DANM 132
Literary Games: The Intersection of Writing and Play
Summer 2012, Session II

Time and Location: Hum & Soc Sci 350, M/W/F 10:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Instructor: Aaron A. Reed (aareed@soe.ucsc.edu)

Office Hours: TBD

Class Website: `http://gamesaslit.textories.com/`

Required Texts: *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Aaron A. Reed. Course Technology PTR, 1st edition, 2010. ISBN 1435455061. $25.00 online, or available at the bookstore.

Required Purchases: *Sleep Is Death* (http://sleepisdeath.net/) — Minimum $2 donation *Fallen London* (formerly *Echo Bazaar*) (http://fallenlondon.com/) — 1 month subscription, $9.95

Overview and Objectives: Digital literature exists at a unique crossroads between two very different media: games, and stories told with words. How can the needs of gameplay be balanced with the sometimes contradictory needs of storytelling? Is a creator of these works an author or a designer? Should interactive stories be beta tested or workshopped? How can one write prose meant to be manipulated by an audience?

This intensive hands-on course, half writing/design workshop and half survey of contemporary work, will explore the many thriving micro-genres in the neutral zone between games and literature, including hypertext stories, parser-based interactive fiction, simulation- and system-based prose, and spatial and collaborative narratives. We will try out as many interactive stories as we can, focusing on accessible work less than ten years old to emphasize the living and still-evolving state of digital literature. We'll also learn several tools for making our own digital fictions, conducting a series of experiments culminating in a final project: a major piece of creative writing in a digital mode. The work we explore and create will help frame our discussions about what these evolving new media say about storytelling in the 21st century.

Be forewarned: this is a five-credit, five-week summer session course, meaning an ambitious agenda and a serious workload. This is not an easy class, but it will be an exciting one. Come with a passion for reading and writing, be prepared to live and breathe electronic literature for five weeks, and I guarantee a fantastic journey.

Readings will mostly be interactive stories available online for free, with the few commercial exceptions noted about in the "Required Texts" section. The focus is on contemporary, text-based work that could not exist on a printed page and that demands participation from the reader.

Requirements include getting a copy of the required text (see above) and attending all class sessions. You'll need to have regular access to a modern computer you can install

custom software on. A laptop and a USB key are highly recommended to facilitate in-class tutorials and turning in assignments; if you have your own web space, that's also useful for turning in work. You should have basic computer skills and be comfortable installing software and navigating the web. No programming experience is required for the course; we'll learn the basics of two different story-making systems, one good for beginners and one better for intermediate to advanced programmers, and you can choose whichever you feel most comfortable with to create your final project.

Additional policies can be found under the "Policies" link on the course home page.

Grading

Class Participation: 20%. A major component of this course will be interaction with and discussion of the works on the syllabus each week. Students are expected to read/play assigned work outside of class and come prepared to share opinions, experiences, and favorite quotes or excerpts. Attendance is mandatory and more than two absences will make passing difficult. Quizzes on reading assignments may be given on occasion.

Weekly Experiments, 30%. You'll create three "experiments," micro-projects designed to get familiar being creative in various interactive storytelling media, each worth 10% of your final grade. We'll have in-class tutorials of tools for making these experiments. Each experiment should be accompanied by a one-paragraph writeup explaining your intentions for the project and any insights or lessons learned from its creation.

Final Project, 30%. During the last week of class, you'll present a final project that tells an interactive short story. The project might incorporate elements of previous weekly experiments or explore in a different direction. You'll have the opportunity to get feedback from classmates and make revisions before turning in the final version. The final submission should be accompanied by a one page artist's statement placing the work in the context of class discussions and readings.

Close Reading, 20%. Each student will be expected to choose one interactive work from the list of related work on the class website, and conduct a close reading of it, at a more in-depth level than for a standard assignment. This might require navigating the work multiple times to gain a fuller perspective, or doing some research into other works by the same author or existing scholarship about the piece. You'll share your results with the class by giving a 10 minute presentation, and submit a 2-page summary and research bibliography citing at least two sources to the instructor.

Course Outline

Each week we'll focus on a different mode of interactive literature, charting a rough trajectory from simpler/older to more complex/newer forms. **Mondays** I'll introduce the week's topic with a brief lecture, and we'll try a representative work together as a class. After the first week, we will also go over students' weekend experiments in a casual demo fair style roundtable. For **Wednesdays** students should come prepared to discuss the two works on the syllabus, having spent enough time with each to have a productive discussion. We'll discuss our experiences with these two works in depth, then have a tutorial introducing a piece of software you can use to create similar work of your own. **Fridays** some students

will give presentations on their close readings, and we'll have a more extended tutorial and workshop to give you a solid grounding for your weekend experiments.

Week One: Hypertext and Forking Paths

Monday, 7/30

- Class Welcome
- Lecture: Hypertext and Forking Paths
- *The (Former) General In His Labyrinth* (2008, Mohsin Hamid; HTML/Javascript)
- <u>Homework for Wed.</u>: Interact with Wednesday pieces (links on class website).

Wednesday, 8/1

- *These Waves of Girls* (2001, Caitlin Fisher; HTML & Audio)
- *Forest* (2006, Jacob Garbe; HTML & Javascript)
- Writing Exercise: Character and Conflict
- Tutorial: Twine
- <u>Homework for Fri</u>: Sign up for a close reading on class website; Install Twine

Friday, 8/3

- Close Reading Presentations
- Workshop: Twine
- <u>Homework for Mon</u>: Weekend Experiment #1: Create a link-based fiction

Week Two: Interactive Fiction

Monday, 8/6

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Interactive Fiction
- *The Warbler's Nest* (2010, Jason McIntosh; Inform 7/Glulx)
- <u>Homework for Wed</u>: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 1-2; Install Inform 7; Interact with Wednesday pieces.

Wednesday, 8/8

- *Hoist Sail for the Heliopause, and Home* (2010, Andrew Plotkin; Inform 7/Z-code)
- *Everybody Dies* (2008, Jim Munroe; Inform 7/Glulx)
- Tutorial: Inform 7
- <u>Homework for Fri</u>: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 3-4 (especially pg. 41-57, 73-85).

Friday, 8/10

- Close Reading presentations

- Screening: *Get Lamp* (clips)
- Workshop: Basic I7 Skills
- <u>Homework for Mon</u>: Weekend Experiment #2: Tell a story using exploration, spaces, and things.

Week Three: Computational & Simulationist Narratives

Monday, 8/13

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Simulation and system-based narratives
- *The Two* and *Through the Park* (2008, Nick Montfort; Python)
- *Alabaster* (2008, Emily Short et al; Glulx)
- *Prom Week* (2012, Josh McCoy, Mike Treanor et al; Flash)
- <u>Homework for Wed</u>: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 5-6; Interact with Wednesday pieces.

Wednesday, 8/15

- *'Mid the Sagebrush and the Cactus* and source code (2010, Victor Gijsbers; Inform 7/Glulx)
- *Balance of Power: 21st Century* (2009, Chris Crawford; StoryTron/Java)
- Tutorial: Inform (Phrases and Processes)
- <u>Homework for Fri</u>: Read *Creating Interactive Fiction with Inform 7*, Chapters 7 and 10; Create a Fallen London profile and begin playing.

Friday, 8/17

- Close Reading presentations
- Mini-lecture: Microfiction
- Workshop: Inform (Actions)
- <u>Homework for Mon</u>: Weekend Experiment #3: Tell a story through simulation or systems.

Week Four: Spatial & Collaborative Texts

Monday, 8/20

- Weekend Experiment Demos
- Lecture: Spatial & Collaborative Fictions
- *From Closed Rooms, Soft Whispers* (2011, Jacob Garbe; Poster, Projection, AR software, PHP)
- <u>Homework for Wed</u>: Interact with Wednesday pieces; one paragraph project proposal.

Wednesday, 8/22

- *Sleep Is Death* (2010, Jason Rohrer; Windows/Mac application)

- *Fallen London* (formerly Echo Bazaar; 2009—present, Failbetter Games; S#arp/HTML/Javascript)
- Workshop: Open project time
- <u>Homework for Fri</u>: Play an ARG (TBD)

Friday, 8/24

- Close Reading presentations
- Discuss: an ARG (TBD)
- Mini-lecture: Avoiding clichè
- Workshop: Open project time

Week Five: The Future of Post-Print Fiction & Final Projects

Monday, 8/27

- Lecture: 2013 and Beyond
- Group: Break into groups first by system then by story theme & discuss final project
- Workshop: Open project time
- <u>Homework for Wed</u>: Beta version of final project

Wednesday, 8/29

- Group: Find a beta parter and test each other's project
- Workshop: Open project time
- Group: Find a different beta partner and test each other's project
- <u>Homework for Fri</u>: Final project & artist's statement

Friday, 8/31

- Final project demos

Saturday, 9/1

- **FINAL VERSION OF PROJECT DUE BY 12:00 NOON!**