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Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities

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"[T]o write is human, to edit is divine"
—Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000).

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PREFACE

Stephen King in the New Millennium: Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities undertakes to investigate the connections between textuality and technology within wider literary and socio-cultural contexts. It explores the various implications of a constantly mutating media culture with regard to Stephen King's twenty-first century popular production that flourishes both in print and in electronic environments. For this reason, it undertakes a systematic study of the literary and technological convergences that have emerged from the digital revolution in the late twentieth century.

In an effort to revise traditional theories of horror writing, I highlight King's literary departures and media shifts that have contributed to the re-invention of his writing craft. This book examines the diverse effects of King's media turn on writing and reading practices as well as on authorial roles and intentions. Focusing on both the potentials and constraints of electronic media in relation to both the content and form of King's fictional works, I explore the different types of relationships that bind King's authorial team and active audiences in the formation of an amplified literary experience within the context of present participatory culture and under the pressures of an insatiable entertainment industry.

In this book, I focus on a selection of King's printed novels and e-novellas of the twenty-first century, such as *Lisey's Story* (2006), *Duma Key* (2008) and *UR* (2009). I also examine *Discordia* (2009), King's online interactive computer experience, as well as other electronic projects King creates for his readers on his official website (*StephenKing.com*). I aim at explaining the dynamic relations that arise and the new possibilities that open up with King's authorial practices and his oscillation among different expressive modes and writing textualities. I depend on Narratology, New Media and Videogame Studies for the formation of an enhanced literary

theoretical context. My intention is to facilitate the understanding among different disciplines and to contribute to a constructive dialogue among variable discourses, regarding popular fiction, popular writers and constant readers in an electronically-mediated world.

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INTRODUCTION

The intrusion of computational technologies in the infrastructure of developed Western societies since the 1990s has led to the gradual digitization of all types of information at all levels of organized institutional practice. We detect a staggering increase of human interaction with electronic media, used as vehicles for access to and distribution of diverse media content. Also noteworthy is the increasing tendency towards the active participation in the creation and distribution of this new media content. Bearing in mind these developments, *Stephen King in the New Millennium: Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities* commences an investigation into the technological, literary and cultural intricacies that have affected the recent writing endeavors and commercial policies of Stephen King, the hugely popular American horror writer. By using as primary sources several of his popular works, published after the turn of the twenty-first century, I undertake the task to theorize about the irreversible effects of the new media revolution on popular fiction writing and reading practices, carried out by the writer and his audience respectively.

The updated entry in the fourth edition of *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* under the name of Stephen King writes:

> American horror and fantasy writer, born in Maine, the location for much of his fiction. Initially, after *Carrie* (1974), he wrote as Richard Bachman—a clash of identities exploited in *The Dark Half* (1989). In *The Stand* (1978; as miniseries by Marvel Comics 2008—) he shows ordinary Americans in physical and metaphysical confrontation; other themes include relationships between writers and audiences (*Misery*, 1987), and childhood friendships (*The Body*, 1982, filmed as *Stand by Me*, 1986) [. . .]. King has subsequently published some works solely in digital format, for example *The Plant* (2000, serialized online) and *Ur* (2009, for Amazon Kindle e-book reader). (385)

By choosing to move beyond the conventional categorizations of King as a horror and fantasy writer, I examine King's works and media presence from the turn of the twenty-first century onwards. I argue that his experimentations with literary traditions and writing formats in print and online environments account for both his redefinition as a writer and the re-invention of his craft. They can also explain his immense popularity. By approaching his writing techniques from a completely new perspective, my aim is to highlight the need for a transition from a conventional theory of popular fiction writing to a technologically and culturally informed one. To this end, I mark out the terrain where a fruitful dialog between different discourses can commence.

In a constantly mutating media landscape, Henry Jenkins is a media theorist who has been studying the multiple effects of new media on contemporary popular culture in relation to its participating agents (the producers and the consumers of media content). In *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (2009), Jenkins defines participatory culture as one "with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another" (xi). His words summarize the essence of a new electronic culture that regards its members as active participants in education and in other novel experiences, such as the creation and dissemination of information and artistic expression.

Concerning literary developments, the challenges of the electronic era have resulted in a sea of changes in authorial practices. A new writing reality has sprung from the new roles allocated to writers and readers of diverse texts while, as N. Katherine Hayles states, "texts [are considered to be] embodied entities" ("Print is Flat, Code is Deep" 67), acquiring a life, an existence and a meaning of their own, which can be modified according to their physicality and their mode of signification. In turn, literary texts are defined by the specificities of the certain technology that carries them and are affected by the materiality of

the medium of expression. Thus, authors have to adjust their narrative structures and schemata accordingly. Words and images appearing on new writing spaces acquire new meanings, which leap out of complex interrelations. As the importance of readers is rediscovered through the participatory roles assigned to them, all three mediating parts – writers, readers and texts – make up a new powerful unity, affected by and affecting a new media culture, which is departing from traditional formations.

The side effects of this digital saturation have created the need for a repositioning in recent popular cultural studies. By espousing the term "popular," I accept two dominant interpretations and aim to underscore their latest manifestations. On the one hand, "popular" is connected with folk power and the stories that emphasize the power of people to create literature for people. As such, the term acquires new extensions and adaptations within the present participatory culture, which allows the shift of focus from readers' reception of literature and art to their active participation in them. On the other hand, "popular" connotes mass-consumption, corporatized profit and standardization as a result of technological dominance. It is determined by the powerful corporations of brand, which regard commercial profit as the primary variable that drives the production of popular cultural products.

The diversification in the means of enunciation, production and dissemination after the introduction of film, television, video and, lately, new media technologies has promoted cultural plurality and the democratization of products, bringing them closer to the recipients. The free flow of online information has also democratized social media and eradicated all barriers. This has led to a new consumer consciousness, which book and entertainment industries hope to formulate and manipulate. In the new media culture, control over cultural spaces has meant the relocation of power among traditions, genres and technologies; as a result, new correlations, hierarchies and structures characterize institutions, education and the entertainment industries. Thus, there is a need to redirect literary and cultural studies and redefine the roles of both authors and readers in contemporary Western culture in order to fully appreciate the consequences of an already maturing electronic age.

The origins of a media turn in literary studies can be traced in the early 1960s to Theodor H. Nelson's Xanadu Project, which proposed the creation of a storage system that could support the "'true' structure of texts" being all part of a "[l]iterature [seen as] an ongoing system of interconnecting documents" ("Proposal for a Universal Electronic Publishing System and Archive" 445). Nelson explains how "[l]inkage structure between documents forms a flux of invisible threads and rubber bands that hold the thoughts together" (446). His conception of the hypertext as a computer-based system, which would enable the flexible connection among ideas, lay the foundation for the electronic organization of information. At around the same time, Marshall McLuhan's views on media technologies are expressed in his work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), where he speaks of the supremacy of the materiality of the medium over the content it transmits as it affects the human sensorium and people's perception of the world. Since the early 1990s, the World Wide Web and the new digital platforms have provided new spaces for diverse corporate and individual creative activity.

As media and content correlate, affecting human activity and perception, multiple convergences have been underway; the convergence of fiction writing with digital technology constitutes the focal point in this investigation. "Convergence" is a key notion coined by Jenkins. It describes the complex workings within this emergent new media culture. For Jenkins, "convergence [entails] the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (*Convergence* 2). The latest technological applications, directed by strict marketing laws, have affected writing techniques and practices while also creating fertile ground for the redefinition of literature. Therefore, taking technological, cultural and literary parameters into account, it has been my primary concern to investigate the interaction of digital media with literary tradition and focus on both the creative potentials of this convergence and the constraints of particular media.

Due to new media shifts at the start of the twenty-first century, popular artists have had to reconsider their roles and potentials. Even though they often manage to achieve financial success and evanescent popularity, due to the visibility that mass media generously offer, the literariness of their works is frequently questioned. What used to constitute qualified fiction writing in the twentieth century in America must now adjust itself to recent technological developments and live up to the expectations of an ever-growing and fast-mutating reading public. Moreover, the proliferation of "transmedia storytelling" practices, which imply "a transmedia story [which] unfolds across multiple media platforms with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (*Convergence* 95 – 96), has changed the rules of production in the book and entertainment industry. Writers and publishers have had to come to terms with an evolving reality and the needs of contemporary markets. So, another question that is immediately raised pertains to the qualities that make a writer stand out in contemporary cultural and technological contexts.

Such considerations regarding qualitative fiction writing become particularly complex when it comes to King's case. One of the top-selling contemporary American popular writers for over four decades, he has had to meet the challenges posed by the new electronic era in order to remain competitive. Although his printed books and latest contributions to mass and new digital media have had tremendous commercial success, he has frequently received negative criticism for his writing techniques and marketing choices; his literary work has been subject to both positive and negative critical analyses by the academia. For instance, despite King's long list of book awards and nominations,[1] some of King's harshest critique comes from S. T. Joshi, a novelist and reviewer of fantasy fiction, who regards most of King's best-known works as bloated, unconvincing and "susceptible to influence from film" ("Mavens of Horror: Stephen King and Dean Koontz" 225). Furthermore, Harold Bloom "does not [consider King] to be a borderline literary

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[1] An extensive list of Stephen King's most noteworthy awards and nominations can be accessed in his official website *StephenKing.com* under the title "Awards and Nominations."

phenomenon." Bloom sees King as being "consonant with our age of virtual reality" (1), merely a by-product and supporter of contemporary visual and electronic culture. Such commentaries have served as a springboard for my investigation into King's latest writing and marketing practices in the twenty-first century[2] so that a transition from conventional positions in criticism can be achieved. By approaching discussions concerning King's literary practices from a new direction, this book challenges the generalizations that maintain the literary canon and sustain the imaginary binary between high and low culture. Actually, it investigates King's phenomenal success in the context of contemporary literary production by taking into consideration the changing cultural, technological and marketing parameters that have redefined his writing at the turn of the new millennium.

Specifically, King's prolific writing career commenced long before the age of the World Wide Web. He has displayed his writing resourcefulness since the 1970s[3] with the production of a diverse array of literary works that deny closure; they keep on bifurcating, providing material to film and TV producers and to his authorial team for further experimentations. A long list of King's film and TV adaptations is provided in the "Library" section in his official webpage *StephenKing.com.* What is more, Mark Browning's focused study, *Stephen King on the Big Screen* (2009), scrutinizes a great selection of King's works – which have inspired film directors – and tries to explain the reasons film adaptations of his novels are very often doomed to fail. Kevin Quigley's *Wetware: On the Digital Frontline with Stephen King* (2011) provides a by-no-means exhaustive record of King's publishing experiments with technology. Yet, in as few as forty-one pages,[4] it helps readers form

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[2] The publication of King's first e-book *Riding the Bullet* (2000) is acknowledged as the first major turning point in his writing career.

[3] King's first published horror novel is *Carrie* (1974). Even earlier, he experimented with his writing techniques and genres, through short story contributions sold to men's magazines (such as *Cavalier*) while still at college (King, "On Becoming a Brand Name" 16 – 28).

[4] Book length is estimated by the number of page turns on a Kindle, with special settings to closely represent a book, as explained by *Amazon.com.*

an idea about King's first engagement with electronic gaming (*The Mist* PC game in 1985 and *The Dark Half* PC game in 1992) before moving to online environments. It also reminds one of his other experimentations with serial publishing, such as *The Green Mile* book project (1996) and *The Plant* online project (2000). *Chart of Darkness* (2011) by the same writer retells the story of King's successful publishing career by focusing on the writer's chart triumphs, this time including fresher titles such as *Under the Dome* (2009) and *Full Dark, No Stars* (2010). What differentiates *Stephen King in the New Millennium: Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities* from all the other projects focusing on King's authorial practices is the fact that it attempts a systematic and theoretically grounded examination of his writing techniques and prolific production in a fast-evolving world. Yet, it excludes filmic and TV productions from the onset as they have been massively discussed elsewhere. The study showcases how King manipulates information, image, sound and word for the production of a new wired culture and an online consumer consciousness. It investigates the more general cultural, economic and marketing parameters that characterize popular production in the twenty-first century. This way, King's resourcefulness is traced in his writing skills and narrative techniques; it is also located in his marketing choices as he walks on the tightrope set by the book and the entertainment markets and by his insatiable need for new writing surfaces, techniques and formulas.

Scholars and critics have long tried to put down on paper the characteristics that make up King's writing persona. In his introduction to the essay collection, *Fear Itself: The Horror Fiction of Stephen King (1976 – 1982)* (1982), fiction writer Peter Straub enumerates the reasons for King's successful writing career. He explains that he is "a serious storyteller [who] put[s] himself wholly into his books [and] [spreads] himself throughout the book to get between the reader and the narrative" (10). Both this volume and the next collection, *Kingdom of Fear: The World of Stephen King* (1986), deal with King as the phenomenal horror genre representative who has managed to make the horror story popular again. Indebted to literary traditions, he has never turned his back on his predecessors and literary fathers. As the essays reveal, after

respectfully waving at his forefathers, such as Edgar Allan Poe, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch and Richard Matheson among many others, King has managed to revitalize the genre by getting rid of all the bankrupt elements, thus giving his writings a new twist.[5]

Being influenced by the great repository of traditional horror fiction writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, King oftentimes makes his readers conscious of this fact through the mediating voice of the narrators in his stories. I choose to examine the narrations and depictions King constructs in his latest artworks. Through them, he brings archetypal fears to the fore and connects them to the present consumer society. King explains that he has manipulated childhood fears and nightmares in order to widen his marketing choices and achieve the desired recognizability. Writing about the publication of "Boogeyman," a story first sold to *Cavalier* men's magazine in 1973 and republished in the story collection *Night Shift* (1978), he explains: "The story takes a childhood fear and saddles an adult with it; puts him back into that dreamlike world of childhood where the monsters *don't* go away when you change the channel, but crawl out and hide under the bed" ("The Horror Writer and the Ten Bears" 11, italics in original). It soon becomes obvious that King has always pushed writing and commercial tactics to extraordinary limits in his search for new means of expression and success.

King's writing production has increased amazingly since the eighties, and so has criticism about his writing techniques. His horror writing has aroused controversy about the nature and the function of the American society and family. Alexandra Heberger, in her study *The Supernatural Depiction of Modern American*

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[5] An interesting study of weird fiction production since H. P. Lovecraft's time and the 1970s, as a by-product of mainstream horror fiction, is attempted by S. T. Joshi in *The Modern Weird Tale: A Critique of Horror Fiction* (2001). Joshi marks the path of the weird fiction genre and its deterioration as "a spectacularly marketable phenomenon" (1). In particular, in his essay "Stephen King: The King's New Clothes," he discusses King's indebtedness to Lovecraft and the genre, while cruelly criticising his writing skills, bankrupt supernatural tropes and marketing ploys in an effort to explain King's tremendous commercial success.

Phobias and Anxieties in the Work of Stephen King (2002), regards his writing as a meaningful critical reflection of and insight into contemporary American society. As for the cruel way women are depicted in his stories, this instigates a lot of disagreement, as Karin Elizabeth Gardner discusses in her Master's Thesis, "Domestic Violence Against Women Within the Horror Literature of Stephen King" (1998). Joe M. Abbott analyzes King's fascination with the dysfunctional family unit in his work, *Family Survival: Domestic Ideology and Destructive Paternity in the Horror Fictions of Stephen King* (1994). In addition, Steven Bruhm's essay, "Picture This: Stephen King's Queer Gothic," published in David Punter's edited volume *A New Companion to the Gothic* (2012), analyzes instances of queerness in King's work, equating paranoia with homosexual panic. In the hundreds of novels and short stories published by King in the last four decades and in the numerous works discussing them, the plethora of issues raised proves King's ability to sense contemporary social tensions and release them through his stories.

In an effort to highlight the technical aspect of King's inventiveness, Sharon A. Russell's *Revisiting Stephen King: A Critical Companion* (2002) takes up an analysis of the writing formulas adopted by the writer. In particular, Russell tries to explore the secret tools found in King's "toolbox" (*On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* 104), a metaphor King maintains in his non-fiction essays. More importantly, Karen A. Hohne's essay, "The Power of the Spoken Word in the Works of Stephen King," provides an enlightening account of King's dialogic elements in his characters' utterances, which demonstrate a game of power relations between official knowledge and unofficial otherness.

King has always experimented with many different genres. Since the publication of *The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger* in 1982, the first book of his best-seller, eight-volume epic work, inspired by both Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and J. R. R. Tolkien's works, the novels in the series exemplify the successful practice of combining fantasy, mystery, science fiction, Gothic and epic. His effectual merging of different writing styles and his storytelling desire to build multiple narrative threads could justify the success of such a publishing

endeavor. Yet, what seems to differentiate King from other popular fiction writers is his incessant search for new ways to divert from established writing as well as from publishing norms and conventions. He clings onto the strong literary tradition of horror at a time when a digital turn within the world of literary production is already evident. *Stephen King in the New Millennium: Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities* investigates King's writing conventions and formulas in an attempt to explore those elements that keep his readers' interest alive while also promoting high-figure sales. As the analysis of King's writing will show, his language games and his cross-genre and multi-vocal narrations are rooted within the Gothic and horror tradition. Yet, they evolve as he sets off to explore other mediums of expression.

All kinds of natural and social transgressions have been depicted in Gothic works. For Punter, the Gothic constitutes "a contested site" ("The Ghost of a History" xiii), due to its "resistance to canonization" (ix). This is evident in texts that deal with a wide array of issues, such as social divisions, political struggles and inner dilemmas.[6] In the early nineteenth century, an explosion in female readership is witnessed after the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which led to the further popularization of the genre. Since then, the genre of Gothic horror, on both sides of the Atlantic, has given shape to the fears and anxieties of its readers. In the first half of the twentieth century, it gradually moved to other literary and media forms such as the Gothic scenario in films and the Gothic drama on stage. A few examples are the classic film *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror*, produced in 1922, the different film and stage adaptations of *Dracula* (1897) and *Frankenstein* as well as the adaptations of Poe's works (Kermode, "The 10 Best Gothic Films"). So far, cinema and TV have managed to capture the excess of feelings distilled in the Gothic. For a century, their emphasis on visuality and the image has shaped the most horrid

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[6] David Punter and Glennis Byron's *The Gothic* (2004) provides a comprehensive list of both British and American Gothic tales as well as critical analyses.

fears of the intellectual mind.[7] However, towards the end of the twentieth century, the introduction of new media has facilitated the flourishing of the Gothic culture in other fields of cultural production, such as video games and graphic novels for young readers, feeding the entertainment industry with transmedia franchises.[8] It is the primary aim of this analysis to systematically study the formation of a reinvented visualized popular Gothicism, through which renewed anxieties can be expressed, as evidenced in King's latest writings.

While under the pressure of an emerging convergence culture, in which technology, literacy, tradition and commercial profit seem to be intertwined, cultural phenomena, literary products and marketing choices need to be explained anew. More specifically, the entertainment industry has been promoting specific types of literary writing and cultural products in an effort to control public taste.[9] Advertising, book clubs, bookstore chains and Hollywood productions are all parts of a well-organized marketing mechanism that makes the most out of popular writers and their works, ensuring at the same time that everyone gets paid. "Book-of-the Month Clubs" in the U.S.A. and the U.K. are only a few of the strategies used to shape taste in the reading public and help big conglomerates secure their existence.[10] The industry promotes the

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[7] The two volumes of *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* by Punter, with first and second supplemented editions, have offered extensive accounts of definitive perceptions of the Gothic genre, ranging from the Romantics to examples of contemporary American Gothic.

[8] Gothic depictions have flourished in videogames, such as the series *Gothic* (2001) by Piranha Bytes or *Vampire: The Masquerade-Bloodlines* (2004), to name only a couple of examples in a long list of titles, while *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* have also been adapted into graphic novels.

[9] Joe Moran, in his study *Star Authors: Literary Celebrity in America* (2000), illustrates that the seven conglomerates in the U.S.A. control production and distribution of all printed and recorded works, characterizing this kind of cooperation as "synergy" (39).

[10] Beginning in 1997 and up until 2013, *BarnesandNoble.com* allowed King's fans the space and the freedom to creatively and critically discuss plot and character creation as well as comment on the author's writing and

role of popular authors as celebrities through marketing policies in an effort to reinforce the market. As Joe Moran puts it*,* "[i]f celebrity authors hardly rival their counterparts in film, television and popular music for column inches, they are still a significant cultural phenomenon, one well worth examining critically" (1). Critical attention not only to the literary work but also to the writer's authorial persona and to what each represents adds incremental value to both. Understandably, the marketability of the image of popular writers ensures the marketability of their products and the sustenance of the market. At the same time, Hollywood companies enjoy the profits coming from new markets, created via the adaptations of book titles into filmic productions and, recently, into new media artifacts. As soon as existing markets are exhausted, the opening up of niche markets follows. New cultural products (such as graphic novels and videogames) are coming into existence, making sure that constant consumer demand follows constant production. Moran claims that,

> [t]he encroachment of market values on to literary production, while clearly having a major impact on literary celebrity, has not occurred in a vacuum—it forms part of a complicated process in which various legitimating bodies compete for cultural authority and/or commercial success, and regulate the formation of a literary star system and the shifting hierarchy of stars. (3–4)

Due to the pressures exercised by the entertainment industry, writers who wish to affect literary production have to secure their position within the industry and, at the same time, pave their way through compromise and redefinition.[11]

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marketing policies; since then this webpage has permanently been out of operation.

[11] As regards film and TV productions, J. T. Caldwell analyzes policies, such as "network meddling" (198) and "'house' mode production" (199), in order to show how big film production constraints affect the directors' work and film choices. Despite dealing with a distinct market, the commentary Caldwell's study provides offers an insight into the workings of the entertainment industry and its liaise with the cultural scene.

In the introduction to her book, *No Logo* (2000), Melanie Klein explains that company mergers have turned business conglomerates to totally new directions, as some of the most successful corporations worldwide systematically give the production part of their business over to contractors and temporary associates for the creation of novel marketing ideas (xvii). As Klein demonstrates, the concept for a product precedes the actual product; it even replaces it as the product itself is not important any more. Similar practices determine policies chosen by the book and the entertainment industries as they try to create new production opportunities, which will accommodate new ideas and writing formats in shrinking markets. After the book industry reached out to other markets (such as those of film and videogames), it also turned to the flexible spatiality of the World Wide Web. The web provides the necessary room for the transmedia storytelling potential to grow. This new electronic space is explored not as virtual (as a parallel cybernetic universe people imagined once) but as an *actual* space available for production, distribution, participation and creative expression. In this respect, I examine the World Wide Web and the new media platforms as both the vehicles for new content to be released and the space for new relationships to be forged. In the light of the above, I explore, within the context of the current book, the new creative writing directions that King chooses to take.

Initially, I concentrate on examples of King's popular fiction writing, produced in the first decade of the twenty-first century in print. Taking into consideration the galloping technological developments, after the introduction of the World Wide Web, I choose to explore the new and innovative mediums of digital enunciation and distribution. After tracing King's departure from traditional writing forms and textualities, I turn to the digital environments of the personal computer and other electronic reading devices. I study the reconfiguration of King's popular novels and sequels into electronic books, electronic gaming experiences and online projects, adjusted to the hypertextual structure of the writer's website. By creating links with the past and points of departure for the future, this study will, eventually, help readers appreciate the emergence, development and gradual maturing of digital media,

which have already been directing developments in the literary world for three decades.

Through an incessantly mutating and evolving writing process, King manages to reinvent his writing techniques every time and secure his popularity. *Stephen King in the New Millennium: Gothic Mediations on New Writing Materialities* focuses on the ways he readjusts narrative conventions and traditional literary genres and takes advantage of all the means currently available, for both the production of printed novels and the creation of fictional worlds in electronic environments. More precisely, it looks into the ways King recruits print, visual and digital media as the means through which he constructs his fictional world and brings it to life. This investigation aims at pointing out the means through which King takes advantage of the mass media and the hyper-mediated technological applications available nowadays in order to reinvent his writing techniques and keep his insatiable reading public satisfied, perpetuating thus his popularity.

King's own account on what makes a good fiction writer, in his book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000), is one of the primary springboards for this investigation. Its confessional style, combining autobiographical elements with simple literary theory, elaborates on the dos and don'ts of contemporary fiction writing. Through a combination of a belief in a mystical source of inspiration and a puritan ethos of hard work and self-discipline, King wishes to instruct as well as inspire modern readers and future writers. As he admits, "good story ideas seem to come quite literally from nowhere, sailing at you right out of the empty sky: two previously unrelated ideas come together to make something new under the sun. Your job isn't to find these ideas but to recognize them when they show up" (25). However, within the scope of this book, such a romanticized notion of fiction writing, springing from an unknown well of imagination, has proven insufficient to explain the writer's phenomenal success and the complicated processes involved in recent cultural production. Rather, I argue that it marks the end of an era when the writing of qualitative – as well as sellable – fiction constituted the main criterion for considering somebody to be a successful writer. Research into King's selected print writings, coming from the first

decade in the twenty-first century, as well as his gradual shift towards the electronic medium, will allow me to trace the writer's recent developments in his writing career. By following King's recent omnipresence in electronic media, my investigation will reveal the ways in which his literary writing and prolific creativity intersect with the latest technological advances. These are orchestrated by the advertising mechanisms of the American publishing industry, which hopes to boost sales and solicit readers' responses.

For the study of King's new media configurations, I depend on David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of the process of remediation, meaning the representation of old and new media in one another, as explained in their study, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). I employ their concept of remediation as the theoretical basis to explain the transformative processes that bring together language, code, media and texts in the new digital era. Bolter and Grusin propose that the "double logic of *remediation*," in other words, the Western culture's need to "multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation" (3, italics in original), manages to account for the complex processes of redefinition that writing technologies as well as 'old' and new media have been undergoing, as a result of the digitization of the information unit through the two opposing forces of "immediacy" (5) and "hypermediacy" (6). The concept of remediation will help me explain the more general redefinition of reading and writing processes and account for the roles that both writers and readers have to assume as creators and consumers. Yet, because of its limitations, the theory of remediation cannot explain why the processes involved tend to maintain existing hierarchies and reduce new media formations to a mere re-articulation of former expressions. Therefore, there is a need for a more complete theory of the aesthetics and the politics of digital formations on electronic spaces.

Hayles, in her book *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (2005), employs the concept of "intermediation" (7) in order to include the more complex processes of human agents, correlating with digital coding and texts, as they emerge in computational and literary processes. Finally, Lev Manovich's milestone, *The Language of New Media* (2002), which studies the

characteristics of new media within the history of visual media in the last two centuries, served as another stepping stone for this project. These recent and invaluable theoretical contributions are essential for the creation of a new poetics that will allow contemporary media users to appreciate visual digital culture for what it really *is*. I employ them in order to explain the inevitable merging of new and old conventions, disseminated through new and old media technologies; they contribute to a fruitful reappreciation of new media emanations in tandem with the new roles of the participating authors and readers.

In this project, I also touch upon the formation of the concept of authorship in today's popular culture and the way authorship functions in King's works. Refusing to adopt a nostalgic outlook on authors as cultural icons, I direct interest to new types of collaborative authorship, examined as "new relationships between producers and consumers, and new distribution models, thus acting as a (sic) the avant-garde of the culture industry" (Manovich, "Who Is the Author? Sampling/Remixing/Open Source" 1). Though more popular than ever before, King is captured standing further away from his products, while new relationships, hierarchies and balances are formed among the participants in the communicative process of reading and producing a text. His fans, faced with constantly new instances of literary and cultural production, have to redefine their roles and relationships. They have to adjust to the literary text's constant redefinition and to rethink the function of literary writing and reading. Therefore, by examining the cultural, literary and technological parameters that have helped formulate my theory of King's artistic creation and production, I hope to explain recent trends and developments in popular cultural production.

Taking the literary tradition as a metaphorical space surrounding the writer, I regard King as a modern literary cartographer, a "pattern maker" to borrow Janet Murray's term ("Inventing the Medium" 11). I see him as a writer who moves around, creating new maps or links with the literary scene. If we accept that contemporary authors, in general, and King, in particular, are themselves the creation of Western consumer society, we must naturally ask who is doing the writing. Established literary theories,