

# *HUIN 204: Digital Media and Digital Cultures* *HUIN 303: Digital Media Aesthetics*

**Autumn 2007**

**Wednesday 14:15-16:00, Thursday 12:15-14:00**

**Room: Seminar Room 124, Sydneshaugen skole (except where noted)**

**August 22 and 23<sup>rd</sup> Auditorium A, Sydneshaugen skole**

**Scott Rettberg**

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**Office Hours: Tuesday 13:00-16:00 and by appointment**

**Office: HF 347**

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## **About this course**

This course is a wide-ranging survey of the developing field of digital media, with particular focus on the intersection of technology and literature, on genres of writing developed specifically for the computer and for the network. Readings will include contextualizing historical essays from *The New Media Reader*, hypertext and kinetic poetry on the web, interactive fiction, interactive drama, computer games, and essays from *Second Person: Role Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* and *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Techotexts, and Theories*.

## **Policies**

Because much of the material we will be studying will be covered only in lectures and discussion, regular attendance of class meetings is strongly encouraged. Any evidence of plagiarism will be grounds for failing the course. Instances of plagiarism will also be reported to the office of the University Director for further disciplinary measures.

## **Website**

The paper syllabus is not the “live” version. Our schedule is likely to change over the course of the semester. Page numbers of assignments, paper topic assignments and modifications to the class schedule will be posted to the student portal. You are expected to check the site at the start of every week for this updated information.

## **Contacting the Instructor**

The best way to get in touch with me is via email. Please note: when emailing me, be sure to include your name and a brief statement of the email’s topic in the subject line of the email. I will make every effort to respond to email in a timely manner, though you should not expect an instant response.

## **Required Texts**

Required texts for this course include

*The New Media Reader*, Montfort and Wardrip-Fruin, eds.

*New Media Poetics: Contexts, Techotexts, and Theories*, Morris and Swiss, eds.

*Second Person: Role Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, Harrigan and

Wardrip-Fruin, eds.

Online readings.

## **Compulsory Activities**

Students in 204 and 303 are required to contribute to online bulletin board discussions, to submit two short position papers, and a draft of the term paper prior to the exam period. Position paper topics will be assigned, and will differ for 204 and 303. The topic and research question for the final term paper must be approved by

the teacher. All papers should be titled, printed, and stapled before they are turned in. In addition, students in 303 are required to prepare and deliver a 20-minute presentation on an article from a list I will distribute.

### **Exam**

Students are required to submit a final term paper of 4-5000 words. Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where E or better is a passing grade. Final papers are due by 12:00 on Thursday, November 23rd.

### **Course Plan**

- W 08/22/07 Guest Lecture: Stuart Moulthrop (14:15-17:00)  
Reading: "You Say You Want a Revolution? Hypertext and the Laws of Media" *NMR* 691-704.
- Th 08/23/07 Reading/Demonstration by Stuart Moulthrop  
Reading: "*Pax*, Writing, and Change" *SP* 149-156, Works online.
- W 08/29/07 Vannevar Bush "As We May Think" *NMR* 35-48, Ted Nelson  
"Computer Lib/Dream Machines" *NMR* 301-338, Storyspace hypertexts.
- Th 08/30/07 Michael Joyce "Siren Shapes: Exploratory and Constructive Hypertexts" *NMR* 613-624, Robert Coover, "The End of Books" *NMR* 705-710, Storyspace hypertexts.
- W 09/05/07 Stephanie Strickland and Cynthia Lawson "Vniverse" *NMPoetics* 165-180, N. Katherine Hayles "The Time of Digital Poetry: From Object to Event" *SP* 181-210, Online readings "The Ballad of Sand and Soot" and *V:Inverse* by Stephanie Strickland.
- Th 09/06/07 "New Media Poetics: As We May Think/How to Write" by Adelaide Morris *NMPoetics* 1-46. Online readings: "RiverIsland" by John Cayley.
- W 09/12/07 "Time Code Language: New Media Poetics and Programmed Signification" by John Cayley 307-334. Online Readings by John Cayley. No in-person class meeting.
- Th 09/13/07 Kinetic Poetry – *Poems that Go*, Selection #1. Post to class discussion board required. No in-person class meeting.
- W 09/19/07 Kinetic Poetry – *Poems that Go*, Selection #2. No in-person class.
- Th 09/20/07 "Screening the Page/Paging the Screen: Digital Poetics and the Differential Text" by Marjorie Perloff *NMPoetics* 143-164. Post to class discussion board required.
- W 09/26/07 Paper #1 due at start of class. Digital Poetry – Selections from *The Electronic Literature Collection*.
- Th 09/27/07 Digital Poetry – Selections from *The Electronic Literature Collection*

- W 10/03/07 Alan Turing "Computing Machinery and Human Intelligence" *NMR* 49-65. No in-person class meeting.
- Th 10/04/07 Joseph Weizenbaum "Computer Power and Human Reason" *NMR* 367-376. No in-person class meeting. Post to class discussion board required.
- W 10/10/07 Interactive Fiction. Online reading: Emily Short's *Galatea*.
- Th 10/11/07 "Enlightening Interactive Fiction: Andrew Plotkin's *Shade*" by Jeremy Douglass *SP* 129-136. Online reading: *Shade*.
- W 10/17/02 Online Reading Katherine Hayles "Electronic Literature: What is it?" Guest lecture by Katherine Hayles.
- Th 10/18/07 "On *Savoir-Faire*" by Emily Short *SP* 147-48. Online reading: *Savoir-Faire* by Emily Short.
- M 10/22/07 Samuel Weber "Benjamin's Aura and the Mediaauratic" Guest lecture.
- W 10/24/07 Online reading: Aaron A. Reed, *Whom the Telling Changed*
- Th 10/25/07 "On *The Breakup Conversation*" by Robert Zubeck *SP* 209-212. Online reading: *The Breakup Conversation*, other chatbots
- W 10/31/07 Paper #2 due at start of class. "Writing *Façade*: A Case Study for Interactive Storytelling" by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern *SP* 183-208. Online reading: *Façade* by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern.
- Th 11/01/07 "Video Games Go to Washington: The Story behind The Howard Dean for Iowa Game" by Ian Bogost and Gonzalo Frasca *SP* 233-246. Online: Persuasive Games.
- W 11/07/07 Paper topics due at start of class. "The Puppet Master Problem: Design for Real-World, Mission-Based Gaming" by Jane McGonigal *SP* 221-264.
- Th 11/08/07 Essays on MMORPGS by Mortensen, Walker, and Pearce, *SP* 297-318.
- W 11/14/07 303 student presentations.
- Th 11/16/07 303 student presentations.
- W 11/21/07 Paper Draft Peer Review
- Th 11/23/07 Final Papers due by 12:00

## HUIN 204 Paper Assignments

### Paper #1

For your first paper assignment, due in class Wednesday, September 26<sup>th</sup>, write a short essay of approximately 800-1,000 words addressing one of the two below topics:

- 1) Compare and contrast two different poems from the online archive of the kinetic poetry site *Poems that Go*. Be sure to choose two poems that make distinctly different uses of the medium in which they are presented. In comparing the two poems, be sure to address multiple modalities of reading, for instance interpreting the way that the authors use the language itself, the typography, motion graphics, page layout, voiceover audio, music, and interface design to convey meaning.
- 2) Spend several hours with one of the Storyspace fictions that are installed in the computer lab: *Afternoon* by Michael Joyce, *Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson, or *Victory Garden* by Stuart Moulthrop. Then write a short paper describing how the author used the constraints and affordances of the software to construct the narrative. Describe as best you can the narrative structure of the work. How does the work reflect some of the possibilities and limitations of hypertext described by Robert Coover in his "End of Books" essay?

### Paper #2

For the second paper, please spend several hours reading and exploring one of the two interactive fictions: *Savoir Faire* by Emily Short or *Book and Volume* by Nick Montfort. Feel free to find an online walkthrough of the work to help you when you get stuck. Taking into account our readings of Turing and Weizenbaum as background on artificial intelligence, and the essays in *Second Person* by Short and Montfort, consider the work as an interactive narrative. What aspects of traditional fiction are present in the work? How do aspects of fiction such as character, plot, and setting function in the work? What aspects of the IF are best understood as "game" and what are best understood as "story"? What effects does the conversational or "natural language" interface have on your reading? To what extent do you consider playing an IF to be interacting with an artificial intelligence?

### Paper #3

Choose from one of the two below general topics and write an analytical essay. The paper should be approximately 3,500-4,500 words in length.

- 1) This term we spent a good deal of time interacting with and discussing works of interactive fiction, such as Emily Short's *Savoir-Faire*, Aaron Reed's *Whom The Telling Changed*, and Nick Montfort's *Book and Volume*. We also interacted with and discussed the groundbreaking "interactive drama" *Façade* by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast one of the works of interactive fiction with the interactive drama *Façade*, with a goal of distinguishing the two genres from one another. Consider aspects of the works such the role of the player character, the nature of the interactor's "goals", the way that the plot is developed, the nature of the interface, the function of setting, the function of conversational interaction, and the procedural operations underlying the two programs. Base your essay on close reading and analysis of your textual interaction with the works, supported by secondary sources such as the essays we have read in *Second Person* and *The New Media Reader*.
  
- 2) We recently examined and discussed several "persuasive games" and "serious games" – games that are meant to serve a persuasive rhetoric or ideological point of view as much or more than they are intended as mere entertainments. Examples can be found at <http://www.persuasivegames.com/games/>. Taking into account observations in Ian Bogost's *Second Person* essay and Gonzalo Frasca's essay "Videogames of the Oppressed" <<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/Boalian>>, perform a rhetorical analysis of "The McDonald's Game" <<http://www.mcvideogame.com/index-eng.html>>. How does the game use simulation and gameplay to develop a complex argument about the nature of the global restaurant chain? What argument is the game making and in what ways is the game more or less effective at developing that argument than a more traditional rhetorical form, such as a newspaper editorial, would be? Support your analysis with close reading of specific examples from the game.