Syllabus LMC 6317  
Interactive Narrative  (Fiction and Non-fiction) Spring 2015  
Thursday 4:30-6:30  
TSRB 322

Professor Janet H. Murray
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Office Hours Monday 4-6 PM TSRB 320A

Course Description
The larger objective of this course is to contribute to the expansion of human expressive powers by creating and critiquing artifacts that exploit the affordances of the emerging digital medium for the purposes of the ancient human practice of storytelling. Stories are a foundational structure of human cognition and human culture, and a new medium for storytelling offers new possibilities for understanding the world and our relationships to one another. To explore interactive narrative is therefore one way of exploring the boundaries of human understanding and cultural change.

This course focuses on in-depth discussion of two kinds of works: interactive narratives in a wide range of digital and legacy formats, and theoretical works that offer a critical vocabulary for understanding actual and potential traditions of practice. The course will be conducted as a graduate seminar with formal seminar reports and weekly journal responses (which can be in the form of rapid prototypes). Students will also create one major final project that will combine a formal design document with the creation of a theoretically-grounded prototype.

Programmatic Learning Outcomes

• Demonstrate knowledge, comprehension, and application of the tools and formal design elements of digital media design.
• Demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate existing digital media artifacts, services, and environments using formal knowledge, and to explain and defend one’s critical evaluation.
• Demonstrate the ability to devise, design, create, and assess prototypical digital media artifacts, services, or environments and to contextualize them within recognized traditions of practice.

Requirements and Grading
This is a graduate seminar course that provides a scholarly in-depth look at key artifacts and critical texts in interactive narrative design, and that explores the connections between theories of narrative and innovative design.

• 30% Formal Seminar Reports
• 30% Weekly journal posts/rapid protypes)
• 20% Final project theoretically-informed design documentation, including paper, poster, video, and oral presentation
• 20% Final project working prototype of an original interactive narrative

Required Texts

http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html  Sections IV-XIX, XXIII, XXIV


Evans, R. and E. Short (2013). “Versu—A Simulationist Storytelling System.” *IEEE Transactions on Computational Intelligence and AI in Games* (available on tsquare)

The Fulbright Company, *Gone Home* (2013). PC or Mac game: purchase for download or play in EGL.


Mateas, M. and A. Stern, “*Façade: An Experiment in Building a Fully-Realized Interactive Drama,*” in *Game Developers Conference 2003:* San Jose CA.

Mateas’s group’s Prom Week site: http://promweek.soec.unc.edu/


*Snow Fall.* (New York Times 2013)


Tell-Tale Games (2014), *Game of Thrones: Fire from Ice.* iOS game.


**Additional Story-Games**

Kan "Reives" Gao, *To the Moon.* Freebird Games. 2011
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_the_Moon
http://freebirdgames.com
Recommended / Supplementary Texts


Assignments

Weekly: a one-page response to texts. Write one paragraph on the assigned digital artifact, one on the assigned critical text, and one on the relationship between them (300 words maximum). If multiple texts or artifacts are assigned, choose one of each to write about.

Seminar Report: an oral/slide presentation (15 minutes, ~10 slides). Prepare a comprehensive oral/slide presentation on either an artifact or a reading assigned for this week. Your report should summarize the key aspects of the artifact/reading that advance our understanding of interactive narrative. You may also present similar texts or artifacts to clarify your points as appropriate. Your presentation should include discussion questions and you should be prepared to lead the class discussion as well as to offer your own insight.

We will assign the whole semester’s reports by the end of the 2nd week so please think about what you want to focus on, and feel free to propose alternate texts or artifacts that you will take responsibility for presenting.

Final Projects: Working interactive digital narrative, design document, demo video. An original interactive narrative, in digital form, using a platform and delivery environment of your choice. The project should be a complete working prototype that is playable and that supports replay of the same scenario with different experience. It should produce a sense of dramatic agency in the interactor.

Design Document for your Final Project:
1. Executive Summary (paragraph)
2. The theoretical question your project addresses: Who has raised it before and how have they framed it? What is at stake? What will you address? (2-4 pages)
3. The tradition of practice your project draws on: What other artifacts are like the ones you are making? What strategies have they used to create satisfying experiences? How is yours similar or different? Make clear how the tradition of practice is related to the critical question motivating your project. (2 or more pages, with illustrations as appropriate)
4. Evaluation criteria? What are your aesthetics and how will you know whether you have created a successful artifact? (1-2 pages)
5. Screen shots, flow chart (as needed)
6. Brief preliminary evaluation and future plans (1-2 pages)
7. A VIDEO that documents the project with screen captures. It should briefly and persuasively explain the theoretical rationale, and show multiple run-throughs of the final project, demonstrating the value of interaction, and the aesthetic objectives. (1.5-3 minutes)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intro Thursday Jan 8</td>
<td>Eliza, Zork</td>
<td>Aarseth (excerpts on site) Murray, HoH, ch 3-6</td>
<td>Montfort Weizenbaum Leibling et al on Zork</td>
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| Week 2 | Formalisms for story variation Thursday Jan 15 | Myst OR Journey, OR an open world RockStar game | Propp | Murray chapter on Plot Lebowitz articles on Universe system Joseph Campbell |

| Week 3 | Structuring story with dramatic beats Thursday Jan 22 | Façade | Aristotle Laurel, Mateas | Joe Bates Harrell Riedl |

| Week 4 | Discourse and Plot Thursday Jan 29 | Gone Home To the Moon The Stanley Parable (play Gone Home and one of the other two) | Chatman Ryan | Bal Todorov Prince |

| Week 5 | Refining Story Abstraction Thursday Feb 5 | The Sims | Herman |

| Week 6 | Story/Game Thursday 2/12 | Detective or adventure game or other story/game of your choosing, e.g. Phoenix Wright ... | Juul Crawford | Fernandez-Vara |

| Week 7 | Simulation Thursday 2/19 | Any Emily Short Vertu story Prom Week | Richard Evans and Emily Short on Vertu system McCoy, Mateas, et al on Prom Week | Emily Short blog |

| Week 8 | Interactive Narrative Project Formulation Thursday 2/26 | Present your Seminar Project concept in 5 slides: Tradition of Practice / Inspiration Theoretical Context Title; Genre; Platform; rough plot summary; principle characters Will interactor want to replay it? If so, why? If not, is that a problem? How will you provide the experience of dramatic agency? |

| Week 9 | Story Worlds Thursday 3/5 | Tell-Tale Games, Game of Thrones: Fire from Ice | Jenkins Ryan (Story Worlds across media excerpts) |

| Week 10 | Actualities made interactive Thursday 3/12 | Snow Fall; World without Oil, Bogost Fatworld Papers Please Daniel B. games (Play 2 in depth) | McGonigal | Bogost, et al Newsgames |

| Spring Break | | | Spring Break |

| Week 11 | Seminar Project Thursday 3/26 | Due: formal Seminar Project proposal (with theoretical foundation and traditions of practice your work speaks to) |

| Week 12 | (no class 4/2) Seminar Project Conferences | Meet with JHM individually with expanded pre-proposal including wireframes and flow chart of your project |

<p>| Week 13 | Seminar Project Mockup Testing Thursday 4/9 | Create a partial playable mockup of your final project and test one another's projects |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week 14 Seminar Project Lab Week (no class 4/16)</th>
<th>Lab Week - open time to work on your projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 15 Thursday 4/23</td>
<td>Final poster, and live demo of your project, with very close to final design doc and running code</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finals Week</td>
<td>Absolute final code, design doc, poster, and video due by noon Monday 4/27</td>
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