Acadia University Faculty of Arts

***English 4323 X2: Vast Narratives and Transmedia Storytelling: Navigating in and between Fictional Worlds***

Regular Session 2013-2014 (Winter Term)

MW 2:30-4:00pm Location: BAC 235

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**Course Description and Objectives:**

In spite of the illusions established by print culture traditions, stories refuse to remain static. Like the earliest storytelling practices that generated and circulated dynamic myths and evolved epic tales of heroic deeds, recent narrative initiatives, facilitated by new media technologies and networked communications often exchange the limits of single-authorship, self-containment, and consistency for collaborative, participatory storytelling that not only occupies various media platforms simultaneously, but also focuses more on establishing or extending a fictional world or universe than on the narrow development of a particular character or story arc. Such efforts are not simply the result of technological evolutions. They represent the latest manifestation of persistent creative attempts to diversify narrative practice and to extend story-based ideas across multiple platforms. This course will explore the ways in which these alternative models of storytelling intersect with and emerge from more conventional print-based narrative practices over the last century. We will investigate how the convergence of serialized narratives, fan fiction, and collaborative authorship in print-based fiction has contributed to an increasing prevalence of vast narratives and transmedia storytelling. Primary examples of broadly-constituted narrative worlds across various media platforms, supplemented by secondary critical scholarship will provide the foundation for a consideration of the following ideas: blurring boundaries between readers, consumers, authors and players; the strengths and weaknesses of the potential variety of multi-platform extensions of fictional environments; issues of canonicity (“story bibles”), integrity, creative mutation and crossover during the development and extension of fictional worlds; the economies that operate within and generate/sustain the growth of such worlds; the generation of active and interactive communities of collaborative consumer-participants; emergent fictional platforms; and the specific ways that this shift expands our more traditional literary understandings of narrativity, the boundaries of fiction and the place of stories.

**Course Materials and Format:**

**NOTE: All textbooks (except for Third Person) for this course are available for purchase at the “Box of Delights Bookstore”: 466 Main Street in Wolfville (across the street from Pronto Pizza and beside the travel agency).**

**Required Texts and how to use them**:

Vast Narrative and transmedia texts are impossible to assign or purchase in book form. As a result, the textbooks for this class are all secondary critical texts. These are the essential tools through which we will encounter, explore and understand the examples that you bring to the class through your presentations and projects.

1. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin, eds. Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives. Cambridge: MIT Press (2009)
   * This is a rich repository of articles relating to authoring and exploring Vast Narratives. While I will focus on specific selections from this edited collection throughout the term, I hope that many of these articles will either inspire or support your conference papers and presentations.
2. The Dictionary of Imaginary Places. Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, eds. Harcourt (Expanded Edition) 2000.
   * Although we are not reading through this book in any systematic way, I have put this on the required textbook list for a few reasons. It is an amazing collection of literary worlds that demonstrates the breadth and depth of human creativity. As a dictionary, it is meant to be an introduction, rather than an exhaustive encyclopedia and it is interesting both for what it includes and for its limitations. Its literary focus reminds us that we don’t need digital technologies to create vast narrative potential, and that landscapes and settings are always rich in storied potential. It is also useful for introducing the idea that readers are travelers and explorers and for raising the question: why have some of the entries in this book become vast narrative landscapes and others have not persisted beyond their original stories?
3. Frank Rose. The Art of Immersion. W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition ,2012.
   * This book in an indispensable companion to this course and we will be encountering all of its chapters at one point or another throughout the term.
4. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green. Spreadable Media. New York University Press, 2013.
   * It’s odd that a book about media transitions, content spreadability and the impact of increasingly unauthorized social networks of participatory culture has such narrow margins. However, this is a more theoretical and applied look at the current nature of media production and circulation that complements Rose’s book nicely.

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

Students are expected to attend class, to participate in class discussion and to fully participate in the technological components of this course. Please note that January 13, 2014 is the last day to drop Winter-term courses without receiving a “W,” and February 28 is the last day to drop winter term courses without receiving an “F.” It is essential that assigned readings be read carefully and critically. The final grade will be based on the following partial grades:

50% 2 “conference” presentations (20 minutes each) and papers (9-12 pages)

10% Participation in seminar discussions

15% Vast Narrative collaborative mindmap creation and participation (Coggle.it)

25% Other grading and assignment options to be discussed on first day of class….

**Total: 100%**

**Penalties:**

1. **Late Assignments:** Papers are due on the specified due date. After class is considered late. It is your responsibility to contact me as soon as possible regarding late or missed assignments. **Late assignments are subject to a penalty of 1/3 letter grade per day (including weekends) unless you are granted an extension due to *documented* medical or compassionate circumstances** (i.e a “B” paper that is handed in two days late would receive a mark of “C+”). As well, late assignments will be graded, but will include no written commentary.

**Plagiarism**: Please refer to the section entitled "Academic Integrity" in the 2013-2014 Calendar for Acadia University's policies regarding plagiarism. Note that penalties for plagiarism include rewriting work, receiving a failing grade for a particular assignment, failing the course or being dismissed from the university. Please be aware that faculty members reserve the right to utilise software or websites to test student assignments for the presence of plagiarised material. Although some class time will be spent learning how to avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism, when in doubt, ask me for advice or go to <http://library.acadiau.ca/guides/plagiarism/>

1. **Attendance**: Attendance is mandatory. More than 3 unexcused absences per term will result in a significant deduction from your participation mark.

***Please note that I will not accept assignments submitted after the last day of lectures. (Monday, April 7, 2014)***

**Course Outline:**

## Evaluation:

**(2x25%)** Each of you will have 2 conference opportunities. You will present a 20-minute, conference paper (9-12 pages) that offers a critical argument relating particular vast narrative examples to theoretical issues from the course readings related to the day and topic that you’ve signed up for. Please do not just read from your paper directly, but construct a presentation that engages your audience while covering the primary arguments of your paper. Questions about, critical responses to and discussion of your conference presentation will follow. Please circulate any additional material that the class needs to become familiar with at least a week prior to your presentation. A written version of each conference paper is due on the day that you present to the class, and it is expected that you will make use of class readings and additional secondary sources.

Other grades and grade opportunities to be discussed on the first day of class.

**Tentative Schedule:**

Abbreviations:

TP (Third Person); SM (Spreadable Media); AI (The Art of Immersion)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Month* | *Date* | *Topic(s)* | *Readings/examples* | *Ideas:* | *Presentations* |
| ***Introduction and Background*** | | | | | |
| *Jan.* | *6, 8* | *Introduction and Definitions.* | [*Interview with Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin*](http://henryjenkins.org/2009/05/an_interview_with_pat_harrigan.html)  *TP: Introduction*  *AI: Prologue* | *Narrative, mimesis, diegesis, Vast narratives, transmedia narratives, spreadable media, environmental storytelling.* | *n/a* |
|  | *8* | *Historical context* | *Myth and Epic summary(ACORN)*  *Bakhtin on Medieval carnival (excerpts) (ACORN)*  *Chimamanda Adichie TED talk: danger of single stories*  *TP:225-242* | *Myth, epic, carnival, masques, Serial narratives, intertextuality, exploration and discovery, immersive, multimedia* | *n/a* |
|  | *13* | *Authorial control* | [*Foucault: What is an Author*](https://wiki.brown.edu/confluence/download/attachments/74858352/FoucaultWhatIsAnAuthor.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1296272754000)  [*Barthes: Death of the Author*](http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes)  *Perec, Introduction from Life: A User’s Manual (ACORN)*  *Forster and Benjamin on narrative (ACORN)*  *AI: Chapter 4 (Control)* | *decentralization, participatory media* | *n/a* |
|  | *15* | *Blurring reality and fiction* | *AI: Chapter 2*  *(Fear of Fiction)* | *blurred boundaries, unreliability and inconclusiveness* | *n/a* |
|  | *20* | *Networked narrative and spreadable media* | *SM: (Introduction and Chapter 5)*  *TP: 137-152* |  | *n/a* |
| ***Examples*** | | | | | |
|  | *22* | *Films* | *AI: Chapter 3 (Deeper)*  *TP: 179-191* | *translation, reboot, intertextuality* | *n/a* |
|  | *27, 29* | *Transmedia Franchises/serials* | *AI: Chapter 7*  *(The Hive Mind and the Mystery Box)*  [*Lostpedia*](http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)  [*Dr. Who Wiki*](http://tardis.wikia.com/wiki/Doctor_Who_Wiki)  [*star wars*](http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)*,*  [*star trek*](http://en.memory-alpha.org/wiki/Portal:Main)  [*Harry potter*](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page) *and* [*Pottermore*](https://www.pottermore.com/en-us)  *TP: 13-24; 33-40; 313-319; 333-341; 385-397* | *Stories as frameworks for play* | *1.*  *2.*  *3.* |
| *February* | *3* | *Comics* | [*Marvel Universe*](http://marvel.com/universe/Marvel_Universe)  *TP: 41-48; 275-28; 303-311;* | *fanfiction, multimedia, universes, webcomics, mythic pantheons, transmedia translations.* | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *5* | ***(Classes Cancelled)*** | | | |
|  | *10* | *Interactive Fiction* | *Andrew Plotkin’s* [*Shade*](http://iplayif.com/?story=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ifarchive.org%2Fif-archive%2Fgames%2Fzcode%2Fshade.z5)  [*You find yourself in a room*](http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/556644)  *Borges: Garden of Forking Paths (ACORN)*  *AI: Chapter 5 (Forking Paths)*  [Let’s tell a story together: The history of Interactive Fiction](http://maher.filfre.net/if-book/) | *Hyperlinks, choice and freedom.* | *1.* |
|  | *12* | *Collaborative Storytelling* | [SCP foundation](http://www.scp-wiki.net/)  [*The Fear Mythos*](http://thefearmythos.com/)  [*Collaborative Storytelling*](http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/7-collaborative-storytelling-websites-weave-digital-stories/) |  | *1.* |
| ***February 17-21: Study Week*** | | | | | |
|  | *24, 26* | *Role playing* | *Tabletop, Murder mystery parties, LARP and cosplay,* [*Assassin*](http://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=GB&v=KOmPLc3WTmU&hl=en-GB)*,* [*MMORPG*](http://www.mmorpg.com/)*s*  *Sleep no more (*[*1*](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/theater/reviews/sleep-no-more-is-a-macbeth-in-a-hotel-review.html)*) (*[*2*](http://sleepnomorenyc.com/)*)*  *TP: 59-66; 77-85; 87-96; 97-103;* |  | *1.*  *2.*  *3.* |
| *March* | *3, 5* | *Video Games* | [*Storyteller*](http://www.ludomancy.com/games/StoryTeller.html)  [*Façade*](http://www.interactivestory.net/)  [*Dwarf Fortress*](http://www.bay12games.com/dwarves/)  [*DayZ*](http://dayzgame.com/)  [*The Sims*](http://www.thesims.com/en-us)  [*The Sims: Alice and Kev*](http://aliceandkev.wordpress.com/)  *AI: Chapter 6*  *(Open Worlds)*  *Jenkins: Game Design as Narrative Architecture (ACORN)*  *Konzack “Subcreation of secondary game worlds” (ACORN)*  *Harvey Smith, “Environmental Storytelling” (ACORN)*  *Richard Rouse III “Environmental Narrative” (ACORN)*  *TP: 105-117; 119-124* | *Emergent narrative (play giving rise to stories), embedded narrative , social gaming, environment/ setting, open worlds* | *1.*  *2.*  *3.* |
|  | *10* | *ARGs* | [ARGne](http://www.argn.com/)t  [I love bees](http://www.ilovebees.com/)  [Another version of the truth](http://www.anotherversionofthetruth.com/)  [World without oil](http://www.worldwithoutoil.org/)  *Abba: Hybrid Stories (ACORN)*  *AI: Chapter 1 (ARGs)* | *Social narratives, transmedia narratives, nonlinear narratives* | *1.* |
|  | *12* | *Theme Parks* | *Disneyland and Disneyworld, Disney parks vs. Universal Studios, RPG games in the park* | *nature of narrative, extensions of narrative, immersion, environment* | *n/a* |
| ***Issues and Questions*** | | | | | |
|  | *17* | *Marketing and transmedia storytelling* | [*Transmedia Storytelling and Marketing*](http://prezi.com/6qkqw35c8d0y/copy-of-transmedia-storytelling-reinventing-the-art-of-storytelling/?utm_source=website&utm_medium=prezi_landing_related&utm_campaign=prezi_landing_related_author) *(Cindy Hill)*  *AI:Chapter 10*  *(This is your brand on youtube)*  *SM:*  *(Chapters 1 and 2)* | *marketing and storytelling; dispersion; private vs social; time and space;* | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *19* | *Engaged/enslaved consumers and Fans* | *SM:*  *(Chapters 3 & 4)* | *access and privilege; leisure, role of technology; activism?* | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *24* | *Indie and Transnational Circulation* | *SM:*  *(Chapters 6 & 7)*  *TP: 399-405* | *Cultural and commercial colonization; power and politcs* | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *26* | *Gambling, Compulsion and Addiction* | *AI: Chapter 11*  *(The One-Armed Bandit)* |  | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *31* | *Empathy?* | *AI: Chapter 9 (Twitter and Nothingness)* |  | *1.*  *2.* |
| *April* | *2* | *Simulacra and Authenticity* | *AI: Chapter 13 (How to build a Universe that doesn’t fall apart)*  *Baudrillard: The Precession of Simulacra (ACORN)* |  | *1.*  *2.* |
|  | *7* | The end of narrative or a reaffirmation of narrativity? | *SM: (Conclusion)* | *Fiction as a network; complexity and simplicity* |  |