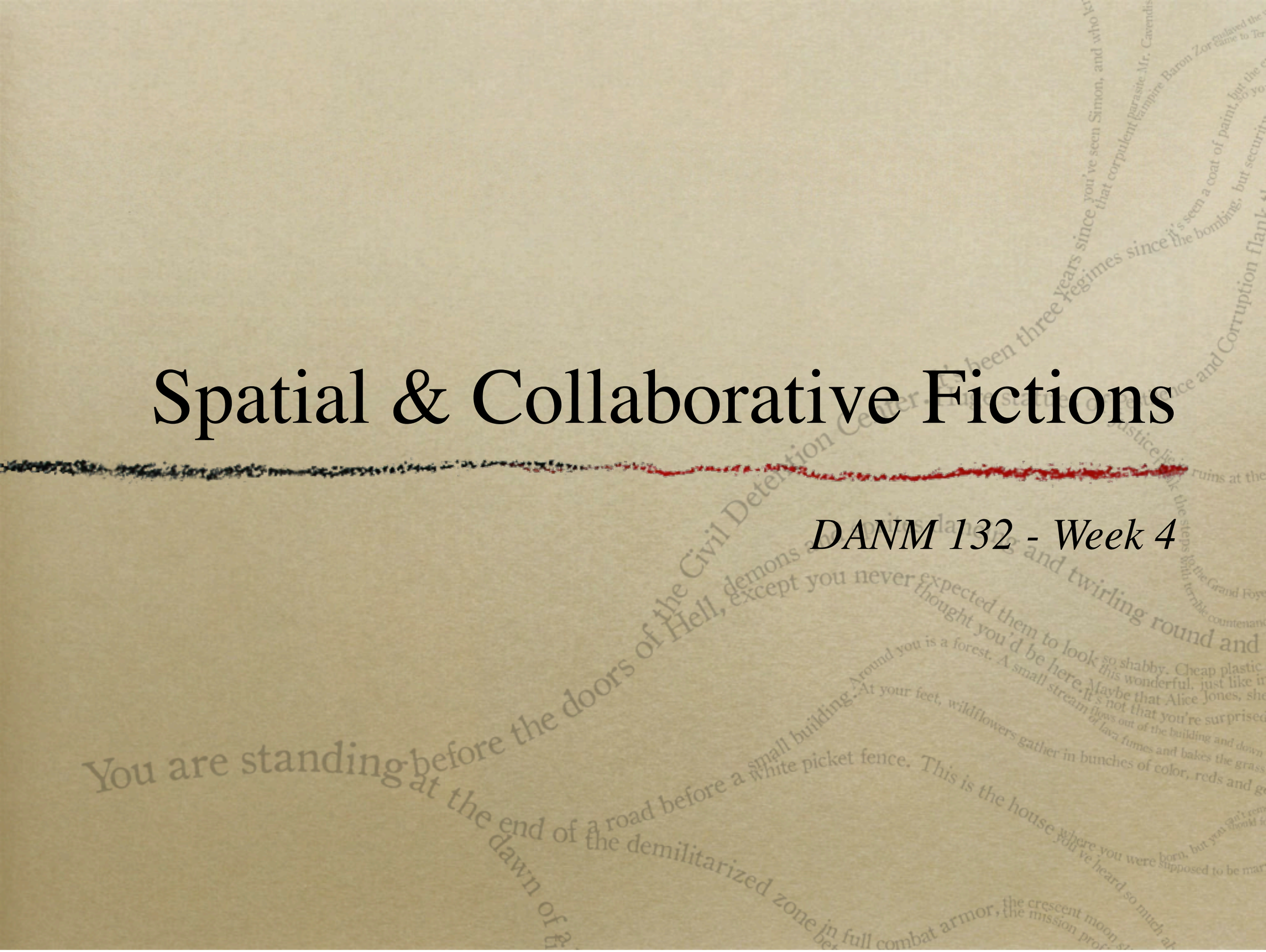
Spatial & Collaborative Fictions

DANM 132 - Week 4



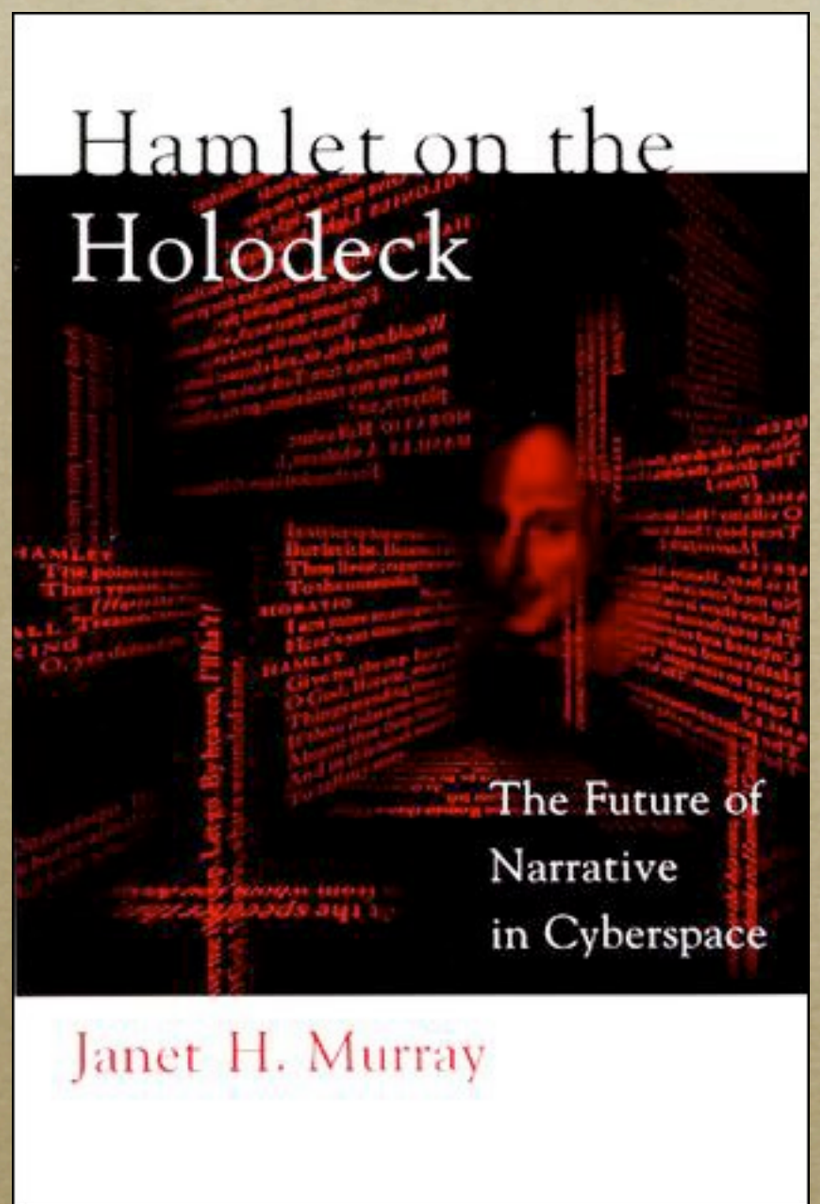
Two intertwined concepts. Recent technology has opened up new stuff.

The Holodeck

Star Trek: The Next Generation, 1987-94

A dream for 25 years.

Hamlet on the Holodeck



- 1998, Janet Murray
- What would be the artistic and storytelling possibilities of such a medium? How do existing media like games come close to realizing its potential?

Virtual reality. But since then, technology has been more about bringing digitality into the real world.

Portable computing

- *Collaborative*
- *Spatial*
- *Pervasive*

We're going to talk about how each of these three, somewhat intertwined, affect what stories we can tell, how the rise of mobile technology (CPUs, WiFi, GPS, accelerometer, camera) is enabling this shift, and then how this all relates to literature.

Collaborative Storytelling

The earliest storytelling probably worked this way. “Tell me a story.” Kids telling stories through toys. Make believe, cops and robbers.

Rules enable consistency...

Simulations like wargames and D&D added consistency. When people share a simulated space with consistent rules, conversation moves beyond “Nuh uh” “uh huh” to what the story is actually about.

Technology enforces rules…

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WELCOME TO ADVENTURE!!  WOULD YOU LIKE INSTRUCTIONS?

yes

SOMEWHERE NEARBY IS COLOSSAL CAVE, WHERE OTHERS HAVE FOUND FORTUNES IN
TREASURE AND GOLD, THOUGH IT IS RUMORED THAT SOME WHO ENTER ARE NEVER
SEEN AGAIN.  MAGIC IS SAID TO WORK IN THE CAVE.  I WILL BE YOUR EYES
AND HANDS.  DIRECT ME WITH COMMANDS OF 1 OR 2 WORDS.  I SHOULD WARN
YOU THAT I LOOK AT ONLY THE FIRST FIVE LETTERS OF EACH WORD, SO YOU'LL
HAVE TO ENTER "NORTHEAST" AS "NE" TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM "NORTH".
(SHOULD YOU GET STUCK, TYPE "HELP" FOR SOME GENERAL HINTS.  FOR INFOR-
MATION ON HOW TO END YOUR ADVENTURE, ETC., TYPE "INFO".)
                        - - -
THIS PROGRAM WAS ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED BY WILLIE CROWTHER.  MOST OF THE
FEATURES OF THE CURRENT PROGRAM WERE ADDED BY DON WOODS (DON @ SU-AI).
CONTACT DON IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, ETC.

YOU ARE STANDING AT THE END OF A ROAD BEFORE A SMALL BRICK BUILDING.
AROUND YOU IS A FOREST.  A SMALL STREAM FLOWS OUT OF THE BUILDING AND
DOWN A GULLY.

east

YOU ARE INSIDE A BUILDING, A WELL HOUSE FOR A LARGE SPRING.
THERE ARE SOME KEYS ON THE GROUND HERE.
THERE IS A SHINY BRASS LAMP NEARBY.
THERE IS FOOD HERE.
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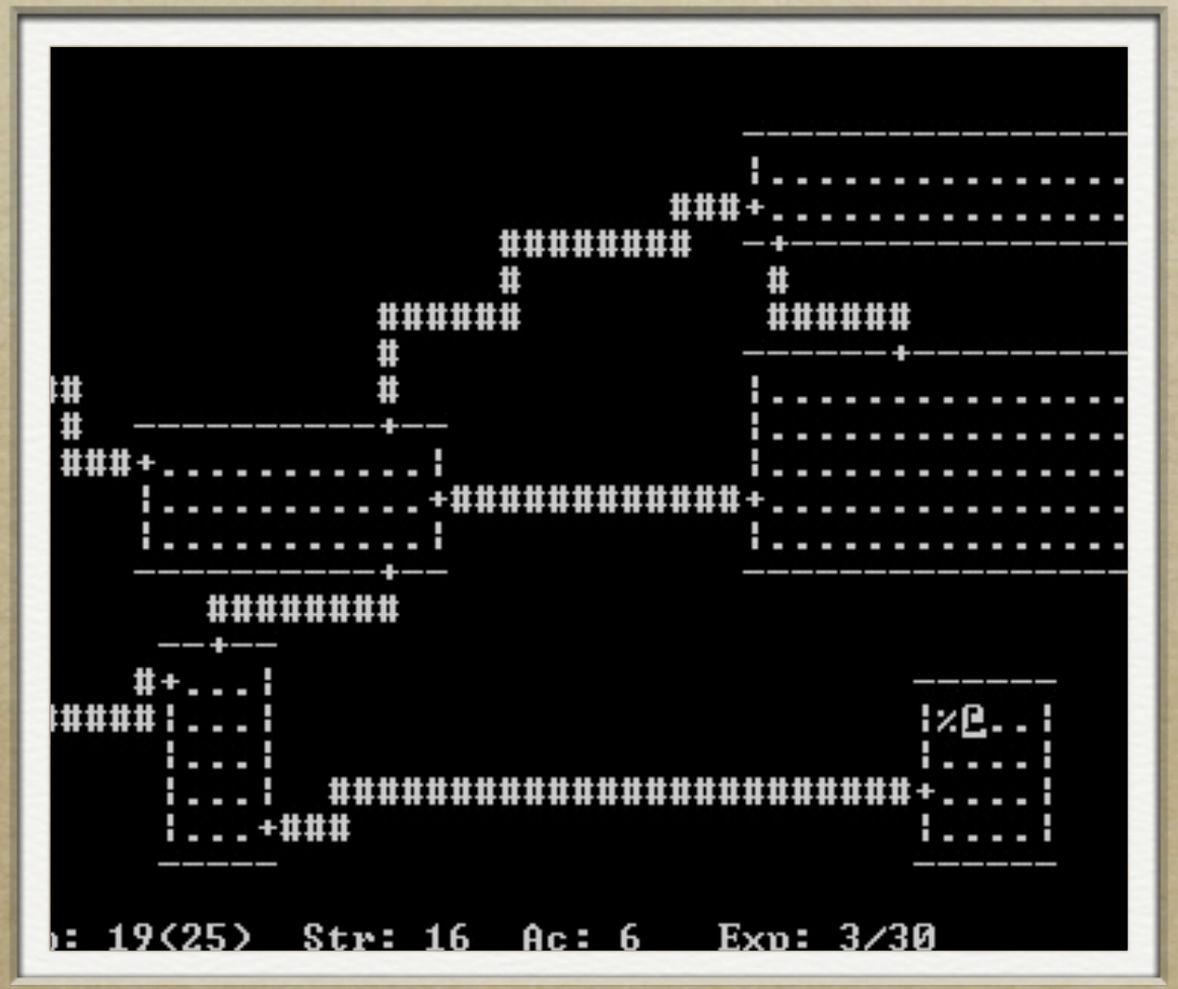


Adventure and *Rogue*

These rule systems could be computerized, but lost their collaborative nature. But connectivity opened up new possibilities.

...and collaboration across great distances

Richard Bartle of Essex University (above right), claims that MUD is two years ahead of any other computer game in the world

- *MUD* (or *Essex MUD*), Roy Trubshaw & Richard Bartle, 1980
- Spawned thousands of clones and variants, mostly in the 1980s and 90s.

TinyG (a MUD)

TinyG. Very simulation heavy, less story-focus than adventure.

MUDs evolve into MMOs…

Neverwinter Nights, 1991-97

The Shadow of Yserbius, 1992-96

MUD started evolving into graphical MMORPGs.
Neverwinter Nights, 1991.
Shadow of Yserbius, 1992.

MUDs evolve into MMOs…

Ultima Online,
1997-present

World of Warcraft,
2004-present

MUDs and MMOs

- **Tension between story and game.**
  - Often at odds with each other, even on "roleplay" servers.
  - "with sustained playing of the same game, the player may become less interested in the representational/fictional level of the game and more focused on the rules of the game." -- Jesper Juul, "Half-Real"
- **Tension between story and socialization.**

Emergent user-created stories, but not terribly successful at authored stories.

Attempts to make MMOs more about story

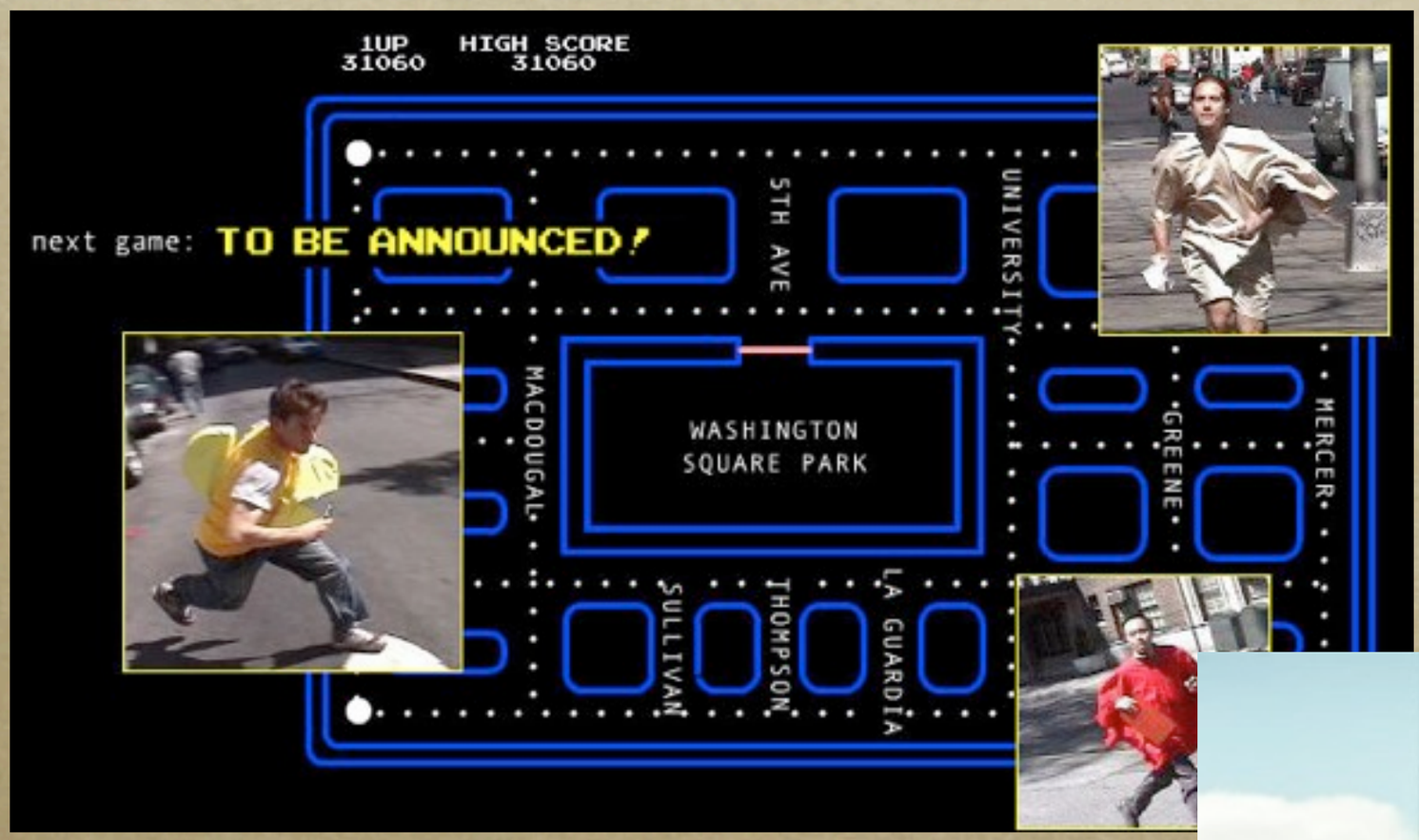
One of the most expensive games to produce, recently went free to play so possibly not being successful.

Attempts to make MMOs more about story

...so far, uncertain success.

One of the most expensive games to produce, recently went free to play so possibly not being successful.

Spatial Games

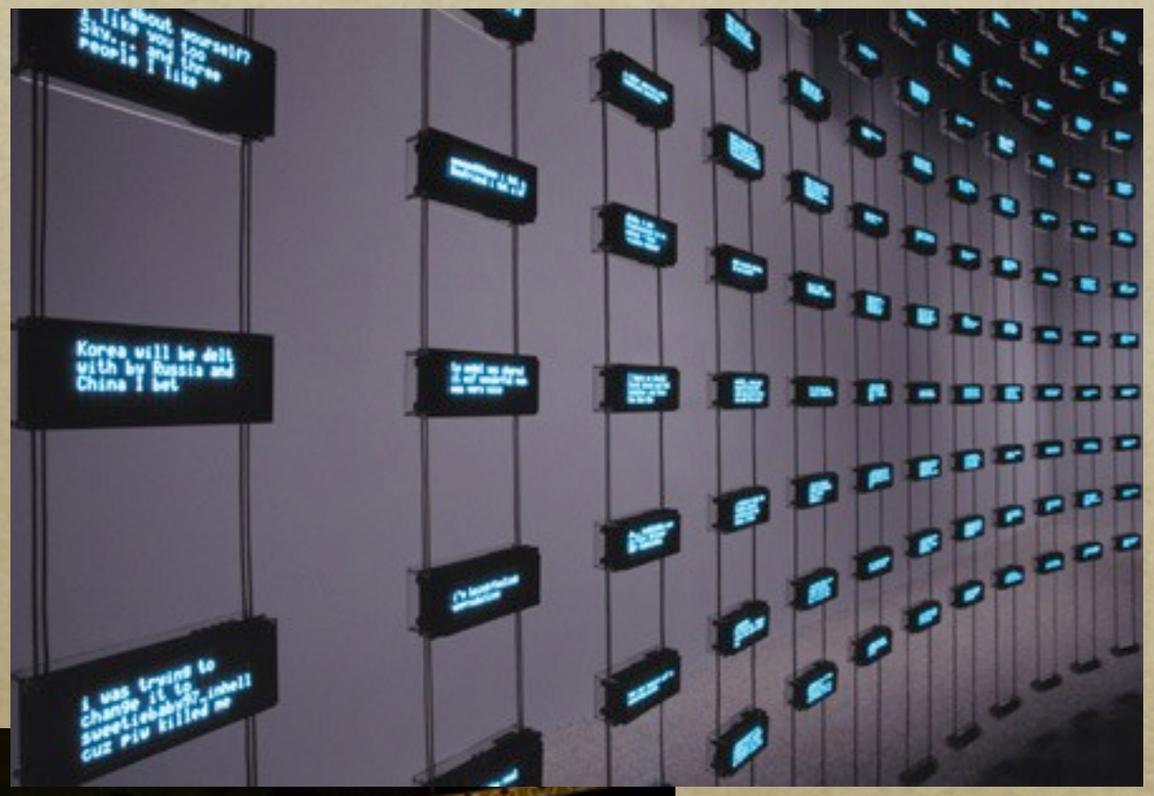


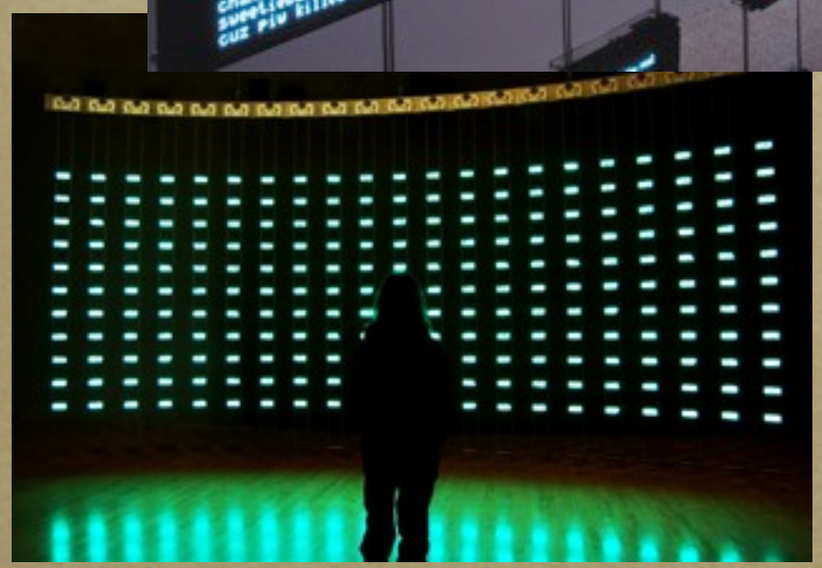
PacManhattan, 2004

A Machine To See With, 2010

So that's collaborative angle. Another angle is spatializing narratives. Rise of commonplace GPS and multimedia-carrying devices has enabled this. GPS tracks real position. Even w/o GPS can work: Machine to see with has audio which the user manually controls.

Spatializing Texts





Screen, 2002, Noah Wardrip-Fruin et al

Listening Post, 2002, Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin

Listening Post, 2001-- culls text fragments from internet chat rooms and other public forums. More poetry than narrative. Screen, shows a story about memory, words start falling off, “player” tries to push them back, ultimately fails.

Spatializing Texts

Implementation, 2002-04, Nick Montfort and Scott Rettberg

Doesn't even necessarily require technology. 2002-4, Nick Montfort and Scott Rettberg. Novel written on sheets of stickers, sheets sent out to people around the country who requested them, encouraged to post in public places.

Pervasive Games

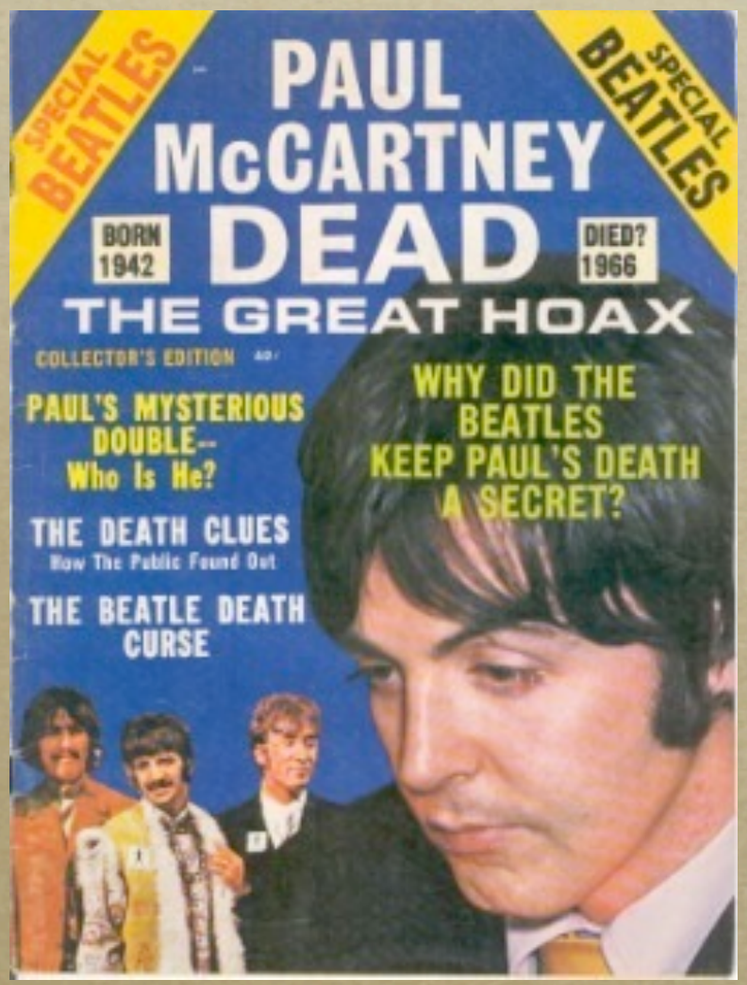
- Games that stretch beyond the boundaries of a screen (computer, movie, book etc) to involve the real world.
- Are often both **spatial** and **collaborative**.
- Tag, geocaching, audio tours...

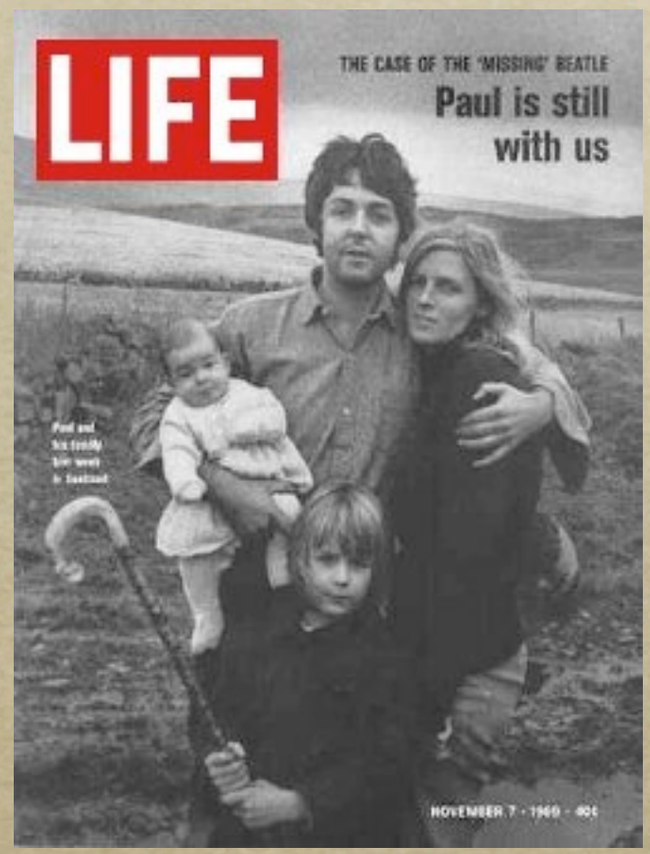
So collaborative, and spatial. Something that encompasses both is pervasive.
Again, old-school analogues. Tag. But devices allow for consistent rules.

The ARG (Alternate Reality Game)

- Pervasive narrative experiences
- both spatial and collaborative
- less focus (or none at all) on rules and simulation

ARG Predecessors

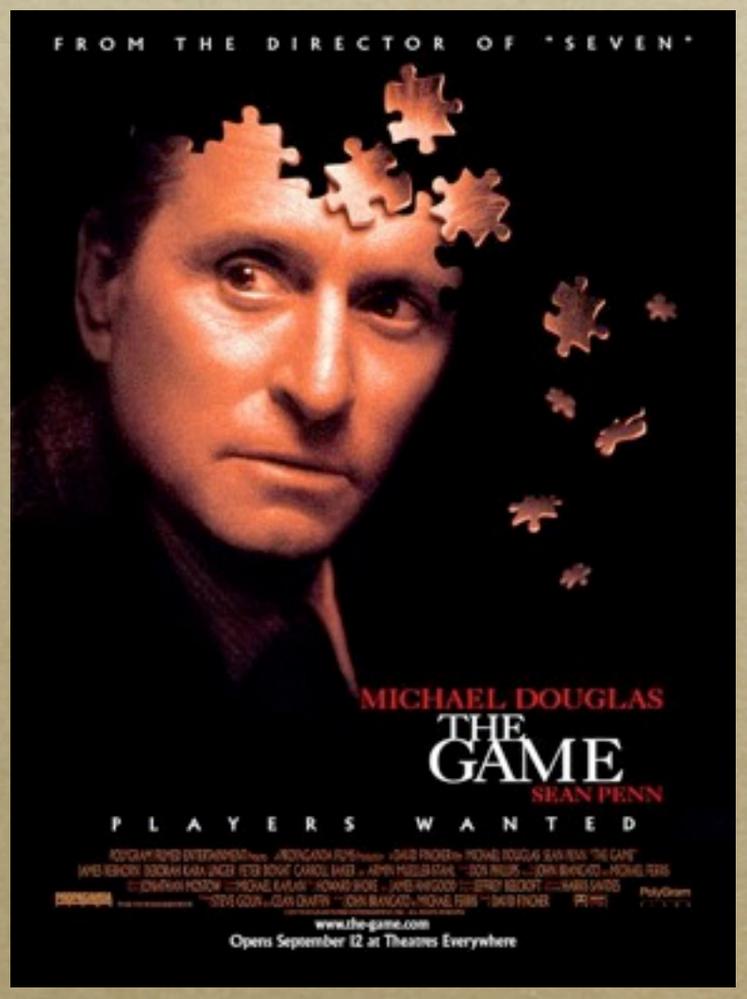




- *"Paul is dead", 1969*

Rumor started by college students, citing "clues" hidden in albums, photos. In fact there were no such clues, but the perception of them caught public imagination.

ARG Predecessors



- *The Game, 1997, David Fincher (clip)*
- *Majestic, 1999, Anim-X / EA*

Majestic game inspired in part by the movie. “Played by phone, email, AOL Instant Messenger, BlackBerry messages, fax, and by visiting special websites. Puzzles. Chatbots. Tagline “It plays you.” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qf-4TDEpycw

The Beast

- The Beast, 2001, Elan Lee (puzzles), Sean Stewart (writing), and Jordan Weisman (concept)
- Required massive collaboration involving thousands of players
- Now credited as the first ARG

Beast: created by Microsoft at team for Spielberg's AI. Ran for 12 weeks. Mantra was "This is not a game." Leading players influenced the game.
I Love Bees, 2004, for Halo 2. Much of same team. As many as 3 million participants.

BASED ON A SCREEN STORY BY IAN WATSON
BASED ON THE SHORT STORY BY BRIAN ALDISS
PRODUCED BY KATHLEEN KENNEDY
STEVEN SPIELBERG
BONNIE CURTIS
DIRECTED BY STEVEN SPIELBERG
THIS IS NOT
Soundtrack Album on Warner Sunset / Warner Bros. Records
DREAMWORKS PICTURES
AMBLIN ENTERTAINMENT
THIS FILM IS NOT YET RATED
www.AImovie.com
America Online Keyword: A.I.
JUNE 29
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Soundtrack Album on Warner Sunset / Warner Bros. Records
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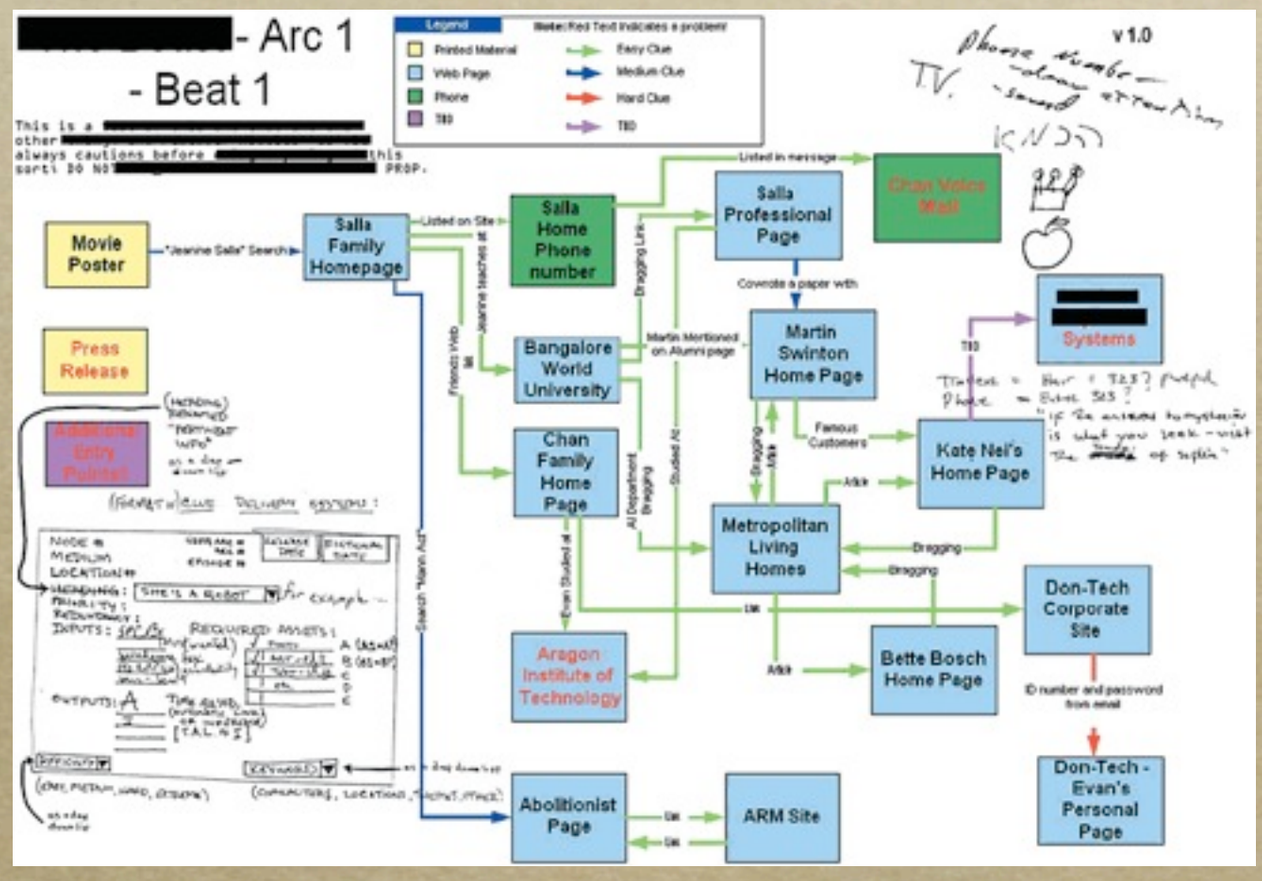
ARG Surface

- Websites
- Phone calls
- E-mails
- Interaction with actors

ARG Systems

- Usually one or more human “puppetmasters” and expensive deployment technology
- Often corporate sponsors
- Usually ergodic but linear-- players work to unlock next bit of content, but cannot (usually) affect the plot.



(Intentionally) very unclear connection between surface and systems. Never quite sure what the game’s capabilities are, how it works, what could/couldn’t happen.

Appeal of ARGs

- Tension between what's "real" and what isn't.
- Being "inside" a story (like the holodeck)

Augmented Reality

In the last few years, devices like iPhone and iPad have pulled a lot of these things together. Augmented reality = can literally change people's perceptions, if they're looking at the world through a screen with a camera attached. Magic Book, Camille Scherrer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Onr8d4Wfo6I

AR for narrative…

Still in very early days. We're in the Hunt the Wumpus era of this tech. We may have to wait a while for Moby-Dick.