ENGL 266-01 - Creative Writing for New Media
MW 1:20PM-2:40PM, FISK 413
Syllabus and Course Overview

Spring 2017 | Wesleyan University
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Office Hours: By Appointment, Mondays & Wednesdays 3:00-4:00

We seldom legislate new technologies into being. They emerge, and we plunge with them into whatever vortices of change they generate. We legislate after the fact, in a perpetual game of catch-up, as best we can, while our new technologies redefine us.

—William Gibson

Writing students are notoriously conservative creatures. They write stubbornly and hopefully within the tradition of what they have read. Getting them to try out alternative or innovative forms is harder than talking them into chastity as a lifestyle. But confronted with hyperspace, they have no choice: all the comforting structures have been erased. It's improvise or go home. Some frantically rebuild those old structures, some just get lost and drift out of sight, most leap in fearlessly without even asking how deep it is (infinitely deep) and admit, even as they paddle for dear life, that this new arena is indeed an exciting, provocative if frequently frustrating medium for the creation of new narratives, a potentially revolutionary space, capable, exactly as advertised, of transforming the very art of fiction, even if it now remains somewhat at the fringe, remote still, in these very early days, from the mainstream.

—Robert Coover

Video games are bad for you? That’s what they said about rock-n-roll.

—Shigeru Miyamoto

The adventure of what is possible in literature with the advent of new technologies is one of the most thrilling and fulfilling adventures to take up in the 21st century. In this course, we will examine how the nature of storytelling is evolving with digital tools like social media, podcasts, blogs, YouTube, Wikipedia, iPads, iPods, cell phones, and video games. We will dive into online artifacts, new media narratives, indie games, electronic avant garde novels, remixes, mash ups, and more with an open mind and ask difficult questions about our role as both creators and consumers of electronic literature. We will consider the exciting potentialities of this growing field as well as its limitations while wrestling with critical issues about digital ethics, internet culture, and the implications of our online artistic creations.

This class will be part salon, part laboratory, and will culminate in a creative portfolio consisting of two new media projects, of which one has been workshopped by your peers.

It doesn’t matter if you don’t know html: your instructor doesn’t know html either. The goal of this course is not to master certain technologies but to tease out their potential for compelling, dynamic storytelling or poetic expression. Come brave the brave new world of digital expression with a full heart and open mind!
There are **FOUR** components of the course upon which your final grade will depend:

1) You will attend class weekly (*missing no more than two sessions unexcused*), having read and thoughtfully considered the reading assignments, ready to discuss and intellectually grapple with the topic of the week. Your participation grade will be decided not only by your attendance but your *active* participation throughout the semester. This means contributing to discussion, being present for the creative exercises, writing thoughtful letters to your peers, and all-around intellectual engagement with the material. In addition, you are expected to attend readings by visiting writers.

2) You will produce no less than TWO creative writing projects for new media, of which one will be workshoped by your peers. The other project will be evaluated by me alone and will be included in your final portfolio. During workshop, you will be responsible for critiquing your peers’ work both vocally and via a thoughtful workshop letter.

3) You will write one 3-6 page individual essay on a selected topic.

4) You will submit a final portfolio containing all the required materials.

**Required Materials**
- A thin notebook for writing exercises
- Enthusiasm!

**Grade Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation: 50%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio: 50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Writing Project #1 [25%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Writing Project #2 [25%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Essay [25%]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Writing Exercises / Artist’s Statement [25%]</td>
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**Attendance and Participation**
This is NOT a class where it’s okay to only show up to turn in your work and take the final. There is no final and your work and participation are your grade. In the event that you have an unavoidable absence, such as a doctor’s appointment or other obligation, let me know (if you know about it beforehand, tell me about it beforehand) and I’ll see what I can do to help you.

**Attendance and absence policy:** Time in this course is at a premium. You are allowed **2 UNEXCUSED** absences for the entire semester. **After these 2 absences**, your participation grade will drop considerably. **After 4 unexcused absences**, I will fail you for the entire course.

**Turning in Work**
I will not accept late work under any circumstance except documented medical emergency or other unavoidable event. Hangovers and printers running out of ink are not considered unavoidable events. All work is due when you come in the following week. (Please don’t email me your work and then not come to class. I will NOT accept it.)
**Classroom Behavior**
Because this is a college class, I expect you to act like the mature adults you are, and I will treat you as such. A lot of what we’ll be talking about will be sensitive and possibly controversial for some of you. I expect you to talk calmly about sex and sexuality, race, religion, politics, philosophy etc. However, this is also not a license to slander, spew profanity, nor incite others with harmful comments. I expect you to be respectful, especially when we talk about hard subjects.

*Your phone and other electronics should be off during class unless I tell you otherwise,* and texting is absolutely forbidden. Seriously, it can wait an hour or two. If you are expecting a very important call or message during class, please tell me so I can allow you to take it without problems.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s work as your own. Plagiarism can range from copy-pasting excerpts from a text or buying a paper and turning it in as your own, to forgetting to place quotation marks around a quote or omitting a citation where it is necessary. Paraphrasing can constitute plagiarism if it is not sourced. Refer to the link below for the University’s full policy on plagiarism and academic fraud. **Note:** any work I deem to be plagiarized will receive a grade of 0, and I will not accept make-up work. **This is your one and only warning.**

In other words: when it comes to your individual essays **NO REMIXES, PLEASE.**

**Changes**
Regarding schedule of assignments, I reserve the right to amend and append this syllabus and schedule of assignments at any time, with notice, and probably will at some point depending on how we move through the material. If I make changes, I will announce them in class or by email.

Schedule: All assignments are due the week after they are assigned, unless otherwise noted.

WEEK 1 (Jan 30/Feb 1): **Introduction/Syllabus**
*Homework:* Decide upon which individual essay topic you’ll write + Consider whether or not you’d like to do an individual creative project or collaborative group project + Read Gibson essay, “God’s Little Toys” ([http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/gibson.html](http://archive.wired.com/wired/archive/13.07/gibson.html))

WEEK 2 (Feb 6/Feb 8): **Are We All Just DJs? Postmodernity & the Remix Society**

WEEK 3 (Feb 13/Feb 15): **Book vs. Screen: the Virtues of Print vs. Online Artifacts; Noise of Technology**

WEEK 4 (Feb 20/Feb 22): **Are We Really Us Online? Self-Editing, Social Media, Personas, & Identity Narratives**
Homework: Read Coover essay, “The End of Books”

WEEK 5 (Feb 27/Mar 1): A Brief History of New Media Narratives, Coover, & the New Creative Tools

WEEK 6 (Mar 6/Mar 8): Narrative Auralscapes & Podcasts: Serial/This American Life
Homework: Read Ebert essay, “Video Games Can Never Be Art” + “Why Video Games Are Indeed Art”
(http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/video-games-can-never-be-art)
(http://www.rogerebert.com/far-flung-correspondents/why-video-games-are-indeed-art)
Play Minecraft Demo, first night at least: www.Minecraft.net; Play The End:
http://playtheend.com/game

WEEK 7 (Mar 13/Mar 15): **SPRING BREAK – WEEK ONE**

WEEK 8 (Mar 20/Mar 22): **SPRING BREAK – WEEK TWO**

WEEK 9 (Mar 27/Mar 29): Are Video Games Art? (A Brief Introduction on the Trajectory of Games Toward Art/Mainstream Games/The Novel vs. The Video Game)

WEEK 10 (Apr 3/Apr 5): Are Video Games Art? Part II (Indie Games/Games as Tools of Introspection)

WEEK 11 (Apr 10/Apr 12): Ready Player One: A Critical Discussion

WEEK 12 (Apr 17/Apr 19): Digital Poetics

WEEK 13 (Apr 24/Apr 26): The Avant-Garde & New Media: Readings I

WEEK 14 (May 1/May 3): The Avant-Garde & New Media: Readings II

WEEK 15 (May 8/May 10): Final Portfolios Due

[IMPORTANT DATES/INFO TO REMEMBER]

*My Workshop Date will be ____________, which means I am to turn in my project ________ (via email to MatthewkBurnside@gmail.com BEFORE class begins)*

**My paper topic will be ______________.

***I will have READY PLAYER ONE read by ________.
PAPER TOPICS

You are to produce a 3-6 page essay on one of the topics below. Your paper should be double-spaced and include a Works Cited page. [If you come up with a topic of your own that you’re especially enthusiastic about, you have to run it across me first. I’ll say yes or no.]

The Remix Society: Case Study
At this point in time, some would say everything is a remix: do you agree or disagree? Consider one particular artist’s work: how do they utilize remixing, and what makes it original? What makes it derivative? Make your case for the artist and their merit.

The Remix Society: Ethical Considerations
In a remix society, how do you responsibly control and enforce intellectual and artistic property? What are some of the ethical considerations? What about illegal pirating? Or is the law too harsh? Be sure to cite some specific examples to illustrate your case.

Print Versus Digital Artifacts: What is Lost? What is Gained?
In the last few years many publications have made the decision to go completely online, abandoning traditional print format. What is to be gained from digital media? What is lost – as both creators and as consumers - when we make the transition from page to screen? Be sure to include specific examples of publications as you thoughtfully consider the potentialities of a world without books (or screens).

Effects of Social Media on Society & Interrelations
We live in a social media-saturated society. In what ways do social media benefit society? In what ways do they harm society? In what ways do they benefit or hinder human interrelations? Cover at least 3 different social mediums (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, etc.) as you thoughtfully weigh the pluses and minuses of each.

Future of Storytelling? A Defense (or Repudiation) of Hypertext Narratives & Their Potential
Once upon a time, a writer predicted hypertext would be the next dominant artistic medium. However, this didn’t quite happen. Chart the rise and fall (and rise again?) of hypertext narratives and then consider where the form is situated today. What do you predict will happen in the next 30 years? What are some of the things hypertext can do that traditional print storytelling cannot, or can traditional print storytelling accomplish more? Is it truly ‘the next big thing,’ or just an overhyped artistic fad?

Critical Book Report: READY PLAYER ONE
Ernest Cline’s book is chock full of themes relevant to this course, including but not limited to: Digital personae, technology’s pervasive influence on intercommunication, the role of games as art, collaborative storytelling, digital consumerism, intellectual property, remixing, etc. Reflect on ONE of these themes as you delve into the text. Avoid superficial summaries or simply slapping terminology upon the page. I expect deep analysis and thoughtful extrapolation.

Video Games as Art: A Narrative Analysis
Choose one of the following games below. Play through it first, and then write your paper. In the first paragraph, introduce the game and include a plot summary, applying Freytag's pyramid to the narrative structure. In the second paragraph, discuss the game in relation to its genre or
subgenre (in what ways does it stick firmly to genre conventions? In what ways does it subvert them?) In the third paragraph, chart your personal journey through the game (did you race straight through to the end to unravel the main story? Did you spend your time mostly exploring, or were you more interested in side quests/side missions? What did you find yourself most taken with in the game? What moments would you cite as highlights? Were there any moments that transcended the medium? Be specific, providing in-game examples.) In the fourth paragraph, discuss some of the narrative elements or devices employed in the game which makes it unique or effective (symbolism, foreshadowing, allusion, flashback, irony, repetition, in media res, plot twists, etc.) In the fifth paragraph, consider whether or not you think the creator/writer was trying to make any specific social commentary with the game (if so, what were some of the themes, issues, big ideas examined in the game? What messages did you encounter?) Lastly, in the sixth paragraph, make your case for the game as a work of art: is it or is it not? Why or why not?

Games
The Last of Us
Deus Ex: Human Revolution
Red Dead Redemption
Grand Theft Auto V
Bioshock
Bioshock Infinite
Resident Evil 4
Resident Evil 5
Resident Evil 6
Fallout 1 (PC)
Fallout 3
L.A. Noire

*If you have another game in mind, ask me. I'll consider it thoughtfully and say yes or no.
**In addition, you may opt to write about an indie game, such as Braid, Minecraft, Fez, To the Moon or Limbo. Some of these games eschew traditional narrative, so you won’t be able analyze it in the same way as the games above. Instead, you might consider aesthetic, tone, design, art direction, physics, music, etc. But the topic would still remain the same: does it qualify as art? Why or why not?
NEW MEDIA PROJECT

This is a creative writing class, after all. This semester, you are to create TWO creative projects in accordance to these requirements: 1) both must include either a narrative, strive for poetic effect, or incorporate literary gaming, and 2) both must utilize new media to some degree.

These requirements are few for a reason. First of all, my goal is that you have FUN building this project, so I don’t want to stifle your creativity by establishing too-stringent guidelines. However, here are some things to keep in mind...

- The goal is to create art, not just complete an assignment for college. Keep this in mind at all times.
- Be sure to pick a project that can be completed by its due date, but also something of sufficient ambition as to keep YOU engaged. In other words: don’t just pick something easy because you know you it will be easy to complete, but do keep in mind scope and time limitations.
- No matter what you choose to do, I expect a writing component (script/story/dialogue/storyboard with captions, etc.) first, a sort of rough draft before you translate your project into a new media artifact. I expect to see this initial component in your final portfolio.
- The initial writing component should be no LESS than 20 pages in length.
- Only ONE of these projects will be viewed/read/experienced by your peers and workshopped. The other will be viewed/read/experienced by me alone.
- I hope you’ll consider visiting my office hours throughout the semester as you experiment with this bold new form.
- As long as your project(s) meet the initial prerequisites above, I offer no moratoriums on subject matter. However, I do encourage you to try something a little different from one project to the next. In other words, if your first project is a choose your own adventure narrative, maybe make your next project a poetic endeavor of some kind?
- If you’re reading this now and panicking because you have no idea what kind of project you might take up, don’t fret! I’ll be showing you plentiful examples. In the meantime, here are a few ideas...
  1. A choose-your-own-adventure poem using Inkle Writer (https://writer.inklestudios.com/)
  2. A comic or game made in PowerPoint
  3. A short film captured on cell phones then uploaded to YouTube
  4. A remix of some kind.
  5. A collaborative visual poem using Prezi (http://prezi.com/)
  6. A hyperlink murder mystery made using Wix (http://www.wix.com/)
  7. An aural narrative (in the vein of Serial or This American Life)