**HS 248 MACHINES TO THINK WITH**
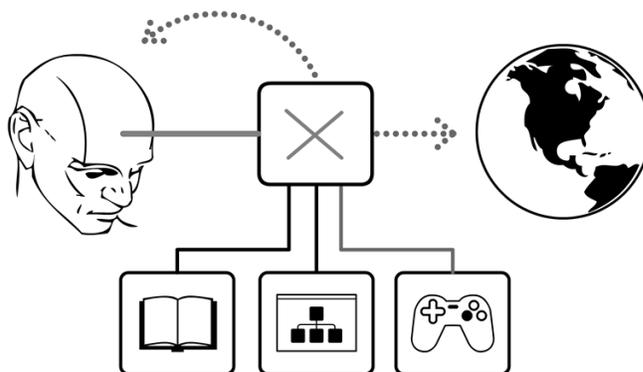
**Cornish College of the Arts**
*Humanities and Sciences Department*

Course:      **HS 248 01 LE**
Semester:   **Spring 2015**
Time:         **M+W  6.00p-7.20p**
Location:    **MCC 305**
Instructor:  **Terry Schenold**

Email:       **tschenold@cornish.edu**
Website:    **http://courses.bloodedbythought.org/m2tw**

"It remains true that there is, after all, nothing but imagination that can ever supply [us] an inkling of the truth. [We] can stare stupidly at phenomena; but in the absence of imagination they will not connect themselves together in any rational way."

- Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*

"Media are a means of individuating thoughts."

- Matthias Vogel, *Media of Reason*

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

*Machines to Think With* is a course exploring ideas and experiences of narrative across three different forms of expressive media. Following I.A. Richard's provocative descriptions of literary texts as "machines to think with" and "speculative instruments," we will consider how these media organize language and the aesthetic experience of information to express stories and enable complex reasoning about and criticism of ideas, such as empathy, justice, selfhood, monstrosity and humanity. We will also attend to how different forms of media challenge us to do different kinds of imaginative work, to think with them and to critically model our understanding of their particular organization and history. Coursework will be organized through focused readings of three exemplars with thematic similarities: Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, Shelley Jackson's hypertext fiction *Patchwork Girl*, and Jonathan Blow's videogame *Braid*, and supported by selected readings on media poetics and aesthetic theory.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1) Develop technical, reflective reading practices that involve methodical attention to the details, order, and functioning of a given work, connecting it to history, and reasoning about its strategies for organizing experience, communicating ideas, and providing resources for critical reflection.

2) Deepen understanding of narrative design and media poetics of exemplary works in three primary media forms: novel, hypertext fiction, and videogame.

3) <u>Provide historical and philosophical resources</u> for understanding novels, hypertext fiction and videogames as fundamental forms of reasoning, cultural commentary, and expression.

4) <u>Facilitate moral reasoning about topics addressed in media</u> we collectively read and experience in the course with an emphasis on application to everyday life in contemporary society.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The class sessions will be a <u>lecture/seminar hybrid</u> that will include short lectures that make use of multimedia, detail-oriented analysis of selected media, and guided discussion. We will also collectively create a series of structured roundtable discussions recorded as podcasts on topics of interest to the class.

## EXPERIMENTS

The short lectures will provide historical context, conceptual resources, and a narrative of ideas for understanding the assigned media, but *the most important and lasting development that occurs in any educational program is self-development*. Much of the course is concerned with the creation of the *conditions* for this aspect of education. The assignments listed below will constitute the memorable core of your learning experience and will provide opportunity for discoveries not only about the works under scrutiny, but your own values and selfhood.

Just as the development of scientific understanding of the natural world cannot proceed very far on received knowledge and the isolated speculative reasoning of an individual, understanding human culture *and ourselves* requires, perhaps counter-intuitively, purposeful experimentation and collaboration with other people. Only so much can be achieved from information and introspection. These assignments should be understood as experiments—as mediums for understanding, designed to provide opportunity for insight and collaborative inquiry. *Detailed documents explaining these works will be given in class, but here is a quick overview*:

Discussion Participation & Blogging
Being engaged not only entails attending, paying attention in class and following the material, but also actively contributing to the class sessions. This means sharing insights and questions on lecture or readings in discussion – both those that arise organically in class and those that you have formulated in preparation for class. Posting insightful *commentary* on the course blog is also another way to contribute to the class.

Reading Quizzes
We will have daily short quizzes on assigned reading. These are meant to monitor attentiveness and measure very general comprehension of the reading—broad themes, key concepts, general arguments, etc. These will not include obscure points or require complicated scholarly inferences: just do the reading with your brain turned on and your iPod and smartphone off (gasp!).

Formal Commentaries
Over the course of the semester you compose some formal commentaries responding to prompts on specific passages. These will be exercises in careful reading that are meant to develop detailed and grounded understanding of the material.

Roundtable Session Participation & Paper
At the end of the semester we will collectively produce a series of roundtable discussions based on topical papers written in thematic clusters. We will organize into groups to research and respond to key ideas and

questions in the course. Papers will serve as preparation for the roundtable sessions, which will proceed in the manner of a conference panel. These sessions will be recorded and collected into an audio "casebook".

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Although there are no required *textbooks* you will need the following in order to participate fully in the course:

Internet: We will make heavy use of the course website for distributing media (readings, video links, game software), archiving course documents, and tracking revisions to the schedule based on our collective progress, and blogging. Therefore, you will need to have daily access to the Web. *Required supplementary texts will either be downloadable as PDFs or Web-based*, thus requiring software for reading/printing PDFs and a modern Internet browser. Most computer devices purchased in the last 4 or so years have this ability by default.

Texts/Media: Here is a list of required purchases for the course:

- Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*
- Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* ($25, Eastgate Systems)
- Jonathan Blow's *Braid* ($10, Steam)

## DEMONSTRATION OF LEARNING & EVALUATION

Evaluation methods will vary by assignment so more detailed information will be given on specific assignment documents, but the course will follow the Humanities and Sciences grading system summarized below.

| A | 4.0 | C+ | 2.3 | D+ | 1.3 |
|---|-----|----|-----|----|-----|
| A- | 3.7 | C | 2.0 | D | 1.0 |
| B+ | 3.3 | C- | 1.7 | D- | 0.7 |
| B | 3.0 | | | | |
| B- | 2.7 | | | F | 0.0 |

The final grade in the course reflects the following elements:

- Discussion Participation & Blogging     20%     all semester
- Reading Quizzes     35%     all semester
- Formal Commentaries (x2)     20%     TBD
- Roundtable Paper & Session     25%     TBD

Please also consider the following departmental policy on attendance for the course:

| Effect of Absences on *Final Grade* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Absences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| Max Grade Possible | A/A- | | | A- | B+ | B | B- | C+ | C | C- | D+ | D | D- | F |

After 3 absences the final grade you can earn in the course is reduced with each subsequent unexcused absence. The success of this course depends on many elements, one of which is our ability as a group to create a dependable community of vigorous and searching inquiry built on the accrual of common

understandings as well as cognitive diversity. In the case of the former, if you miss class you will become alienated from the common understanding; in the case of the latter, the group cannot benefit from your humanity, your insights, your unique experience and point of view. In this context, showing up to class takes on a moral quality! If you must miss class because "life happened" contact me ahead of time via email. Please note that it is your responsibility to get caught up by going to the website for lecture slides and consulting your colleagues for notes on discussion.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

The reading/gaming schedule below is <u>an idealized plan and should be considered tentative</u>. The goal is not to get through all the material for its own sake, but rather to understand and explore the material as much as we can.

## WEEK 1 - READING & AESTHETIC REASONING

- Syllabus
- Wallace Stevens, "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself"
- Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes the Memorious"

## WEEK 2 - THE IDEA OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

- Immanuel Kant, excerpts, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790)
- Friedrich Schiller, Letters II-IX, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (1794)
- Gayatri Spivak, [video] "Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization" (2010)

## WEEKS 3,4,5 - NOVEL

- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)
- Marie-Laure Ryan, "Introduction," *Narrative Across Media* (2004)

## WEEK 6 - ERGODIC EXPERIENCE

- Espen Aarseth, excerpts, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* (1997)
- Shelley Jackson, "Stitch Bitch" & "My Body"

## WEEKS 7,8 - HYPERTEXT

- Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl* (1995)

## WEEK 9 - ATTENTION ECONOMIES & MEDIA POETICS

- Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention" (2007)
- Marshall McLuhan, "Medium is the Message" & "Media Hot & Cold" *Understanding Media* (1964)
- Janet Murray, "Games as Joint-Attentional Scenes" (2007)

## WEEKS 10,11,12 - GAME

♦ Jonathan Blow, *Braid* (2006)

## WEEKS 13,14 - MACHINES THAT MATTER

♦ Roundtable Planning

## WEEK 15 - AESTHETIC EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

♦ Reflections, Evaluations

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## DEPARTMENT PRACTICE AND POLICY

<u>Academic Etiquette</u>
♦ Arrive on time
♦ Cell phones off unless being used for purposes related to the course
♦ No headphone use during class time unless approved by instructor
♦ No checking e-mail or text messaging
♦ No surfing the Web during class unless for purposes related to the course
♦ Respectful participation and discussion is expected

<u>Attendance</u>: The learning experience cannot be duplicated outside of class and depends on the participation of all classroom community members.  Attendance is required for all Humanities and Sciences courses. In all other Humanities and Sciences courses, students are permitted three absences before having their grade affected.  In all courses, these permitted absences include absence due to personal matters or illness, and absences due to departmental commitments, such as rehearsals, performances, or show installation.  In all cases, it is the responsibility of the student to alert his or her instructor of a pending absence and to make arrangements to complete all coursework in a timely manner.

<u>Academic Honesty</u>: The College demands a high level of artistic integrity and academic honesty on the part of students. No form of academic dishonesty (for example, cheating and plagiarism) will be tolerated.  If an instructor demonstrates to the Department Chair that a student is guilty of academic dishonesty, the student will be assigned a failing grade for the entire course.
All cases of academic dishonesty are reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee. Disciplinary action may be determined by the Academic Standards Committee depending on the circumstances of the particular case. Further disciplinary actions may include warning, probation, suspension, and expulsion.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

<u>Student Affairs</u>: Student Affairs is dedicated to enhancing and complementing students' educational experience through programs, services and opportunities that aid in their personal development.  Student Affairs is committed to community building, co-curricular learning, and student support.  If you are a student with a documented disability and you need accommodations, please make an appointment with the

staff in Student Affairs, located in room 301 at the Main Campus Center.  You can call 206-726-5098 to reach them.


Counseling: The mission of the Counseling Offices at Cornish College of the Arts is to assist students with their academic and artistic pursuits by providing supportive counseling, referrals and outreach programs that promote students' mental health and emotional well being. To schedule an appointment, call a Counselor at 206-726-5027 or 206-726-5047. If they are not available, please leave a message on their voicemail and they will return your call as soon as possible.  The Counseling Offices are located in rooms 308 A & B in the Main Campus Center.

Writing Center: The Writing Center, located in MCC 212 (next to the library), provides Cornish students with free and personalized writing support. Writers can visit for a conference on essays for courses, resumes and cover letters, artist statements, or anything else that includes writing. Writing Center Peer Consultants can help during any and all stages of your writing process,
from brainstorming to editing. Drop by to learn more about what's happening in the Writing Center or to use our computers and printer.

In addition to drop-in hours Mon-Fri, the Writing Center now accepts submission of writing ONLINE 24 hours a day. Writers who use the online service can expect a video response from a consultant containing suggestions addressing the writer's concerns.

Visit http://www.cornish.edu/academics/writing_center/ for hours, contact information, or to submit your writing for feedback.

## GENERAL SAFETY
Please inform yourself of safety procedures for this room, including emergency evacuation routes and the location of the closest first aid kits and fire extinguishers. Consult the Health & Safety Procedures booklet posted near doors and eyewash stations. Detailed information is also provided in the College student handbook.