IML (TBD)

Transmedia Production: Film, Games, Animation & Virtual Reality

Spring 2018
[Course Meeting Days/Times]
[Course Location]

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience."

- Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture,* 2006

Some of the prototypical transmedia enterprises include Star Wars, Harry Potter, the Matrix, or any of the Marvel movies. The term transmedia describes a production process where the creators construct a unified world, with multiple media objects (films, TV shows, games, etc.) and stories coming from that one unified story space. This course is about methods for crafting linked stories across diverse mediums. We will study this through technology and storytelling, but also through the neuroscience of the mind. We will consider ways of discovering and creating meaning recognizing the embodied nature of the human mind, as neuroscience clarifies that the mind is the body and the brain linked dynamically. Through everything from game design and play to the study of perception, virtual reality, theater, dance, sound design, and production design, we will develop concrete strategies to access the implicit knowledge of our bodies while creating stories in a unified fictional world. Students will be challenged to engage with theoretical concepts and production techniques, relying not only on their intellectual capacity for producing work, but also exercising their affective, intuitive, physical, and emotional capacity to generate content. We will study the production of meaningful mega structures (transmedia enterprises), by mastering interdisciplinary research, production techniques, and design methodologies.

In order to work quickly and rapidly produce prototypes, we will use readily available equipment: cell phones, computers and cameras students already own.

COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

This is similar to an introductory cinema production course, except it will provide a broad overview of media production techniques, and we will use these skills to learn various methodologies for research

and content generation. In an era of rapid technological, cultural, and media evolution, students will be called upon to be agile innovators, media makers, storytellers, entrepreneurs, and collaborative professionals bridging interdisciplinary fields. Additionally, they will need to respond to ever-changing environmental, economic, and social factors. In this course, students will learn processes they can adapt to the demands of their diverse fields, while helping them focus their own research interests and contributions. Students will work toward answering the following questions for themselves: which tools allow me to effectively research my interests and hypotheses; which forms appropriately communicate the content I want to investigate; and which elements in our society am I inspired to research or change? By studying design methodologies, the course will teach students methods of problem finding and divergent thinking, which psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has identified as critical to creativity.

This course is designed to appeal to undergraduates from diverse majors who are interested in producing transmedia entertainment platforms. The design of a robust world demands a comprehensive understanding of multifarious media production techniques, and this course will help students understand how to research, test, and create these dynamic entertainment super-systems. A focus will also remain on producing work with quality and meaning, considering the ideological decision making processes involved in any media production.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
- Students will have an opportunity to craft multiple media projects, built around a single world of their own design. Through this process, they will have a crash course in production techniques, as well as an opportunity to think through methods of creating a unified world.
- We will learn some of the research techniques of design methodologies, including worldbuilding. The worldbuilding process includes working collaboratively, building embodied research skills, mapping and presenting research content, conducting and utilizing expert interviews, and imagining future solutions to problems through fiction scenarios, physical improvisation, and rapid prototyping. These processes teach problem finding skills from the design field, as well as concrete methods of divergent thinking.
- Students will take steps toward identifying core themes driving their creative work and research. 'Research' will not be limited to computer work, but will include paper prototyping, media production, and improvisation designed to investigate student led topics.
- Students will leave the class with toolbox of embodied methodologies for future projects.
- Students will read critically and apply theory and research to their work, they will contextualize their projects within the field, and engage in providing and receiving constructive feedback.

SCHEDULE
This class is broken into modules. Each module will last at least one week, with a few lasting longer; the modules will be presented in the following order, unless the students decide to rearrange them.

1 - Sound Design | as experience

- We will focus on perceiving sound and learning techniques of sound design, this module concludes with a short sound designed project 1-2 minutes long.
- We will take a 'sound walk' and write a 'sound journal' for five minutes a day for a week.
- Sound as signifier, Don Norman: *The Design of Everyday Things*, 155-161. This reading considers the emotional impact of sound and the information sound carries.
- "Designing A Movie for Sound," Thom, Randy. Randy Thom's arguments contribute to the conversation on the role of sound in media production.
- "Making gamers cry: mirror neurons and embodied interaction with game sound." Collins, Karen. This article focuses on the neuroscience of how sound elicits emotion.
- Excerpt from *Playtime* (Jacques Tati, 1967) Creating an orchestra in a cityscape.

2 – Problem Finding

- This module will focus on developing each student's world. Students will produce short written stories from the world and begin a research map of their world. We will focus on the methods of problem finding, an inquiry that will continue throughout the course.
- We will consider constraints, themes, pedagogy and the learning process.
- "One of my rules in consulting is simple: never solve the problem I am asked to solve… In the real world, the problems do not come in nice, neat packages. They have to be discovered. It is all too easy to see only the surface problems and never dig deeper to address the real issues" (217-218. Don Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*)
- "What in The World? Storyworlds, Science Fiction, and Future Studies" McDowell, Alex and Peter Von Stackelberg. This article discusses theories of worldbuilding.
- John Cage, Visual Scores + Writings

3 – Experience Design | Touch, Look + Feel

- This module will last for two weeks and produce two outputs. The first is a prototype app for iPAD, phone, or other mobile device. The second is an object from the student's world—a pencil, a pair of glasses, or a model of a computer. The objects can be crudely constructed, but they must have a story about their use and connect to the society.
- We will explore the qualities of experience and how we experience the world, especially objects, culminating in discussions of experience design.
- Don Norman, "Fundamental Principles of Interaction," and "The Psychology of Everyday Actions" in *The Design of Everyday Things*
- Excerpts from *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*, Sherry Turkle

4 – Types of Intelligence: Spatial Thinking

- Students will be responsible for finding a problem in their world, they will then create a narrative that explains that problem through a different intelligence. As an example,

they could identify a problem in science, and explain it through metaphorical spatial relationships. Twyla Tharp claims all art is metaphor, so students will investigate metaphor as a tool for building their worlds.

- Howard Gardner, Frames of Mind: "6 – Musical Intelligence," "8 – Spatial Intelligence," "Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence," These chapters provide examples of intelligence and learning that will expand our thinking on techniques for solving problems.

5 – Gesture | Theater and Improvisation

- Students will produce a short choreographed interaction between two people from their world; no dialogue allowed. Produce a short video or a brief performance.
- "How Gestures Affect Thought" from *Hand and Mind*, David McNeill. This text elaborates how gesture shapes thought and language.
- "Chapter 8: Hidden Cognition," Touching a Nerve, Patricia S. Churchland. This reading elaborates some of the science of thought in gesture.
- Tom Marioni, Tim Knowles "Tree Drawings." We will discuss 'gesture' in humans, animals, plants, and inanimate objects such as machines.

6 – Play | Story

- Students will consider play in media production, producing a structured play activity from their world. Who does this activity? What does it reveal about social dynamics and values? How can the activity demonstrate something special in the world? Can this play solve problems in the world? One day will be devoted to playing these activities.
- *Critical Play*, "Performative Games and Objects," Mary Flanagan.
- "The play is now reality: affective turns, narrative struggles, and theorizing emotion as practical experience." Kumar, A. The power of play in multiple contexts.
- "Stories Have the Power To Save Us" Le Hunte, Bem and Jan A Golembiewski. We will consider playing with everything from descriptive detail to abstract concepts.

7 – Memory | + gesture

- Students will create a poignant memory from a character in their world. The challenge is to create a short animated depiction of any moment from the memory; the animations will be 1-5 seconds long and will be produced during class time.
- "memory is a physical act" (148). "Embodied Memory and Extra-Daily Gesture" Neal Utterback.
- While you are animating, we will listen to podcasts and consider the science of memory, utilizing Lynda Barry's technique of listening to theory while drawing or animating.
- "The Conscious Life Examined" in *Touching A Nerve*, Patricia Churchland
- "Harness your memory," in *The Creative Habit*, Twyla Tharp
- (nostalgia) (Hollis Frampton, 1971)

8 – Touch | + thought

- The challenge is to figure out how to create a piece of digital art that includes fingerprints. How can characters from the student's world 'touch' digital media? How can we 'touch' digital media, if touch is significant to human experience?
- "The world cannot be translated, it can only be dreamed of and touched." - Dejan Stojanovic, "World II," p.84
- Excerpts from *The Meaning of the Body*, Mark Johnson
- "Cinema as Skin and Touch." Elsaesser, Thomas and Malte Hagener.

9 – Emotion + Decision-Making

- Here we will focus on the effect of emotion on human experience and decision-making. Students will craft a brief story in the medium of their choice: drawing, writing, animating, through sound design, game design, etc.; which conveys how a character or characters in the world made a decision because of their emotional investments.
- Excerpts from *The Feeling of What Happens,* Antonio Damasio; "Feeling and Knowing," "Feeling Feelings," "Notes on Mind and Brain." This reading discusses the role of emotion and feeling in creating self and cognition of the world.
- We will also cover Don Norman's concepts of the visceral, behavioral and reflective.
- "Bodily maps of emotions." Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., Hari, R., & Hietanen, J. K.

10 – Metaphor

- Expanding our initial encounter with metaphor, students will propose a solution to a problem in their world through metaphor. Students can use any media tool they prefer.
- Discussions of how to create "concrete thought."
- Excerpts from Johnson and Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By*, including "How Metaphor Can Give Meaning to Form." Discussion of form and content.

11 – Space | Virtual Reality + Production Design

- This module allows students to design or represent space through virtual reality and/or production design. This project should reflect a space in the world, and students can choose any media tool. VR projects will be paper prototypes. Students can make maps, or depict the space of a person's desk, anything from the large scale to the miniature.
- Field trip to USC VR Labs: Jaunt, MxR, and World Building Media Lab
- We will discuss production design, virtual reality, and the body in space and time.
- *Repulsion* (Roman Polanski, 1965)

11 – Synthesis

- Students will share an abbreviated synthesis of their world, elaborating the world's greatest problems-and how they discovered them; explaining the divergent thinking they used to innovate novel solutions for these problems; and finally comparing their fictional world to our real world, exploring insights that may be applicable to real life.

ADDITIONAL MEDIA

- "Sensory Overload" (Miguel Jiron, short animation, 2012)
- *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1990)
- *Levitated Mass* (Doug Pray, 2014)
- Media and Performance works by Miwa Matreyek + Cloud Eye Control
- "The Machine to Be Another" (BeAnotherLab)
- City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City (Ian Lambot)
- Work of James Tyrrell
- Work of Michael Asher
- Work of Robert Irwin
- *Pry*, Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro
- Tim Knowles, Tree Drawings
- Projection Mapping Works by Joanie Lemercier
- WbML "Leviathan" Virtual Reality Experience (2014 + 2016)

POSSIBLE GUEST SPEAKERS

- Chanel Summers, Interactive Sound Designer
- Richard Burton, Film Sound Designer
- Alex McDowell, World Builder + Production Designer
- Hannah Sanghee Park, Poet + Screenwriter
- Henry Jenkins, Transmedia Specialist
- Miwa Matreyek, Animator, Collage Artist, Performer
- Christine Panushka, Animator
- Marsha Kinder, Transmedia Database Projects + Autobiographical Identity
- Jeff Watson, Game Designer
- Javier Barboza, Animator

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course will utilize a traditional structure, but students will also develop their own digital scholarship using SCALAR projects to collate their research and any media produce. These digital SCALAR projects can remain unpublished if students prefer to keep their work private.

SAMPLE GRADED PROJECT

Please reference the sound design articles we read and discussed in class (listed below), as well as the media works we analyzed while developing your sound design project.

- Thom, Randy, "Designing A Movie for Sound"
- Cameron, Evan William, ed. Sound and the Cinema: The Coming of Sound to American Film.
- Collins, Karen. "Making gamers cry: mirror neurons and embodied interaction with game sound."
- Miguel Jiron, *Sensory Overload* (short animation)

In the last two weeks we utilized multiple methods to hone our awareness of sound and its presence in our environment and effects on our state of being. We built a vocabulary for talking about and analyzing sound, engaged with critical and creative texts considering the use and meaning of sound, and analyzed films, game sound, and spatial sound design to understand its affective and intellectual resonances. You heard from world-renowned interactive sound designer Chanel Summers.

Following our 20 minute 'sound walk,' you witnessed first hand the auditory cues that inform and shape our environment. In sharing your observations with each other, the subjectivity of auditory experience also took became clearer. Your daily sound journal, observing sound for five minutes a day over the course of two weeks, has helped you evolve a heightened awareness of sound.

Conceptualize an audio environment in your world. What does a store sound like, a street? Imagine and develop an audio environment, and then think of an interaction in that space that would represent a change of emotion or a progression from place to another. The emotion could be as abstract as moving from sadness to happiness, and the place could be as simple as moving from a quiet to a loud location.

Utilizing the sound software of your choice (we will go over the basics of the free software Audacity), along with the USC sound libraries, and your own sound recording capabilities (with your phones or other devices), you will **craft a 1-2 minute sound journey that represents your story world. Your piece should elicit a sense of emotion or a movement between places. You will also write a 1-page reflection on your process and critical and creative influences.**

Deliverables
- 1-2 minute audio file in .wav format
- 1 page reflection on your method and what you learned about the world from this exercise

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or requests for technical assistance!