English 230: Milestone 3 (for Friday, October 14th)

First, a recap of Milestone 2:

1. *Media are about trust:* for instance, the hope that your message is received.
2. *Media may foster intimacy*. Distance affords unique connections.
3. *We need time to feel.* An abundance of media can be exhausting.

Here are three more themes to recall as we proceed with the course:

Media manipulate and massage. "You will learn to trust my voice. *You will learn to trust my voice."* That voice in *Within the Wires* toggles between an instrument (meant to relax and recede from attention) and a messenger (meant to be decoded). It's the voice of authority, as if it's emanating from a loudspeaker, and it's the voice of intimacy, as if someone "you" know is checking in. Media may be calculating and calming at once. This is why it's important to consider how their politics are aestheticized—how we're made to feel messages "from above" or "out of nowhere"—and how their aesthetics can be politicized—how media may help people organize against oppressive regimes. It matters that the voice of this story is speaking *within* the wires: using The Institute's manipulative relaxation tapes against itself.

Media stage player stories. It's June 7, 1995. You're walking through a gigantic home in Boon County, Oregon. Stories are evoked and embedded in every nook and cranny of this house, and your movement through it triggers Sam's journal entries, which are then read aloud. Maybe you follow the narrative on rails, rarely deviating from the designer's plan. Maybe you push the game in other directions, making your own fun, speedrunning, streaming with friends, writing Sam and Lonnie fanfic . . . Either way, stories are not only baked into *Gone Home*; they also emerge from it. Media draw from theatre this way. They stage stories.

Message and play don't always resonate. You are looking at a cup or digging through filing cabinets while Sam is talking to you about her relationship with Lonnie. The mechanics of snooping don't always align with *Gone Home*'s love story. They may even contradict it. This ludonarrative dissonance is pretty common in video games. After all, most games centre the player. "This world was built for + around you, dear gamer." Of course, this dissonance may be purposeful, perhaps for a laugh. Regardless of the intent, it highlights a pretty fascinating aspect of games, namely how mechanics can be expressive, not just functional. Snooping is how you express yourself as a player in the loop of *Gone Home*.

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Terminology from Milestone 3: diegetic, nondiegetic, ways of listening (causal, semantic, reduced), MX, BG, VO, FOL, DX, SFX, unintended speech (language), the grain of audio, listening habits, walking sim, FPS, mechanics, on rails, ludonarrative dissonance, environmental storytelling (evoked, embedded, enacted, emergent)