Narrative, Database, and Algorithm in the Hospitable Network

In early 2012, robot writers began threatening journalists’ livelihood everywhere—but perhaps it’s not fair to blame the robots. It was Kristian Hammond, Chief Technology Officer of a company called Narrative Science, who was firing shots across the bow. Narrative Science designs computer algorithms that synthesize data into news stories. Hammond claimed that within 15 years more than 90% of news would be written by computers. In the midst of a media blitz, journalists and commentators began asking whether algorithms could replace human writers. But Narrative Science’s algorithms also raise a different set of questions. Given that Hammond’s algorithms are designed to transform spreadsheets and databases into narratives, we might instead take the debate about robot writers as an opportunity to rethink the problem of information overload. In a hospitable network that welcomes the contributions of a multitude of writers (human and otherwise), consumers are inundated with growing databases and a proliferation of narratives. As datasets grow, we spin more and more narratives to make sense of information. How are we to navigate this situation? In this talk, I suggest that algorithmic thinking offers one way forward, since algorithms are the hinge point between the world views of database and narrative. Further, I suggest that rhetorical theory, which has always been algorithmic, provides key theoretical resources for engaging a growing database of narratives.

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Friday, February 8
WORKSHOP: noon
TALK: 3:30pm
both: CURTIN 108

In this informal workshop, Professor Brown will demonstrate the following software and answer any of your questions about it:

- **SCRATCH**, which undergraduates in my class have used to create videogames:
- **INFORM7**, which undergrads in my class have used to create interactive fiction:
- **TAROKO GORGE**, a poetry generator designed by Nick Montfort and remixed by a number of others.

both events are free and open to the public

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