn would tell us the stories of Virginia, Clarissa and Laura. These stories function as a user manual: your contribution consists of one day in your life. Finally there is a shadowy corner where you can discuss the issue of leaving your loved ones.

Including formulaic stories will persuade lurkers (Preece, 87) to become participants.

space	Richmond, 1923	Los Angeles, 1951	New York City, 2001	Oxford, 2003
partner enters,	Leonard	Dan	Sally	
heroine lies in bed	awake	asleep	awaking	
washes her face and ties her hair (meets her alter ego);	Doesn't study her reflection	Starts reading Mrs Dalloway	Studies her reflection	
breakfast;	Virginia quarrels with Leonard about breakfast	Dan wants Richard to have breakfast	Clarissa quarrels with Richard about his breakfast	
Introduction of	Leonard	Richard	Richard	

anchor character in first life (contester);				
begins challenge;	First sentence of Mrs Dalloway	Cake recipe	Buys flowers	
meets resistance;	Nelly	Cake doesn't work	Richard doesn't want to come to the party	
has visitors (secondary anchor characters)	Vanessa and her children	Kitty	Lewis	
Other Land	flees to			
bed.	Keeps writing	Waits and finally goes	Goes first	

## Conclusion

The advent of new media always causes a stir amongst the traditional media. They have to reposition themselves and find their authenticity in content as well as representation. Yet, traditional media play an important role in our understanding of new media. Our familiarity with the traditional media allows us to become aware of the innovations new media offer. This awareness needs multiliterate educators who can translate these cues into knowledge.

New media expect the audience to be active. But does the audience feel competent to participate? This participation competence should be the major challenge of education to make sure every human being will belong to our cybercommunity.

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