EXPLORING THE [DIGITAL] MEDIUM
2012 SYMPOSIUM: **"GAMING THE HUMANITIES"**

The 2012 E[D]M Symposium "Gaming the Humanities" asks in what way scholars can identify, define and analyze the products of contemporary media designs and practices. As readers, viewers, and gamers challenge authors for command over the [digital] text, scholars have to revisit and refine their understanding of concepts such as authorship, readership, textuality, and works of [digital] art.

SYMPOSIUM SCHEDULE

09.15-9.30: Welcome address
09.30-10.15: Stephanie Boluk, Vassar College
10.15-10.30: Coffee Break
10.30-11.15: Patrick LeMieux, Duke University

11.30 – 13.00: Lunch (for members of the E[D]M Working Group)

13.15-14.45: Jason Mittell, Middlebury College
15.00-16.00: Open Reception (English Department Common Room)

16.00-17.45: E[D]M Post-Symposium Working Group Meeting

SYMPOSIUM VENUE

• English Park Campus, Room 16-0042 (Department of English, Thunbergsvägen 3L)
- English Park Campus Website: http://www.engelskaparken.uu.se/
- Map of area included below

SYMPOSIUM SPEAKERS

Stephanie Boluk (http://stephanieboluk.com) is a media scholar and Post Doctoral Fellow in the Media Studies Program at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York (US). Located at the intersection of cultural studies, media archeology, and the digital humanities, her teaching and research incorporate digital-born modes of criticism with traditional literary hermeneutic approaches. Her research investigates applications of seriality—as a narrative, aesthetic, political, economic and technical construct—in a diverse range of cultural texts spanning from historical plague writing to computer programming. She has worked as an editor at the interdisciplinary journal *ImageTexT*, and co-edited the anthology *Generation Zombie; Essays on the Living Dead in Modern Culture* (2011).

Patrick LeMieux (http://patrick-lemieux.com) is an artist and Ph.D. student at the Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina (US). He received his MFA from the University of Florida in 2010. His artwork, scholarship, and teaching focus on the ethics of viewership, alternative histories of art, and critical game design. Inspired by puzzles, puns, riddles, and games employed by artists throughout the twentieth century, LeMieux builds "art games" featuring monochromatic mechanics, infinite inactivity, and simulated silence. He has exhibited artwork in the Tampa

Museum of Art, Tallahassee Museum of Fine Arts, and the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art. His publications are forthcoming in *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *Electronic Book Review*, and the *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*.

Jason Mittell (http://justtv.wordpress.com) is Associate Professor of American Studies and Film & Media Culture and Chair of Film & Media Culture Department at Middlebury College, Vermont (US). He is the author of *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (2004), and *Television and American Culture* (2009). Mittell is spending the 2011-12 academic year at the Lichtenberg-Kolleg at the University of Göttingen, where he is collaborating with the Research Unit on Popular Seriality. He is also working on his latest book project, *Complex Television: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Narrative*, which is currently under contract with New York University Press.

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

09.30-10.15: Stephanie Boluk (Vassar College)
"Stretched Skulls: Anamorphic Games and the *Memento Mortem Mortis*"

From Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* to Robert Lazzarini's skulls, anamorphic artworks explore the tension between mathematical models of vision and an embodied experience of space. After reviewing the ways in which anamorphosis has been deployed as a philosophical tool for investigating technology and phenomenology, specifically through the criticism of Espen Aarseth and Mark Hansen, this talk looks at how contemporary videogames like Sony's *Echochrome* series, *levelHead* by Julian Oliver, and Mark ten Bosch's forthcoming *Miegakure* technically, aesthetically, and conceptually explore anamorphic techniques. While *The Ambassadors* is famous for its anamorphically skewed skull, a classic *memento mori*, we propose that the anamorphic effects of videogames can be more accurately described as a *memento mortem mortis*: reminders of the death of death. By foregrounding the impossibility of ever fully resolving the human experience of computational space, "anamorphic games" gesture toward experiential domains altogether indifferent to the human to create allegories of the beyond. The result is that these are not so much speculative games as they are games of speculation. In an attempt to practice this kind of game design philosophy, the talk will end by demoing a piece of original software by Boluk and LeMieux featuring a large, multifaceted skull in which each polygonal component acts as an individual viewport into the perspectival space of *The Ambassadors,* allowing the player to haptically engage a *memento mortem mortis*.

10.30-11.15: Patrick LeMieux (Duke University)
"Hundred Thousand Billion Fingers: Seriality and Critical Game Practices"

The title of this essay borrows from Raymond Queneau's iconic *Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, a sonnet generator capable of producing 10^14 unique texts–a quantity that no one reader (or even a million readers) could parse in a lifetime. While *Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* gestures towards the impossibility of ever accessing the totality of its many reading paths, computer games such as *Super Mario Bros.* limit the player to one isolated, incomplete perspective among an enormous (but finite) set of possible playthroughs. Despite this single-player experience, collective patterns of play emerge from the repetitive, procedural, and discrete elements that drive computational media. This essay examines two categories of metagames which critically play the serial logics intrinsic to computational media. Metagames are games about games and the examples in this essay are built inside, outside, or alongside *Super Mario Bros.*, inscribing twenty-five years of procedural play. From remakes of ROM hacks to speedruns of sequencers, this eclectic collection of player-created modifications documents an alternative history of computer games defined not by the

production of software but by play. Rather than subjecting the player to the mechanisms of control as defined by the rules of the game, the techniques documented in this essay successfully metagame their own serial conditions to model the movements of a hundred thousand billion fingers. Developed in parallel to this genealogy of Mario metagames, the talk will end with a demo of Boluk and LeMieux's "Oujeupo" project, *99 Exercises in Play* which uses Mario's genre-defining mechanics as a constraint for producing ninety-nine metagames.

13.15-14.45: Jason Mittell (Middlebury College)
"Playful TV: The Ludic Impulse of American Television"

Metaphors abound in describing how audiences engage with television, including framing viewers as couch potatoes, drug addicts, or active productive fans, as well as characterizing television viewing itself as defined by flow, glance, or negotiated struggle. In this presentation, I will explore another metaphor that hopefully will expand our understanding of our television viewing: play. I will first survey the ludic engagements that have been a key part of television viewing for decades in a range of genres, including sport, game shows, news, serials, and comedy, as well as via technological additions like recording devices, videogames, and transmedia storytelling. The bulk of the presentation offers a detailed exploration of how ludic engagement suffused the consumption of contemporary serial programming that I have been analyzing in my book project, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*, looking closely at examples programs like *Lost*, *Breaking Bad*, and *The Wire*. Through this preliminary exploration of a new line of research, I hope to show how we can productively think across media and view a broader cultural role for play beyond its specific incarnation in the game medium.

ABOUT THE E[D]M INITIATIVE

Exploring the [Digital] Medium (E[D]M) is an interdisciplinary working group with the primary goal to create a forum for intellectual exploration of digital and interactive media as sites of expression and creation, and as new tools and paradigms for global communication and social interaction. Find out more about the E[D]M initiative by navigating to our website: www.edm2012.com.

All E[D]M working group meetings and the 2012 E[D]M Symposium are organized by Peter Waites and the American Studies Group at the Department of English, Uppsala University. The E[D]M Symposium is sponsored by SALT: Forum for Advanced Studies at Uppsala University.

MAP OF THE ENGLISH PARK CAMPUS

The Department of English is accessed through the entrance 3L.
The E[D]M Symposium lectures will be held in room 16-0042.