



“There is no substitute for a planned simulation.”
—*White Noise*

**ENGL 758C
Simulations
Spring 2008
University of Maryland**

Matthew G. Kirschenbaum / Mat3w Merryman
Associate Professor of English and Associate Director, MITH
301-405-8505
mgk@umd.edu

Office hours: by appointment in MITH, Tuesday afternoons and Wednesdays are usually best;
also every Sunday, 8pm-9pm in Second Life

Is simulation the consummate genre of the 21st century? How can we negotiate between simulation as a trope of science fiction and cultural fantasy (the *Matrix*, to name one obvious example) and the non-virtual reality of the Strip in Las Vegas, or the best-selling video game franchise *The Sims*? The objective of this seminar will be to range freely between simulation as the essential focalizer of the postmodern, between practices of applied modeling in humanities research online (such as the *Virtual Vaudeville* project, which painstakingly recreates a performance in a turn of the century Manhattan theater), and between simulation as an established mode and form of digital gaming. We will read widely in the literature and theory of simulation, from obvious high postmodern candidates like DeLillo, Baudrillard, and Haraway to more exotic sites of engagement, such as military technology, theoretical mathematics, artificial life, and the philosophical discourse of modeling. Indeed, our goal will be eventually to adjudicate among three interrelated terms: simulation, modeling, and gaming; and to come to grips with their import and distinctions in the contemporary milieu. To what extent are these forms and practices rivals or competitors to the literary? Can a simulation (or a game) sustain a narrative? Is the virtual merely the latest act or art of wish fulfillment in an age-old progression of mimetic conceits, or is it something else? Something new?

A key component of the course will be a set of hands-on explorations using the popular virtual world *Second Life*. You will engage with the cultures and sub-cultures of *Second Life* by creating

avatars and participating in the communities and events of this thriving virtual world (current population: 10 million). With only slightly greater investment, you may also learn to "build" in Second Life, contributing your own objects, structures, and experiences to the world. Part simulation, part model, and part game, Second Life will be the social arena in which we seek to activate and literalize our weekly conversations.

Texts

All of the following are required. They are on order at the University Book Center (though readily available from many vendors).

- Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Indiana, 1995)
- Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Video Games* (MIT, 2007)
- Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (Chicago, 2006)
- Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (Viking Critical Library, 1985, 1998)
- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (Verso, 2007)
- Michael Rymaszewski, et al. *Second Life: The Official Guide* (Sybex, 2008). Second edition.
- Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (Bantam, 1992)

Requirements

A **presentation**: every member of the class is responsible for presenting an article or book chapter. A presentation should consist of: a summary of the argument; an evaluation of the significance and uses of the argument in relation to other work we've read; and a series of questions for initiating discussion. Presentations will be primarily oral, but you may wish to have handouts, electronic slides, or other supplementary material. 10%

Questing, defined as a personal goal or objective to be achieved within Second Life over the course of the semester. You will have broad latitude in defining your individual quest, which may take the form of an event (or series of events) to attend, an artifact or structure to build, a community or group to join, or a certain kind of interaction to experience. You must propose a quest to me by **March 5th**; quests must be completed by the end of the semester, but ideally sooner (you will briefly present your quest to the class upon completion). You must also document the completion of your quest: documentation can include screenshots, movies, chat transcripts, and perhaps other means, in addition you will submit a 1000-word statement explaining the nature of your quest and its significance in the context of our work in the seminar. Quests may be collaborative provided you discuss arrangements with me beforehand. 30%

A **seminar paper**, defined as 15-18 pages of scholarly writing on a topic of your choice. You should begin discussing ideas with me as early as possible in the semester. As an alternative to the paper, I am open to proposals for electronic projects, created in Second Life or otherwise. These *absolutely* require my prior approval, and will require detailed planning and consultation. Due on the last day of class. 50%

Blogwatching: each of you will choose one blog related to Second Life, and be responsible for keeping the rest of us up to date on its content. We will do a "news roundup" at the beginning of every class—for a list of recommended blogs, see the wiki (and you should feel free to suggest additions to me). 10%

Last, **weekly attendance and participation** is expected and assumed, and shortcomings in this area may adversely affect your final course grade.

About Second Life

Second Life (<http://secondlife.com/>) requires a fairly up-to-date computer to run. The specific technical requirements are spelled out here: <http://secondlife.com/corporate/sysreqs.php>. It is essential for the work of the seminar that you have regular access to a computer that can meet those requirements. Several of the machines in MITH will be set up to run Second Life, and you are welcome to use these whenever they're not being used for other MITH business (MITH is open M-F 9-5).

Important: Second Life is a virtual world inhabited by approximately 10 million anonymous users from all over the globe. It teems with diverse cultures and sub-cultures. By its very nature, this is an unpredictable and open-ended adult-oriented environment. You must exercise personal judgment and responsibility as you explore and navigate it. You are discouraged in the strongest possible terms from divulging your true name, geographical whereabouts, or any other aspects of your real-world identity to individuals you meet in Second Life. If at any time you feel unsafe or just uncomfortable in Second Life, leave. Go elsewhere in-world, or, if you prefer, log off, even turn off your computer. You should never feel pressured to place yourself in an undesirable situation out of fear of academic reprisal, including a poor grade. If you ever find yourself in such a situation, I encourage you to disengage from it immediately and talk to me about what happened. Neither the instructor nor the University of Maryland can be held liable for what transpires in Second Life. By taking this course, you are agreeing to participate in this virtual world at your own discretion and risk.

Please also be sure you read and understand Second Life's Terms of Service and Community Standards (<http://secondlife.com/corporate/tos.php> and <http://secondlife.com/corporate/cs.php>).

Electronic Resources

We will be making use of various electronic resources besides Second Life.

- **Electronic Syllabus.** A PDF version of this document, with active links embedded, is available here: <http://www.otal.umd.edu/~mgk/courses/spring2008/engl758c/syllabus.pdf>.
- **Wiki.** <http://simulations-engl758c.wetpaint.com/>. The Wiki will serve as the primary clearing house for all of our online activities outside of Second Life itself. It will be the place to post comments, links, news feeds, and so forth. You should get into the habit of checking the wiki several times a week to look for new activity from your classmates.
- **Listserv.** I will be maintaining an email listserv, simulations-engl@listserv.umd.edu, for the course, to use for announcements. Subscription is mandatory—please make sure I have your preferred email address on the first day of class. You will be held responsible for all messages distributed to the listserv 24 hours after they have been posted.
- **Electronic Reserve.** All readings marked with a “+” symbol are available via the Library's electronic reserve system. Search for “engl758c” in the Library Catalog.
- **YouTube Playlist.** An index of videos I've flagged as relevant to the course. Feel free to send me suggestions on set up your own playlists with your own YouTube account (I will link to them). Find the playlist here: http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=1423C49EAB97EB1C.
- **de.licio.us.** A popular social bookmarking service, allowing you to tag Web content, with tags visible and searchable by other users. I will be using the tag “engl758c” to flag items of interest for this course. You can do the same (this is better than posting them to the

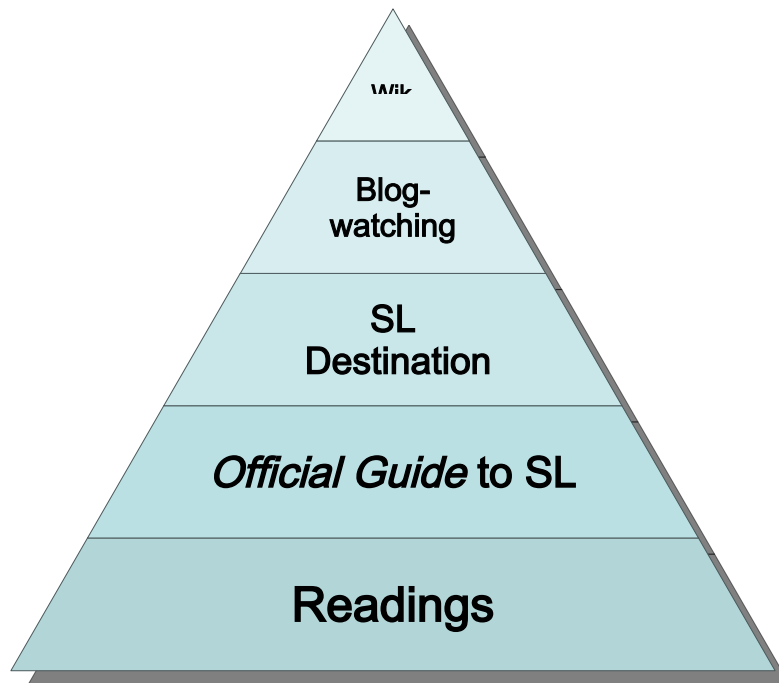
- listserv). You can also set up an RSS feed to automatically notify you of new engl758c tags. Go to <http://del.icio.us/> to set up a free account.
- **Zotero.** A free extension for the Firefox Web browser, Zotero allows you to harvest Web content and organize it for citation purposes. You can also collect citations from library catalogs, Amazon.com, Google Books, and other sources of online texts. (Zotero is thus a powerful, free alternative to tools like EndNote and RefWorks.) Eventually Zotero users will also be able to share their citations and notes with one another. Zotero is optional but recommended. Get it at <http://www.zotero.org>.

Digital Dialogues

MITH runs a weekly seminar series called Digital Dialogues, every Tuesday 12:30-1:45. A number of the talks will be relevant to our work this semester, and you are encouraged to attend as time permits. Talks are announced each week at <http://www.mith.umd.edu>.

Calendar

Readings appended with a “+” are available via the Library’s electronic reserve system. A few readings are marked [Optional]. While not explicitly scheduled on the calendar below, you are expected to work your way through *Second Life: The Official Guide* in the first few weeks of the course. Note that each week also has a related destination within Second Life—generally you can get there by typing the name of the destination into your SL Search function (make sure you’re searching under Places). Finally, a portion of your reading each week should consist of spontaneously gathered news items, blog entries, and other late-breaking content posted to our wiki or elsewhere on the 2D or 3D Web. And you should in turn, of course, look at other people’s contributions to the wiki. Your weekly responsibilities—exclusive of presentation, questing, and seminar paper—can therefore be rendered as follows:



1.30

- “On Exactitude in Science”:

On Exactitude in Science . . . In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Suarez Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658

—From Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*, Translated by Andrew Hurley

2.06

- Neil Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (read at least the first 100 pages or so, as much as you want if you’re having fun)
- “Glimpse Inside a Metaverse: The Virtual World of Second Life”:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrSCjSRMY64> (59 min. video)
- Also these other, shorter videos:
 - Second Life: Get One: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxj8RTW4ev4>;
 - Introduction to Second Life:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b72CvvMuD6Q>
 - Henry Jenkins Presents at Global Kids Island in Second Life:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAQ2V356q-Y>
- Michael J. Bugeja, “Second Thoughts about Second Life”:
<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2007/09/2007091401c/careers.html>
- Julian Dibbell, “A Rape in Cybersapce”:
<ftp://ftp.lambda.moo.mud.org/pub/MOO/papers/VillageVoice.txt>
- [Optional: Julian Dibbell, “Mutilated Furies, Flying Phalluses: Put the Blame on Grieferers”:
http://www.wired.com/gaming/virtualworlds/magazine/16-02/mf_goons]
- [Optional: Stuart Moulthrop, “Deuteronomy Comix”:
http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/deuteronomy_comix.html]
- *Orientation Island*. Create your account and complete tutorials (get your “key” to Second Life). Also *Help Island*. And, if you’re feeling up to it, *The Black Sun Night Club*.

2.13

- Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*
- Slavoj Zizek, “The Desert of the Real”:
<http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions/interpretations/desertreal.html>
- Scientists Simulate Jet Colliding with World Trade Center:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cddlgb1nGJ8>
- Peter S. Jenkins, “Historical Simulations: Motivational, Ethical, Legal Issues”:
http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=929327
- Sandra Buchmüller, et al., “Body Extensions and Representations Within Disembodied Virtual Spaces” (to be distributed)
- [Optional: Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra” and “The Orders of Simulacra”:
<http://www.ee.sun.ac.za/~hgibson/docs/html/Simulacra-and-Simulation.html>]

- *Reuters Island*

2.20

- Sharon Ghamari-Tabrizi, from *The Worlds of Herman Kahn*: “How to Build a World with Artful Intuition”+ and “Faith and Insight in War-Gaming”+
- Timothy Lenoir and Henry Lowood, “Theatres of War: The Military-Entertainment Complex”: www.stanford.edu/class/sts145/Library/Lenoir-Lowood_TheatersOfWar.pdf;
- Orson Scott Card, “Ender’s Game”: <http://www.incwell.com/ipulp/endersGAME/index.html>
- Peter Shulman’s War: <http://peterswar.com/>
- [Optional: Joshua Davis, “If We Run Out of Batteries, the War is Screwed”]: http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/11.06/battlefield_pr.html]
- *Ivory Tower Library of Primitives*

2.27 Guest: D. Snyder, doctoral candidate, American Studies

- Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society”: http://manoafreeuniversity.org/multitudes/profiles/groups/wr/athanor/text_archive/pomo_and_consum.rtf
- Ronald Smith and Valerie Bugni, “Why Las Vegas is Hyperreal”: http://strata.unlv.edu/smith_bugni/pomo.pdf
- D. Snyder, “Understanding Consumption in The Sims Online” (to be distributed)
- Susan Stewart, from *On Longing*: “The Miniature”+
- *Bellagio*

3.05 Quest Proposals Due

- Henry Melton, “Catacomb”: <http://www.henrymelton.com/0/h10.html>
- Edward Castronova, *Synthetic Worlds* (especially chapters 1-8)
- “Virtual World, Real Money,” *BusinessWeek* (May 1 2006): http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/06_18/b3982001.htm
- [Optional: David Gelernter, from *Mirror Worlds*: “The Orb”+]
- *Sheep Island (The Electric Sheep Company)*

3.12 Guest: Dr. Kenneth Fleischmann, College of Information Studies

- Kenneth Fleischmann, “Frog and Cyberfrog are Friends: Dissection Simulation and Animal Advocacy”: <http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa11.2/fleischmann.shtml>
- Donna Haraway, from *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium: FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™*+
- Benjamin Woolley, “Hyperreality”+
- Robert Markley, “Boundaries: Mathematics, Alienation, and the Metaphysics of Cyberspace”+
- *Luskwood*.

3.19 Spring Break

- *Svarga*

3.26

- Don DeLillo, *White Noise*

- Passage: <http://hcsoftware.sourceforge.net/passage/> (download and play)
- *Suffugium*

4.02

- Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games* (especially chapters 1-4)
- Rita Raley, “War Games” (to be distributed)
- September 12th: <http://www.newsgaming.com/games/index12.htm>
- America’s Army: <http://www.americasarmy.com/>
- *Jessie (Home of the People’s Soviet Communist Party)*

4.09

- Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games* (especially chapters 8, 9, 11)
- Fatworld: <http://www.fatworld.org/>
- *Democracy Island*

4.16

- Henry Lowood, “High-Performance Play: The Making of Machinima,” *Journal of Media Practice* 7 (1): 25–42:
<http://www.atypon-link.com/INT/doi/abs/10.1386/jmpr.7.1.25/1?cookieSet=1&journalCode=jmpr>
- Henry Lowood, “Found Technology: Players as Innovators in the Making of Machinima”:
<http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/dmal.9780262633598.165>.
- Lev Manovich, from *The Language of New Media*: “What is Cinema?”+
- [Examples of machinima to be selected by the seminar.]
- *Alt-Zoom Theatre*

4.23

- John L. Casti, from *Would-Be Worlds*: “Reality Bytes”+
- Willard McCarty, “Modeling: A Study in Words and Meanings,” chapter 19 of Blackwell’s *A Companion to Digital Humanities*: <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion>
- Willard McCarty, “Knowing True Things By What Their Mockeries Be: Modeling in the Humanities”:
<http://staff.cch.kcl.ac.uk/~wmccarty/essays/McCarty.%20Knowing%20true%20things.pdf>
- Philip Sabin, from *Lost Battles: Reconstructing the Great Clashes of the Ancient World* (to be distributed)
- Virtual Vaudeville: <http://www.virtualvaudeville.com/>
- Rome Reborn: <http://www.romereborn.virginia.edu/>
- Real Estate Roller Coaster: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUldGc06S3U>
- *Info Island*

4.30

- Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees*
- The MONK Project: <http://www.monkproject.org>
- Richard Powers, “Literary Devices” (to be distributed)
- *The Literature Factory*

5.07 All Quests and Papers Due

- TBA