English Department - Research Essay Preliminary Proposal

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In the space provided please give a **(typed)** draft of your research essay topic (approx. 250 words)

As digital readers such as the Kindle and the iPad spread into the twenty-first century and across the globe, the concept of text and the definition of story have begun to change and evolve. With the proliferation of these technologies comes an important question about what constitutes a definitive textual analysis. Traditionally, textual analysis has limited itself to core content: despite translations of presentation format or even language, a literature scholar has been able to focus on the words of the author and an examination of the book in question as an indivisible unit. However, when one story is presented across multiple media platforms and in myriad forms, the traditional methods of analysis are no longer adequate.

This paper seeks to examine the effects of the changing materiality of text and the consequences of effectively (sometimes violently) shoving one medium into another. Taking as its object Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' 1985 series *Watchmen*, the essay will look at the various forms the narrative has taken, from serialized maxi-series to collected edition to "absolute edition" to motion comic to feature-length blockbuster film in an effort to describe and interpret the implications of presenting a narrative in a variety of material aesthetic forms. When all of these media exhibiting one story are available simultaneously, the methodology of textual analysis needs to change, relinquishing ideas of primary authorship and building new theoretical models that take assemblages into account. The operating critical framework for the project will be built from theories that take factors like the digital realm and the concept of the scriptor into account when prescribing the role of the author (Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes), as well as those that concentrate on the materiality of text itself as both physical and virtual (Johanna Drucker, Jerome McGann). From this foundation, the paper will attempt to thoroughly examine *Watchmen* as differential media, and in doing so will show that the contemporary media landscape renders definitive textual analysis effectively impossible, calling perhaps instead for a model made by synthesizing key aspects of differential media theory (Marjorie Perloff, Darren Wershler), Transmedia Theory (Henry Jenkins), and Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour, Jennifer Daryl Slack & J. MacGregor Wise).