Jesslyn Whittell

English 4W: Networking History

Course description: This assignment is designed for an English 4W on experimental form and urban spaces. English 4W is a lower-division course that fulfills the university's Writing II requirement, meaning students come from north and south campus majors and run the gamut from first years to graduating seniors. This array of student interests and experience lends itself to multidisciplinary projects.

Overview: How does history change our perception of urban spaces? How do we connect urban histories with lived realities? How does digitization alter our perception of history and space?

In this project, you will use cognitive mapping and spatial ethnography to document the personal and social history of an urban space. Your project is to create a Twine game (scripted HTML) that narrates the history of Los Angeles. Twine is a story-telling application that allows you create a network of passages (pages with texts and images). You use Twine to add one or more links between passages, resulting in a non-linear narrative (like Wikipedia) that allows a reader to actively shape their own experience of your game. To focus your assignment, your group will choose one of the following neighborhoods or spaces—UCLA/Westwood, your neighborhood, the LA River/Ballona Creek, or Venice. The assignment is divided into three parts.

Part 1: In groups, you will first research the history of the location you are visiting. This history should include historical developments, like founding dates or government interventions, but should *also* consider general shifts in the role of that space. In your research, please consider your sources— whose narratives have been told? Whose narratives might have been left out? What forms of spatial justice or injustice emerge in this history? **Answer these questions in a 500-800-word reflection and be sure to cite your sources. The reflection is due by email at the end of week 1.**

Part 2: In groups if possible—or solo if not—visit your location. Walk around and take pictures of the five elements used in cognitive mapping: paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks. If you take pictures of individual people, *be sure to ask for permission*. If this is not your neighborhood, remember, *you are a guest*. Be respectful and considerate. Consider how your experience in the area is different from the history you read? Do you see traces of that history? Do you experience elements of the space that were absent in the historical sources you read?

Part 3: Your group will adapt your walk into a Twine game that allows a reader to move through a networked digital space. The Twine game should simulate a map of the space—try to develop passages that represent various edges, nodes, districts and landmarks that you observed and incorporate your images into the Twine game (instructions on how to do this can be found online). You may represent paths as either links or passages. The Twine game should allow a reader to "walk" through the space as you perceived it, making choices and allowing for non-linear movement. You should also add links to passage that document the history or the space, so that your reader is moving through both your experience of the space and its historical narrative. **Your group will publish your game privately on the website *itch.io* and share the link with the class. Links to your finished game are due by the end of week 3.**

Part 3.5: In class, we will play each other's Twine games and use class time to discuss your experience creating and playing the games.

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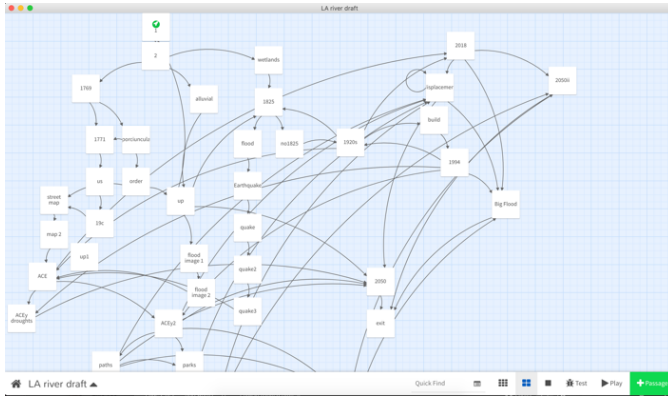
(Twine)

(Expensive apartment development planned along the river, courtesy of *Curbed LA*)

First passages of a sample game:

The LA River is located on **Tongva land**.

Prior to **1769**, at least 45 Tongva villages clustered around the LA River, an **alluvial river** that ran from present-day Glendale to Santa Monica Bay.

People in the Tongva Nation used the **Ballona wetlands** to access the Pacific Ocean for transportation and fishing. The waterways in the tidal marsh also facilitated travel within the Santa Monica bay.

The loose sediments of an alluvial river result in **unpredictable** water movements over a broad, triangular-shaped flood plain.

The Ballona wetlands are an **estuary** for the Los Angeles River. The salt marsh ecology draws a variety of plant and animal life.

In **1769**, European settler colonizers from Spain, including two Franciscan friars, name the river El Río de Nuestra Señora La Reina de Los Ángeles de **Porciúncula**.

(a middle school near Ballona Creek, photo courtesy of *flickr*)

(the bike path on the LA river, courtesy of *spinlister*)

(1902 map of Los Angeles including the LA River, https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/)

*I chose a few images online bc I'm fully quarantining indoors; I'm worried about being a disease vector after a week of protesting, but I looked up spaces that I've seen/know about from earlier visits to Ballona Creek