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Maker's Statement: An Interactive Story

My final project for this course is an interactive digital story built with HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. In this story, the user awakens in a mysterious library and is guided by a voice to a room where four books await. Choosing one transports the user into a unique narrative world where they can interact with characters, make decisions, and influence the outcome of the story. Upon finishing the chosen story path, the user returns to the library, where they provide a password based on their previous choices, unlocking a final ending. My central goal for this project was to explore interactivity in storytelling—shifting the user from a passive reader to an active participant.

This project directly engages with key concepts we explored in the course, particularly around multimodal storytelling and reader agency. As N. Katherine Hayles argues in *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, the “multimodality of digital art works challenges writers, users, and critics to bring together diverse expertise and interpretive traditions” (Hayles 22). My use of text, image, choice, and sound was not merely aesthetic, but purposeful—designed to create a narrative that is experienced rather than merely read. Similarly, Janet Murray’s concept of spatial immersion in *Hamlet on the Holodeck* shaped my thinking; she notes that while traditional media can describe or depict space, “only digital environments can present space that we can move through” (Murray 79). This notion inspired the design of the initial library setting as a navigable space rather than a descriptive backdrop. Projects like Caitlin

Fisher's *These Waves of Girls* and *The Ballad of Sand and Harry Soot* further influenced my approach, showing how fragmented narrative, hypertextuality, and interactivity can offer emotional and intellectual resonance.

From a design perspective, I made several key decisions to keep the project both technically manageable and conceptually coherent. I chose a minimalist black background to maintain visual clarity and avoid overwhelming the user, especially given the integration of dynamic elements like buttons, interactive overlays, and sound. A more colorful or stylistically complex design would have required additional scripting for contrast, spacing, and font changes, which would have diverted focus from the storytelling and made development more difficult given time constraints.

One of the biggest decisions I made during development was to not integrate the ChatGPT API for dynamic responses. I initially planned to use it for dialogue generation to enhance interactivity, but incorporating the API would have required restructuring the framework I had already built. Rather than compromise stability or rush making the project, I pivoted to using prewritten branching dialogue. While this reduced the dynamism of some interactions, it gave me more control over narrative tone and pacing.

I encountered two major challenges throughout this process: first, my relative inexperience with front-end development; second, integrating meaningful interactivity into the story without making it feel artificial or tacked on. I often found myself adding interactive components that, upon reflection, didn't deepen the story but were simply there to meet the "interactive" requirement. I went back and revised several of these to better align with the narrative, however there are many points where I still think there could be improvement. One scene I'm especially proud of is the "fireflies" segment, which I believe successfully marries

story and interaction to create a memorable emotional moment.

My intended audience for this project was not a specific demographic, but rather anyone open to a narrative journey that invites participation. I didn't aim to convey a deeper political or social message as this project's value lies in the experience it offers. I wanted users to feel like they had input, that their choices mattered, and that they were collaborators in the storytelling process. The goal was not just to tell a story, but to create a sense of immersion, of being transported.

If I were to continue developing this project, my first priority would be code cleanup as the current structure is messy due to the rushed development timeline. I would also invest more time in generating high-quality images, either using AI with more intentional prompts, or even creating my own images from scratch. In terms of narrative, I would work to improve the cohesion between branches and refine the interactive moments so that each choice truly enhances the story. I want every interaction to feel as meaningful and polished as the fireflies scene, rather than an afterthought.

This assignment was a very new experience for me. While I had some previous exposure to interactive storytelling tools like Twine, building a full project from scratch using code challenged me to think differently—not just as a writer, but as a developer and designer. It pushed me to think critically about structure, pacing, and user experience. I gained a much deeper appreciation for how digital tools reshape narrative, and how reader choice can create layered, personalized meaning. In *The Boat* by Matt Huynh that I previously analyzed, they showed how interactivity and visual storytelling can profoundly affect how stories are felt, not just understood. Inspired by that, I wanted to create a world where readers wouldn't just follow a story—they'd live inside it.

Choosing the tools and framework was also a learning curve. It was difficult to find the balance between a story I wanted to tell and the features I was technically capable of implementing. Sometimes I tried to do too much, and the story got cluttered. But in reflecting, I see that creative limitation can also lead to focus—and I'm proud of what I was able to build.

Ultimately, this project taught me how to deeply form and medium shape content. The Maker's Statement, in turn, gave me the chance to step back from my code and choices and ask: not just what did I make, but why did I make it this way? That's a question I'll carry with me into future creative work.

Works Cited

Hayles, N. Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.

Huynh, Matt. *The Boat*. SBS, 2015, www.sbs.com.au/theboat.

Murray, Janet Horowitz. *Hamlet On the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. The Free Press, 1997.