ENGL 408C: The Rhetoric of Digital Design: Theory & Practice

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Office hours: Wednesdays 4 – 5pm, Critical Media Lab + Thursdays 2 – 3pm, HH 367
Class location and hours: ECH 1205, 6:30 – 9:20

“As an interactive narrative (which can also be called a hypernarrative in an analogy with hypertext) can … be understood as the sum of multiple trajectories through a database. A traditional linear narrative is one among many other possible trajectories, that is, a particular choice made within a hypernarrative. Just as a traditional cultural object can now be seen as a particular case of a new media object (i.e., a new media object that has only one interface), traditional linear narrative can be seen as a particular case of hypernarrative” (227).

- Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media (2001)

Course Description:
As the topic of digital design can include training in coding, database construction, UX, GUI, game design, graphic design, and a multitude of other topics, in this class, we will focus on methods of digital storytelling. Digital narratives are affected, shaped, represented, and supported by digital media, textuality, and aesthetics. Students in this course are offered a multifaceted approach to digital narrative, learning about electronic (or “born-digital”) literature, emerging narrative genres in online culture, and specific coding and software programs that enable these literature and narratives. As such, the course will be go back and forth between theory and practice.

In our discussion of theories of digital storytelling, students will be introduced to the development of critical ideas and concepts of digital narrative, including interactivity, multilinearity, and the re-conceptualization of the literary reader as a media “user.” Particular attention will be paid to the reader’s agency to shape the development of digital narratives through exploration and choice, taking into consideration textual, spatial, and subjective representations.

The practice element of our class will transform the course into a workshop in order to apply theoretical ideas of digital narrative to practice. Students will be taught how to use the digital authoring program Twine 2.0 (Harlowe format), the locative narrative app ARIS, and the light game engine Bitsy, and will analyze select digital narratives created through these programs. Afterwards, students will focus on their individual digital narrative projects, which they will develop in class and which they will workshop with fellow students and the instructor.

Learning Goals:
The learning objective of this course is twofold: first, to equip students with the theoretical background and knowledge of digital storytelling as a concept and cultural text; second, to train students in three popular digital storytelling programs such that they can see theory in application and create their own digital projects.
**Attendance and Participation:**
To make the most out of this course, students are expected to attend and participate in each class, outside of extenuating circumstances. As half of this course involves learning the authoring programs that you will use for your project and engaging in workshops to create these projects, it is crucial to attend class. Failure to do so will result in incomplete projects, affecting the final grade heavily.

**Method of Evaluation:**
- Participation 20%
- Mini-projects (collaborative or solo) 30% (15% each)
- Major project 35%
- Final presentation or consultation (TBA) 15%

**Links to Tools**
- ARIS: [https://fielddaylab.org/make/aris/](https://fielddaylab.org/make/aris/)
- Bitsy: [https://ledoux.itch.io/bitsy](https://ledoux.itch.io/bitsy)

**2 Mini-Projects**
Each student will submit two mini-projects, due throughout the term. For both, you have the option of collaborating with one other person or working on your own. For each project, please write a 3-page (double spaced) critical discussion explaining the story, design rationale, and developments of your assignment.

Format: Times New Roman, 12 point, double spaced, 1-inch margins.

**a) Twine digital story**
Twine is a great way to combine creative writing with powerful digital tools. For this assignment, choose a molecule (based on the class exercises, for instance) and/or a fictional genre (comedy, horror, drama, etc.) and write a story on Twine with light code that can enhance the storytelling experience. For example, if you are writing in the genre of horror, a good way to adapt the creepy atmosphere of horror stories and movies is to set your text to appear in a certain rhythm (think of footsteps walking towards you or the accelerating pace of the bass in the movie *Jaws*). If you would prefer to write about something else, please run your idea by me first.

**b) ARIS mobile story**
ARIS is a straightforward tool that lets you connect digital storytelling to the GPS on your mobile device. For this assignment, let the space around you be the inspiration for a story: connect your narrative text, media, and other fragments with specific spaces that someone could go visit. Maybe you’ll choose the University of Waterloo campus? Maybe you will choose downtown Kitchener? Maybe you will pick to have someone go on a shopping tour in a mall?

**Major Project**
The major project must be done on your own. Take one of your mini-projects and expand it to a larger capstone project, which you will work on in class as a workshop, and which will be
peer-reviewed by your classmates. If you and your mini-project partner are doing the same project, make sure you agree to take it in two different directions. There is no writing component to this project; instead, students will either present their work to the class OR meet with me one-on-one for a final consultation and walk-through of the project (this is up for discussion). You are free to start new projects from scratch if you didn’t like your original mini-projects; you are also free to speak to me about ideas for the project.

Note: When offering peer-review to your classmates, please only offer constructive (that is: helpful, goal-oriented) feedback. Instead of saying x or y is not working, suggest some ideas about what could be done differently or in addition. Do not be rude.

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Schedule

**Week 1 // INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS DIGITAL STORYTELLING? (Sept 5)**
- class discussion and introduction to tools

**Week 2 // EARLY ELECTRONIC LITERATURE (Sept 12)**
- J. Yellowlees Douglas – “The Book is Dead/Long Live the Book!”
- examples: *These Waves of Girls*, 253

**Week 3 // ELECTRONIC LITERATURE & FEMINIST THEORY (Sept 19)**
- N. Katherine Hayles – “Electronic Literature: What is it?”
  > [https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html](https://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html)
- print examples: *House of Leaves*, *Raw Shark Texts*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*
- e-lit examples: *Fitting the Pattern*, *Shoal of Mermaids*, *Separation*, *Cyborg Goddess*

**Week 4 // TWINE I (Sept 26)**
- Anastasia Salter – “Building Interactive Narratives”
- class exercises: campus map, molecule story

**Week 5 // TWINE II (Oct 3)**
- class exercises: genre story, continue molecule story

**Week 6 // TWINE III/START ARIS (Oct 10)**
- class exercises: continue genre and molecule stories; offer peer-review
- setting up ARIS
- uploading your stories/games onto itch.io

**Week 7 // ARIS I (Twine assignment due) (Oct 24)**
- Adriana de Souza e Silva & Jordan Firth – “Re-Narrating the City through the Presentation of Location”
- class exercises: setting up ARIS, choosing objects/locations

**Week 8 // ARIS II (Oct 31)**
- class exercises: continue ARIS stories; offer peer-review
Week 9 // BITSY (& other light, light engines) (ARIS assignment due) (Nov 7)
- class exercises: start a Bitsy game in 1 hour!

Week 10 // MAKE YOUR OWN WEBSITE (Nov 14)

Week 11 // FINAL ASSIGNMENT WORKSHOP + PEER REVIEW (Nov 21)

Week 12 // PRESENTATIONS or CONSULTATIONS (Major project due) (Nov 28)

Further Texts of Interest (note that URLs sometimes change)
Short, Emily. *Floatpoint*. <http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=01efmfsk4r79mtks>