HIST3812|DIGH3812: Playful Engagement with the Past

How do we write 'good history' through playful engagements? What does 'good history' look like, how is it constructed, and what happens when it meets digital technologies? Those are the questions we are trying to answer this term. I suspect the answer involves 'enchantment'. HIST3812 is a studio-based engagement with the past. We're building games and other playful approaches to communicating the past, examining the past, and challenging the past…. now and into the future

The course is divided into three parts, with three interstitial weeks where we build things – mostly using video game engines but other options are possible. We meet Mondays and Wednesdays 13.05-14.25 in TB 208. Mondays are generally days where I set the scene. Wednesdays require your active presence & participation as we try things. The final thing you'll build will be an 'unessay'.

Do I Have To Be Techy?
In a word, **no**! You do have to be willing to be comfortable with experimentation, with things that break, and with asking for help from your peers or from the prof.

My 'Technical' Objectives for You
I aim to:
- build your confidence with a variety of appropriate technologies
- teach you how to teach yourself:
    - how to document process
    - how to find help
    - how to help others
- foster a critical approach to digital techs, asking such questions as:
    - what does this tech assume about how the world works?
    - who could this harm?
    - who could it support?

This class may be a bit different from most of your classes so far at Carleton. I hope you will see these differences as exciting and intellectually stimulating, but you should be aware of the following caveats as we begin. If you can face these challenges with persistence, verve, and (reasonably) good humour we should have an intellectually enlivening semester. If you have any concerns about these caveats, please come talk to me. I am confident we can find a way forward if we work together. (*The language that follows is pinched, reproduced, and adapted with permission from Ryan Cordell's BookLab class at Illinois, who in turn adapted with permission from Miriam Posner's teaching at UCLA. Thanks Ryan & Miriam!*)

1. **The course is an experiment**
Nobody knows the 'best' way or the 'correct' way to represent and write history with the playful technologies we will be exploring. While there are people working in this area, the field is wide open for innovation, critical engagment, reflection, and experimentation. That's what makes it exciting. An experiential course such as this opens itself up to many quirks: the syllabus may shift; a given tool might not work as expected; an experiment might veer off track or fail altogether. In other words, this course will require both an inventive spirit and patience from its students.
2. **I'm not interested in essays**

You will likely produce a final, (potentially) collaborative project that will ask you to be conscious about relationships among historical materials, digital media and messages. Likely this project will require substantial writing, but it will not look like a 20 page paper at semester's end. Instead, your projects will require sustained work and will be multimodal, comprising text and other elements (e.g. digital images, maps, graphics, sprites, etc). You will document your [paradata](). Your projects may be fully digital, fully analog, or some hybrid of the two. These projects may well lead into more established forms of writing or publication, but we will not begin there.

3. **There will be collaboration (which is not 'group work')**

Digital humanities projects often require collaboration among scholars who bring different intellectual and technical skills to expansive projects. This class will require you to work together in class and to support each other. Indeed, I am not bothered at all should you find help and support outside this class with regard to the technical aspects of the course - learning how to distribute responsibilities, and acknowledging and sharing credit is part of the point here.

4. **You will be required to acquire some technical skills (old and new)**

[I do not require]() or assume any particular technical experience as we begin this course, but I will expect you to be willing to experiment with new tools and learn new technical skills throughout the semester. "I'm not very technical" will not excuse you from the hands-on portions of the course any more than "I'm not poetic" would excuse you from reading Dickinson in a survey of American literature. Some of the tools we play with you may find useful for your research interests; some you will not. But I expect you to try them with enthusiasm and an open mind. *Document everything* and soon you'll be quite techy indeed!

The full course website *is currently being built live, on the open web* at https://hist3812.netlify.app. Please note that this is a work-in-progress and most assuredly will be a bit different by the time the term rolls around.

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