

## **LMC 4720: Interactive Narrative/LMC 6317 Interactive Fiction**

### ***Intersecting Hip Hop-Based Design Thinking Across Interactive Storytelling***

Spring 2020; T/Th, 3:00 - 4:15, Skiles 311

School of Literature, Media, and Communication, Georgia Tech

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Office Hours: 12:45 – 2:45, Tuesday and Thursday or by appointment

### **General Course Description**

Examines significant examples of interactive narrative and digital storytelling as an emerging genre, including its roots in experimental uses of older media, and engages students in creating their own transmedia interactive narrative project.

### **Course Prerequisites**

ENGL 1102

LMC 2100 or LMC 2700 or LMC 2800

CS 1322 or CS 1331

Knowledge of CSS and JavaScript and Unity will be helpful. Familiarity with or ability to quickly master Twine 1.x or a similar rapid prototyping environment of your choice is essential. **If you cannot meet this requirement you should not take this course.** The course will include tutorial presentations on Twine. However, you will be responsible for getting any tech support you might need. The DILAC is equipped with lab assistants who can help. If you cannot teach yourself Twine including programming variables and changing page appearance, you should not be taking this class.

### **Topical Course Description and Objectives**

Interactive narrative is a growing field in digital media. It is also an emerging genre for representing the non-linear, multi-linear, interactive ways in which humans experience the world and the media around them. Since ancient times, humans have used these stories to pass down history, to articulate perspectives, to educate, to entertain, and to instill values. The central aim of this course is to advance this human practice: to engage students in the contemporary role of the narrative and the subsequent practice of storytelling as it remains central to the day-to-day survival and preservation of cultures and communities. The purpose of this course is to, therefore, exploit the intersections between analog and digital narratives, artifacts, transmedia forms, and powerful software tools that help create innovative modes for producing and preserving stories. The course surveys the history and practice of interactive narrative as well as various examples that employ interactive narrative design principles for different reasons.

Through a variety of reviews, prototypes, short analyses, development of original works, and media projects – individual and group – students will leave the course with an understanding of interactive narrative as a model for engaging with immersive environments using various forms of media (including film, visual content, video, personal narrative, music, video games, etc). In this course, students will participate in a series of lectures, discussions, and projects that introduce them to the field of interactive narrative, the purposes of interactive narrative, and the relationships between interactive narrative and specific design purposes.

The course is structured as a theory, practice, praxis class. It builds on Murray's theories of the holodeck, notions for "inventing the medium", and the hip hop-based innovation sensibilities of Wilson's Outkast Imagination. The OI is a 7-point rubric for guiding fundamental design choices. Students will explore the design properties of multiple interactive narratives. Students will examine the interactive narrative structure of different exemplars as they have been applied to the storyworld design, interactivity, content production, information architecture, and other properties. Students will examine narratives as an indigenous technology. Students will conceptualize, critique, and create interactive/digital storytelling products such as photo essays, video games, film, archival environments, and other transmedia forms.

Paired with assigned readings, screenings, and guest speakers, the course uses the music artist "access points" as exemplary case studies for an examination of the sociocultural, political, justice-oriented, ideological histories of hip hop and the ways in which new media innovations facilitate the expression of these histories. To do so, students will create interactive digital media campaigns built on telling a story (and the art created to represent it) of one of 12 randomly-selected artists. Students will analyze the design challenges and best practices employed through interactive technologies. Aside from the necessary skills in the software and computational media methodologies, which many of the students already have based on the course prerequisites, students will need to become familiar with the art and culture of hip hop. Furthermore, the course investigates the intersections of social justice, artistic representation, and the use of interactive, digital innovation as one of its outcomes, and assumes the creation of digital art as a cultural endeavor. So in order to legitimately explore these campaigns, it is integral to include an interrogation of hip hop – its history, its innovations, its challenges, its sensibilities, its elements, its norms, but more specifically its relationship to art, popular culture, and the interactive storytelling embedded in its performance, production, and presentation.

Areas of focus include:

- The foundations of interactive narrative; the technical aspects and aesthetics of interactive narrative; understanding the nature of digital works, how to collect and manage digitized works such as art forms and media including but not limited to video games, photography, journalism, music and sound, dance, theater, film, and other web and new media art.
- The history and innovation of hip hop culture, popular music, and the production of works of art using new media technologies The relationship between hip hop, interactivity, and (digital) storytelling.
- The use of culturally-informed design principles in the analysis and curation of interactive narrative projects created to express themes and ideas generated from lyric poetry (ie album covers, short and long-form videos, film and animation, photography, concerts, meme culture, social media)

The course will diachronically examine music collections as a curatorial model for representing interactive narratives and digital art. Many artists and their music will be presented as case “lessons” in order to focus on a particular issue, contribution, or how an artist’s contribution may have created a cultural shift because of the application of digital technologies.

### **Course Aims**

Five major aims shape the structure of the course.

- To use popular music and culture as the mode of representation for exploring the conceptual, speculative aesthetics, and technical elements of interactive narrative
- To exit the course with a fundamental understanding of interactive narrative and digital storytelling. To draw on a rich dataset of media artifacts for analysis and enhance students’ knowledge base of techniques for designing works of art that utilize digital technology as part of the creative process.
- To provide students with a set of skills and tools for creating media products that intersect music, culture, technology, and social impact. Particular attention is given to issues of representation, identity, authenticity, politics, memory, racism, class, and how works of art are curated through digital technologies to express these concept
- To conceptualize interactive narrative as a pedagogy for facilitating voice, collaboration, inclusion, and resilience.
- To examine how music and music-centered artifacts serve as a medium for representing aspects of Black cultural expression and how they create and are created by other sociocultural construct.
- To understand interactive narrative construction as the result of a creative process producing fixed creative works that are to be consumed and archived; as performances to be experienced and therefore memorialized through documentation and recording; as the result of an execution of an application that is shareable and remixable through media such as social media (ie meme culture).

### **Course Objectives and Learning Outcomes**

As learning outcomes for the program, students will create digital artifacts with an awareness of media traditions, audience, and context. Students will also appreciate and evaluate future trends in the development of digital media. The main objectives are:

- Study interactive narrative as a design issue by exploring key elements of interactive narrative in various media,
- Advance the development of creative insights about interactive narrative as a mode for storytelling,
- Explore techniques such as virtual reality for interactive design,
- Explore software options for designing interactive narrat

### **My Approach: Hip Hop-Based Multi-Modal Interactivity**

Hip Hop culture’s storytelling sensibilities are used as a lens through which to explore the ancient tradition of narrative inquiry and interactivity albeit through new media technologies. Please keep in mind the course is not a substantive one focused on the nature of hip hop culture.

Instead it is a course that borrows from its sensibilities of cultural innovation. We apply hip hop's archival and technological sensibilities as a methodological approach for analyzing interactive narratives and designing environments. Therefore, as a case study I will talk through the design history of HipHop2020, an immersive digital archive that uses the pedagogical sensibilities of hip hop to forge educational innovation in an immersive way. It has been built using game design tools that advance its mission for storying culture and gamifying artifacts, which allows users to engage in multiple tasks, challenges, and trivia about the history of hip hop, its "language of schooling", and its influence as a transglobal social justice movement. Students will use the project as a reference point. The course will be conducted through lectures, student presentations, discussions, in-class group work. Through a series of modules, readings, workshops, and interactive activities students will have assignments that lead to the design of original interactive narratives.

The learning outcomes of the course are:

***Historical Analysis:*** Students will study cultural texts, screen documentary films, and interrogate examples of interactive narratives to form a working definition of what the genre is, its relationship to culture, and ground its affordances within principles of design and curation.

***Enhancement of Design Literacies:*** The films, reading, and assignments are designed to enhance the technical capacities of the students. Students will build upon their knowledge base with opportunities to experiment with illustration techniques, manipulation of images, animation, web design, the use of photography, video, and film, and modeling of virtual environments within physical environments. Students will apply the fundamentals of design with software such as Adobe Creative Suite, Unity, etc.

***Media Production and Team-Building:*** Students will examine the legacies of contemporary and historical graphic designers and their impact. Students will work as part of a production team to learn the conceptual and technical elements of producing a interactive narrative project aimed at having social impact. These projects will enhance their technical skills while also teaching them about organization, project management, communication, and the ethics of teamwork.

***Enhancement of Social Justice Literacies.*** Graphic designers play a key part in producing artifacts that have long-term impact on the ways in which the social world is represented through the media. Students will engage in projects that can help facilitate their civic engagement capacities and social justice literacies as they are youth influencers living in a technological world. Students will understand Hip Hop culture as a pedagogy of inclusion and resilience, but also as a community of practice inclusive of geographical social networks such as Atlanta, Georgia, nuanced by localized, environmental traditions, and how the politics of space and place impact works of art.

## GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Preparation:** The course is conducted as a traditional seminar lecture course. This means there are days when I will provide information in the form of a presentation, followed by a discussion of the materials. We have an aggressive reading, writing, listening, viewing, and discussion

schedule that you will be expected to ACTIVELY meet and participate in. You will also make presentations as they relate to discussion topics, posts, and the final production of your group's media project. Many of our topics will challenge your comfort zone and force you to be critical of the material and your thoughts on the material. But keep in mind that I don't care about what you think or how you feel. I only care about whether or not you can develop an informed opinion that is substantiated by the analysis, research, and overall scholarship. The number one rule is preparation. Come on-time ready to participate. The number two rule is to push yourself out of your comfort zones as there will be many times the content and readings will challenge your thinking in new ways! In addition to the schedule attached, students may receive a weekly agenda preceding the next class meeting. This agenda will announce updates on readings, assignments, preparations, due dates, and any adjustments I have made to the schedule.

**Attendance:** Attendance is absolutely vital to your success in my class; a roll is circulated in every class period. If you have more than three unexcused absences, chronic tardiness, failure to have read enough to engage in the discussions, and other disruptions such as texting, talking on the phone, falling asleep I will consider this an absence and as apathy towards the class and the material. You will be marked absent for the day.

**Reasons for absences.** The attendance policy does not make any distinction about the reasons for your absences. Only absences officially exempted by the Institute (e.g., due to participation in official GA Tech athletics, to religious observance, to personal or family crisis confirmed by documentation from the Dean of Students) will not be counted among your allotted absences. These exemptions are difficult to get.

**Responsibility for missed work.** Students are responsible for finding out what they may have missed while absent from class and what policy the instructor has for making up missed work. However, if you are not present to participate in a group presentation or the final group production, you will fail the course.

**Absence penalties.** Each additional absence after the allotted number deducts one-third of a letter grade from your final grade. Missing six (6) classes results in automatic failure of the class.

Think ahead. If you know in advance that you must miss a certain class meeting be sure not to miss more than three others. If you need to leave a class session early, please inform me before the start of the session and sit near the front of the room so that your departure can be minimally disruptive.

**Personal Electronics:** My preference is that you do not use devices such as laptops, tablets, etc when it is not necessary. They are sometimes an interruption to the engagement of the materials and a distraction to discussions. On most days, you will be asked to put the machines away and utilize the required journal/sketchbook for the course. If you are found to be using a device for any purpose not necessary to the immediate conduct of the course, you will be marked absent for the day. If I ask you to put your device away, I expect you to graciously do so. **You may not, without my written consent, audio or video record my lectures.**

All devices should remain on vibrate. If you are expecting an important call, remember to sit near the door so there is little to no interruption when you exit.

**Social Media:** I understand you will be tempted to tweet, snapchat, or post on Instagram or Facebook. However, wait until after we have our time together. With that, please put your laptops away in class unless you have a documented disability that requires you to take notes on a laptop or unless I give you permission to use it for a particular activity. We are keeping it old-school. My recommendation is that you bring a pencil or pen, and a sketchbook to take notes to archive any illustrations you will create.

Please note that Georgia Tech policy requires you to wait twenty minutes for the instructor to arrive before concluding that the class is not meeting (this policy is included here primarily for your information).

### **Required Texts**

The required text for this course is Murray, J. Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace, <https://inventingthemedium.com/glossary/>, and (<https://inventingthemedium.com/glossary/>) (Links to an external site.) [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patty\\_Kostkova/publication/271013270\\_Learning\\_through\\_Interactive\\_Digital\\_Narratives/links/556c946908aec](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Patty_Kostkova/publication/271013270_Learning_through_Interactive_Digital_Narratives/links/556c946908aec) (Links to an external site.) [through-Interactive-Digital-Narratives.pdf](#)

You will also find helpful (but not required) **Christiane Paul's Digital Art, Third Edition (2015)** and **Context Provider: Conditions of Meaning in Media Arts (2011)**

Supplementary chapters, journal articles, TED Talks, and commentaries will either be uploaded to Canvas, or you can find them online.

### **Recommended Storygames and Videogames (others will be assigned for analysis):**

Half Life 2; The Witcher 3; The Last of Us; Firewatch; Metal Gear Solid 3

### **Recommended Interactive Films and Documentaries**

There are a number of films and documentaries we will screen in and out of class. Here are a few: <http://blog.visme.co/10-mind-blowing-interactive-stories-that-will-change-the-way-you-see-the-world/> (Links to an external site.) **stories-that-will-change-the-way-you-see-the-world/**

### **Recommended Samples of Interactive Journalism**

<https://advocacyassembly.org/en/news/19/>

### **Required Materials**

You will need to purchase a journal and/or sketchbook for in-class reflections, notetaking, and outlining of production notes. Please complete the software evaluation survey.

## **DESCRIPTION OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS**

### ***Individual assignments***



### **Design/Discussion Posts (6 @10 points each; Myintro is a two-part assignment that is worth 20)**

Students are required to post a written, illustration, or video reading response to the course's discussion thread. These posts should be a paragraph. No more than two. For this assignment, the goal is to frame the assigned readings for the week by raising (but not necessarily answering) key questions, concerns, arguments, and positions taken by the author or producer of the film. These posts will either serve as discussions to close out the week or to help guide discussions for the upcoming seminar. Another approach you might take is to respond to another student's post. You might add to it, challenge it, but do not attack it.

To ensure that everyone has a chance to read the post before class, you must post your response by 8am the Monday before class in order for it to count as your post for the week.

### **Vocabulary Quiz (30 points)**

Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to use the language of the field as much as naturally possible. As terms and concepts are provided - along with examples of them, you will be expected to describe a set of fundamental terms regarding interactive narrative as tool and medium.

### **“Interrogating Interactive Narrative” Mid-term Critical Synthesis Essay (1 @ 20 points each)**

Students are required to turn in one critical synthesis essay over the course of the 16-week semester. By mid-semester, it is my goal for you to have a better understanding of the foundations of interactive narrative as both a tool and medium. In this mid-term paper, you may use the weekly discussions as drafts to articulate a more clear and concise analysis. You will need to refer to no less than a combination of 5 references. That is, the two assigned books, one article, and two works of art.

The essay can also take the form of a review, depending on the activities we engage in while in class: class discussions, in-class viewing assignments, and analysis of the cultural material we will explore. Keep in mind, the purpose of the reflection is to show that you have both a cultural and technical understanding and grasp of the analysis methods used in class. This mid-term essay should be no longer than three pages only: two for text and the third is a reference page. They should follow either MLA, APA, or Chicago guidelines for in-text referencing and citations. Using 11 or 12-point Times or Times New Roman font, essays should be **double-spaced, have one-inch margins, a title (not title-page), and include a top-right heading** that consists of *your name, the date, the name of the course, and the instructor's name*. These essays will be read and graded according to the posted rubric.

One last thing on these reflections: your job will be to take the main idea(s) and articulate a position. This is not simply “Yes, I agree with this or that.” Instead this is your opportunity to articulate the synthesis of your critical thoughts as they relate to the readings and discussions. This is an opportunity to show me, through your writing, that you are investing time in the material. This is important to our study because listening to music material and viewing film and video is a vital component to understanding the loftiness of the material. Please think of the music, film, and video resources as primary texts for the course.

There is no mechanism for making up the essays unless you have an official excuse. DO NOT E-MAIL ME YOUR ESSAYS! I will not read them. This critical response must be submitted through Canvas by 8am on the due date.

### *Group Assignments*

#### **Short Presentations on Interactive Narrative Examples (3 @ 20 points)**

Students will present short assessments of various interactive narrative projects with the goal of considering the cultural, technological, and storytelling properties of each. Students will have 10 minutes to deliver an organized presentation and overview to student peers.

We will set up a regular schedule on which a pair will make a 15-minute presentation to the class. These are to be value-added presentations, by which I mean that you should bring in information and ideas that are directly related to but also complementary to the topic and reading of that class session, not duplicate the information and ideas in the readings. The best procedure is probably to do the reading for the session and thus find something you'd like to know more about or that isn't discussed sufficiently (or perhaps at all) in the reading material. Do some research and work up a presentation for the class. If you would like suggestions of topics, I will be happy to provide some at any point. Please note that you are not required to inform me of your topic ahead of time, though you certainly may if you wish to.

You should include any visual or audio materials that will help you communicate your ideas and information, as you'll see me do, and you have the right to ask the class to do a short reading, viewing, or listening assignment as long as you can provide us with the material sufficiently ahead of time.

If something comes up and you need to be absent on a day you are supposed to make one of these kinds of presentations or one related to your project, you must make an arrangement with another student to exchange days and inform me of the change.

#### **Prototypes/ Final Group Project Narrative (20 (Part 1)/40 points (Part 2))**

Remember the storyboard created by your team? For this project, you and your working group members will advance the storyboard to prototype as you all approach the final interactive narrative. This project is in the vein of single authorship, which is usually the case of the traditional narrative and the interactive "whatever"; by this, I mean you will present this as a design team since many interactive narratives are the collaborative efforts of multiple authors, writers, and designers. As a group, you might develop a videogame, a story game, an interactive archive, etc. We will use the logline to help develop a genre to brand your project. Therefore, I will leave it up to you all to determine the kind of interactive narrative you will prototype.

### **GRADING SYSTEM**

Lastly, do not underestimate the course as an "easy A" just because we will do things like analyze popular media texts, watch films, and listen to rap music. You will be expected to meet all of the set deadlines according to the assignments. You will be responsible and held accountable for the readings. You will be expected to submit your very best work without typos. That doesn't mean that you have to write like Ernest Hemingway or incorporate metaphors like Toni Morrison. But you WILL be expected to follow the assignment rubrics, consider my



suggestions for improvement, and submit exemplary work. Work that meets the basic requirements of the assignment will mostly receive a grade of “C”. I reserve “A” and “B” for work that is distinctively high-quality content.

I use a point-based grading system. These points are accumulated according to rubrics designated for each assignment. Your grade will be based on the following criteria.

### **Point Disbursements**

Class Participation and Attendance	160 points
3 Seminar Presentations	60 points
Vocabulary Quiz	30 points
Interrogating Interactive Narrative Essay	20 points
Discussion Posts	60 points
Interactive Narrative Campaign, Parts 1-2	60 points
Total Possible Points:	390

### ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES

#### **The Communication Center**

The Communication Center is located in Clough Commons, Suite 447. It is an excellent resource for any student (undergraduate or graduate) who wants help with a communication-related project. You can visit the center for help at any stage of the process for any project in any discipline. The knowledgeable and friendly tutors are available to help you develop and revise your projects. They are not available to “fix” your projects. Please do not ask the tutors to proofread or edit your projects. For information on making an appointment please visit this website:

<<http://communicationcenter.gatech.edu/content/make-appointment> (Links to an external site.)

If you need assistance with the appointment system, you can call 404-385-3612 or stop by the center. All services are free and confidential.

#### **DILAC (Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center)**

DILAC is located in room 318 of Skiles Classroom Building, in a makerspace built to encourage individual work, discussion, critique, and collaboration. It is staffed for regular business hours and happy to assist you in developing project ideas, equipment use, or anything else you might need. There is a wide array of cutting-edge equipment, including GoPros, Arduinos, and all major VR platforms. DILAC also is equipped with powerful computers and the necessary software for high-level digital work. For more information such as hours of operation and equipment use, see [here](https://dilac.iac.gatech.edu/lab-space) (<https://dilac.iac.gatech.edu/lab-space>).

## **Students With Disabilities**

Any student who feels that he/she may need an accommodation for any sort of disability, please make an appointment to see the instructor during office hours. Students with disabilities should also contact Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students (ADAPTS) to discuss reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a counselor call (404) 894-2564 (voice) / (404) 894-1664 (voice/TDD) or visit Suite 210 in the Smithgall Student Services Building. For more information visit the following website: <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu/>. (Links to an external site.)

## **Academic Honesty**

All work you turn in for this class must be your own work, with all outside reference sources properly cited and acknowledged. The "Student Conduct Code of the Rules and Regulations" (Georgia Institute of Technology General Catalog, Section XIX) states, "Academic misconduct is an act that does or could improperly distort student grades or other student academic records" and offers the following descriptive list:

- Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;
- Substitution for, or unauthorized collaboration with, a student in the commission of academic requirements;
- Submission of material that is wholly or substantially identical to that created or published by another person or persons, without adequate credit notations indicating authorship (plagiarism);
- False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;
- Alteration or insertion of any academic grade or rating so as to obtain unearned academic credit; Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of the student.

The Code continues, "While these acts constitute assured instances of academic misconduct, other acts of academic misconduct may be defined by the professor." Consult [the Honor Code online at http://www.honor.gatech.edu/](http://www.honor.gatech.edu/) (Links to an external site.) or in the General Catalog to remember your primary commitment to academic honesty. Students who engage in academic dishonesty may receive a 0.0 on the assignment or fail the course. In addition, the instance will be reported to the Dean of Students who may take further action.