

Interactive Fiction/Narrative

LCC 6317/4720 | Fall 2009 | Harrell

Instructor: Professor Fox Harrell
Office: Skiles 16
Office Hours: Wednesday, 1:10 – 2:00 p.m. (or by appt.)
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Course Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 12:05 – 12:55 p.m., Skiles 317

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the theory, design, and implementation of narratives in which user interaction and/or computational generation are intrinsic to their expression and production. Toward this end we explore narrative within a variety of theoretical frameworks including cognitive linguistics, literary theory, semiotics, digital arts, and computer science. We examine interactive and generative narrative artifacts ranging from experimental literature to role-playing and computer gaming. We shall envision and create new narrative forms with a strong understanding of their historical antecedents and theoretical grounding. There will be a focus on developing the expressive potential of new narrative forms.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course should facilitate development of the following skills:

- Design of interactive narrative digital media artifacts
- Analysis of interactive narrative media artifacts from a cross-medial perspective
- Analysis of artifacts across media in which generativity and variable form are used as narrative mechanisms
- Use the theories and works presented in this course to frame and support discussions narrative media

Put another way, you should be able to “create” and “think about” design of narrative technologies in a more skilled, knowledgeable and critical manner that takes social contexts and identities into account. This should further your capabilities as both digital media producers and scholars.

GRADING & COURSE WORK

Assignments:

- **Two Projects (including write-ups or essays as specified):**
More specific details on the projects will be posted when the projects are assigned.
- **Presentations:**

On Fridays students will present *interactive narrative works of their choice* in light of the week's readings. Two students will present individually on each Friday. Each student should be prepared for discussion to last approximately 20 minutes.

For presentations, students must submit to me via email a 1-2 page summary of the readings and set of questions/activities for class discussion by 5:00 p.m. on the Monday preceding the presentation. I will respond to the summary and questions to approve or suggest changes. Submit your final presentation material to T-Square under the assignment for student presentations.

Each student will present on examples of interactive narrative of her/his choice. It is not enough to merely bring in an example, there must be clear evidence of analysis and a set of focused questions and/or activities for the class to engage. The presentation should draw upon the relevant theory in the course (aligned with the weekly reading if possible) and the presenters unique background and experience.

- **Five Exercises:**

There will be five exercises to further explore course concepts.

- **Participation:**

This course features a lot of reading. ***Readings for the week must be completed by Monday.*** If you do not complete the readings it will be obvious – your contribution is necessary to make the course successful for everyone. Reading quizzes may be added to the syllabus if necessary. There are multiple means of participation ranging from in-class discussion to behind the scenes support (e.g. development of a class wiki).

Assessment:

Assessment will be based on performance on 2 projects, several presentations, five exercises, and participation.

Assessment breakdown:

Presentations participation: 15%

Exercises: 35%

Projects: 50%

Each project grade breaks down as follows:

10% prototype

10% project itself

5% write-up/essay

General expectations for production assignments include:

- Development and articulation of a clear authorial goal
- An articulated relationship between the generativity of your system and the meaning of your output
- Clear articulation of the expressive goal of your work (akin to an "artist's statement")
- You should communicate something that is important to you

- Clear articulation of the relationship between the meaning of the output of your system and user interaction
- Note: This does not mean that you need a design goal in the sense of HCI (though you may have one), this means that you need an expressive or experimental goal

Project Evaluation Criteria:

1. Extending the coherence and expressivity of the digital medium: Does this project belong to and extend a tradition of practice? Does it originate a new genre or subgenre? Does it establish and extend conventions of participation?
2. Integrating the interactive and immersive elements with story elements: Could this story only be told in this medium? How important, moving, effective, original, witty a story does it tell?
3. Utilizing the affordances of the digital medium: Does this project utilize the participatory, procedural, encyclopedic, and spatial affordances of the digital medium? How well does this project signal its boundaries to the user/reader? Is the navigation coherent? Does it offer the experience of dramatic agency? How well segmented are the story elements? Are they well juxtaposed on replay? Are the landmarks clear? Are the parameters dramatically significant?

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION

Class attendance and participation is mandatory. Participation in class discussion is imperative because it allows you to explore the texts and themes collaboratively, and in the process, discover meanings and issues that you probably would not discover on your own. Participation in class also challenges you to continuously question, refine and articulate your own ideas and interpretations.

In addition, much of this class is based on critiques, which require full participation and cannot be replicated outside of class. Critiques are a central aspect of a studio culture. Extensive teaching and learning occur through critiques: it is through critiques that you will develop your skills for both creating and discussing designs.

Missing more than three classes (unexcused) will result in a loss of one letter grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet H. Murray (Free Press, 1997).
- *The Literary Mind*, Mark Turner (Oxford, 1998).
- *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud (HarperPerennial, 1994)
- LCC 6317 Assigned Readings. The reading will be handed out piece by piece electronically (typically via T-Square).

Recommended

- *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Espen J. Aarseth (Johns Hopkins, 1997).
 - *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff (Chicago, 1995)
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For Further Interest

- Narrative Intelligence, edited by Michael Mateas and Phoebe Sengers (Benjamins, 2003).
- Computation and Human Experience, Philip Agre (Cambridge, 1997).
- Understanding Computers and Cognition, Terry Winograd and Fernando Flores (Addison-Wesley, 1986).
- Remediation: Understanding New Media, David Bolter and Richard Grusin (MIT, 2000).
- The Language of New Media, Lev Manovich (MIT, 2001).
- Life Stories, Charlotte Linde (Oxford, 1993).
- Sociolinguistic Patterns, William Labov (Pennsylvania, 1972).
- Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences, David Herman ed. (CSLI, 2003)
- Dictionary of Narratology, Gerald Prince (Nebraska, 2003)
- More than Cool Reason, George Lakoff and Mark Turner (Chicago, 1989).
- The Uses of Literature, Italo Calvino (Harcourt Brace, 1986).
- Mythologies, Roland Barthes (Noonday, 1973).
- Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand, Samuel R. Delany (Bantam, 1985).
- Hotline Healers: An Almost Browne Novel, Gerald Vizenor (Weslyan, 1995).
- afternoon, a story, Michael Joyce (Eastgate Systems, 1987).
- Snow Crash, Neal Stephenson (Bantam, 2000).
- Nova Express, William S. Burroughs (Granada, 1966).
- Rules of Play, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (MIT, 2004).
- The Game Design Reader, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, eds., (MIT, 2006).
- Unit Structures, Ian Bogost (MIT, 2006).
- Half-Real, Jesper Juul (MIT, 2005).

We will not use recommended books much in class, but some of you might want use them to go deeper into the material of this seminar.

Other Resources

- [Eastgate Systems](#), a supplier of hypertexts and hypertext technology.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Weekly mandatory reading assignments are available via T-Square or can be found in the required textbook

In general, we will have students present and facilitate discussion on theoretical readings on Fridays. We shall frequently have critiques or student facilitated discussion of media artifacts on Wednesdays. Sign up for discussion slots is to be done on the wiki section of the course T-Square page. Required readings are to be completed before class each Monday.

What follows is an outline for the course. As the course progresses, additional specific readings and media artifacts for analysis will be posted to T-Square. Additional exercises/papers will be announced as the course progresses and added to the syllabus as we progress. Hence, make sure to always have an up to date syllabus (announcement will be posted on T-Square when it is updated).

Unit 0: Expansive possibilities of narrative

Week 1: August 17, 19, 21

Introduction to Course Topics and Philosophy

Readings (read by Friday this week only):

-*The Literary Mind*, p. 3-9

-*Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Chapters 1 and 2, p. 13 - 64

-*Toward Phantasmal Media*, Harrell

Unit 1: Understanding Narrative /Analytic Methods

Week 2: August 24, 26, 28 (guest lecturers 24th, 26th, no class 28th)

Narrative is fundamental to human thought and imagination.

Readings:

The Literary Mind, Chapters 2-5, Turner, p. 12-84

-Media: Rashomon

-*Metaphors We Live By*, Chapters 1-9, p. 3-45 (optional to make up for missed class)

Week 3: August 31, September 2, 4

Narrative Thought, Text and Image

Readings:

-(reread/reskim) *The Literary Mind*, Chapters 2-5, Turner, p. 12-84

-*Understanding Comics*, Chapter 2, 5, 6

-Double Scope Stories, Mark Turner in *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*, p. 117-142

-Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies* (optional - if unfamiliar with semiotics)

Week 4: September 9, 11 (7th holiday)

Structuralist Approaches; Cybertext

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Readings:

-excerpt from Propp (pdf)

-Greimas, "Narrative Grammar " (pdf)

-Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext*, chapter 1

Unit 2: Narrative Affordances of the Digital Medium/New Genres

Week 5: September 14, 16, 18

Characteristics of Digital/New Media

Readings:

-*Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Chapters 3, p. 65-94

-*Language of New Media*, from Chapter 1, p. 27-55

-Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext*, Chapter 3, p.58-75

Week 6: September 21, 23, 25 (23rd instructor away)

Characteristics and Affordances

Readings:

-"Speaking in Djinni," <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=388>

-"Benchmark Fiction," Christy Deana, Jeremy Douglass, Mark Marino

- Michael Mateas, "Interaction and Narrative," *The Game Design Reader*, p. 643-669

Week 7: September 28, 30, October 2

Characteristics of Narrative Games

Readings:

-Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," *The Game Design Reader*, p. 670-698

- Play [Zork I](#) for 2 hours and play another IF such as Nick Montfort's [Book and Volume](#)
- Explore two of the following hypertexts (cybertexts) ([Grammatron](#) , [Arteroids](#) , [Nine, From Lexia to Perplexia](#) , [Clues](#)).
- Read Adam Cadre's [introduction to interacting with IF](#) (optional - if you'd like some pointers on how to have a successful interaction with IF)
- Jesper Juul, Half-Real, Chapter 4, p.121-162 (optional)

Unit 3: Agency, Embodiment, Identity in Interactive Narratives

Week 8: October 7, 9 (5th Fall recess)

Embodiment and Agency

Readings:

- Simon Penny, "Representation, Enaction, and the Ethics of Simulation," *First Person*, p 73-75
- Joe Bates, "Virtual Reality, Art, and Entertainment"

Week 9: October 12, 14, 16 (16th instructor away)

Embodiment and HCI Approaches; Narrative Identity

Readings:

- Paul Dourish, "Embodied Interaction: Exploring the Foundations of a New Approach to HCI
- Blair McIntyre and Jay Bolter, "Single-narrative, multiple point-of-view dramatic experiences in augmented reality"
- Mark Gover, "The Narrative Emergence of Identity"

Week 10: October 19, 21, 23

Identity Experiences and Narrative; Social Narrative/Collaboration

Readings:

- Justin Cassell, "Genderizing HCI"
- Jack Muramatsu, Mark S. Ackerman "Computing, Social Activity, and Entertainment: A Field Study of a Game MUD"
- Janet Murray, Hamlet on the Holodeck, Chapter 9 (focus on issues of collaborative storytelling)

Unit 4: Deep Culture, Deep Computation (Diverse cultural narrative, AI)

Week 11: October 26, 28, 30 (28th, 30th instructor away)

AI and Narrative, Characters

Readings:

- Domike, Mateas, Vanouse, "The Recombinant History Apparatus Presents: Terminal Time"
- Mateas, "Expressive AI"
- play Facade and another character driven game of your choice (e.g Bully or Escape From Monkey Island. Be prepared to discuss issues AI characters vs. pre-scripted characters.

Week 12: November 2, 4, 6

Critique of AI; Cultural Readings and Systems in Light of the Critique of AI

Readings:

- Agre, ["The Soul Gained and Lost: Artificial Intelligence as a Philosophical Project"](#)
- Harrell, ["Algebra of Identity"](#)

Week 13: November 9, 11, 13

Cross-Cultural Narrative and AI

Readings:

-Rafael Perez y Perez and Mike Sharples, ["Three Computer-Based Models of Creativity: BRUTUS, MINSTREL and MEXICA."](#)

-Vizenor, ["Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games"](#)

-Vizenor, *Hotline Healers*, Gerald Vizenor, pages 4-5

Week 14: November 16, 18, 20 (16th instructor away)

Cultural Production and Computational Narrative Systems

Readings:

-Penny, ["Agents as Artworks: and Agent Design as Artistic Practice"](#)

Unit 5 End Game (Final Projects and Special Topics)

Week 15: November 23, 25 (27th holiday)

Week 16: November 30, December 2, 4

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

How should I contact you?

You can contact me during office hours, or over email. When sending email **be sure to put "6317 or 4720" somewhere in the subject header** so that I can filter your messages. If you have a long question it is best to discuss it during office hours. If you have a course conflict with office hours then send me an email indicating the conflict and we can schedule an individual meeting.

Computer Usage Policy: Computers should only be used during designated in class work sessions. Laptops may be used for note taking, however web surfing will result in a significant penalty to your Participation grade.

Cell Phone Policy: Please turn your cell phones off, cell phones ringing in class will result in penalties to your Participation grade.

Drop Deadline: October 16th

Honor Code and Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarizing is defined by Webster's as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source."
If caught plagiarizing, you will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code.

You are allowed (and encouraged) to discuss all coursework with other students, as long as you develop and present your own design solutions (aside from group projects). You are also allowed (and encouraged) to ask me questions, although you should try to think about the design problems before asking.

Use of any previous semester course materials is allowed for this course; however, I remind you that while they may serve as examples for you, they are not guidelines for any of your own creative design work that may be assigned during the semester.

For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or www.honor.gatech.edu.