DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

FIELD EXAMINATION

MULTIMEDIA

May 2010

This exam covers the reading list for Multimedia Design and Critique as well as a supplementary list composed by the candidate in consultation with the chair of the examining committee.

The exam consists of three sections. Candidates must answer one question from each section. Sections A and B include three possible questions; Section C, two.

Part A: Theory (35%)

Part B: Critique and Design (35%)

Part C: Redesign Practicum (30%)

Part C is based on the four multimodal digital object texts the committee approved in consultation with the candidate. These texts include at least *four* of the following multimodal categories: text, images (multiple), animation, video, sound, and haptics. The committee has composed two redesign questions about one or more of these texts. The student must answer one of these questions.

Part A: Theory

Answer **one** of the following.

1. "The computer's reactions are not random, but by design," anthropologist Lucy Suchman writes [her text is not on your reading lists], leading her to see "the character of the computer as purposeful, and, by association, as a social object." Discuss Suchman's remark in the context of any theories of technology you find relevant, referring to at least THREE texts drawn from both the core Theory list and your supplementary list (i.e., including at least one text from each).

2. In *Half-Real: Video Games between Real Rules and Fictional Worlds,* Jesper Juul distinguishes between two fundamental game structures: *emergence* ("a number of simple rules combining to form interesting variations") and *progression* ("separate challenges presented serially"). Drawing on at least three texts selected from both the core Theory list and your supplementary list (i.e., including at least one text from each), support or refute the value of Juul's distinction in reference to two or more games you have experienced.

3. In *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin, eds.), Henry Lowood and Matthew Kirschenbaum discuss the game replay or after-action report – videos of video game sessions in Lowood's case, write-ups of boardgame sessions in Kirschenbaum's – as instances of players of games creating narratives of the games as determined by the unfolding of the game as played. Drawing on at least THREE texts selected from both the core Theory list and your supplementary list (i.e., including at least one text from each), explicate the appeal or purpose of these meta-narratives in gaming.

Part B: Critique and Design

Answer **one** of the following.

1. Drawing on theories of information design from THREE texts selected from both the Critique and Design list and your supplementary list (i.e., including at least one text from each), discuss the design, structure, and content of the interface for any digital game of your choice (it need not be on your list of object texts).

2. Develop a rationale for the use of videogame cutscenes (video sequences over which players have no control), situating your discussion within the literature surrounding the topic of interactivity within games. Refer to at least THREE texts drawn from both the Critique and Design list and/or your supplemental list (i.e., including at least one text from each) in your answer.

3. Using <u>THREE</u> works from both the Critique and Design list and your supplementary list (i.e., including at least one text from each), discuss the possible relationships between social media and gameplay.

Part C: Redesign

Answer **one** of the following.

1. You've been contracted to reconfigure the interface and game design for *Facebook: Mafia Wars* to support the site's social media aspects in a manner that immediately forces players to work together with their Facebook friends in order to progress through the game's early stages. Suggest one design that addresses experienced Facebook users who do not have extensive gaming experience, and a second for experienced gamers who do not have extensive social media experience.

2. From the time of its release, reviews of BioWare's *Mass Effect* praised its dialogue system, especially in conjunction with the presentation of non-player characters as more realistic than in most games. But as with all dialogue systems in videogames, the effect of dialogue choices on the actual gameplay was seen by some reviewers as often negligible. Suggest improvements for the dialogue interface and corresponding game effects in *Mass Effect*, referring if you wish (but not necessarily) to enhancements found in *Mass Effect 2*.