NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

June 28th-29th 2008
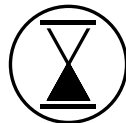
TIME`S UP
Industriezeile 33b
A-4020 Linz

http://timesup.org/laboratory/NarrativeStrategies/index.html

Introduction

Time's Up, based upon over ten years of experience in interaction design, is developing a parallel city world that interacts with its visitors and tells the stories of its inhabitants; the visitors plus a cast of imagined characters who built and inhabit the space.

This story should react meaningfully to the actions and concerns of the visitors without losing the plot, i.e. getting lost in narratively insignificant and uninteresting byroads and tangents.

In order to draw upon the expertise and experience of closely related fields, as well as to enhance communication between them, Time's Up is organising the Narrative Strategies Workshop.

Invitees are practitioners working with narratives that are dynamic in several ways. The core areas that we have paid attention to are Computer Games, Live Action Role-Playing, Physical Narrative, Alternative Reality Gaming, Long-form Improvisation, Live Cinema and Locative Gaming.

The first day will be spent with each participant explaining some of the strategies that they have developed for their work in their area, from the character development of Live Action Roleplaying to the world building of computer games.

The fields brought together have a collection of mutually complementary strengths that fill out a whole area of practice.

The second day will be spent examining, analysing and applying these strategies. Bringing together the expertises of the group, we hope to find new ways of building narrative structures that enable the creation of resilient narrative arcs that are compelling in their physicality and responsiveness.

<u>Program</u>

<u>Friday 27th June</u>

20:00 - Dinner
Agathon - Kapuzinerstrasse 46, 4020 Linz

<u>Saturday 28th June</u>

10:00   Travel to Seminar Venue

11.30 – 12.00   Welcome & introduction by Time's Up

12.00 – 12.40   Presentation by Chris Crawford

12.40 – 13.20   Presentation by Adrian Hon

13.20 – 14.40   Lunch Break

14.40 – 15.20   Presentation by Julianne Pierce

15.20 – 16.00   Presentation by Kate Amstrong

16.00 – 16.40   Presentation by Bronwynn Mertz-Penzinger

16.40 – 17.00   Short Break

17.00 – 17.40   Presentation by Mia Makela

19.00   Regional Dinner at Seminar Venue

Program

Sunday 29th June

10.00 – 10.40	Presentation by Nik Gaffney, Theun Karelse and Maja Kuzmanovic
10.40 – 11.20	Presentation by Time's Up
11.20 – 11.40	Short Break
11.40 – 13.00	discussion forum 01 commonalities & complementarities: what we can learn / steal from one another
13.00 – 14.30	Lunch Break
14.30 – 16.00	discussion forum 02 characterisation: characters, movements, threads, objects,…
16.00 – 16.30	Short Break
16.30 – 18.00	discussion forum 03 "How does the audience know that it is live" resilient responses to audience interventions
19.30	Dinner

<u>Chris Crawford</u>
interactive storytelling

Chris Crawford used to be a big shot in the games biz. He was manager of games research at Atari in the early 80s, and after the collapse of Atari became a freelance game developer who published a total of 14 games, including two big hits. He also founded the first periodical dedicated to discussion of game design issues, and the first conference for game designers. But 16 years ago he abandoned the games industry to begin working on the next generation of interactive entertainment: interactive storytelling. He is now on the verge of publishing his technology.

I have repeatedly failed to successfully explain my technology to other workers in the field. I now believe that this failure is due to the many exotic concepts upon which my technology is founded. In this lecture, I shall list and explain those concepts. It is my hope that a grasp of those concepts will make it much easier for people to understand the technology.

http://www.storytron.com/

Adrian Hon
How we tell stories

Adrian Hon is the co-founder and Chief Creative Officer at Six to Start. One of the world's leading alternate reality game designers, Adrian has been the lead designer of games including Perplex City and We Tell Stories. Adrian is also the founder of the innovative Let's Change the Game charity that aims to raise money for Cancer Research UK through an alternate reality game.

Despite its youth, storytelling within games already takes many different forms, from the linear and non-interactive to more fluid and player-shaped narratives. This talk will explore how new forms of online gaming designed for massive numbers of players, the use of multiple media, and non-traditional forms of interaction, have again expanded the possibilities available.

www.sixtostart.com
www.letschangethegame.org

Julianne Pierce
Rider Speak

Since forming in 1991, Blast Theory's central concern has been to investigate the role of the audience as a participant in installation, performance and gaming. In this presentation I will focus on several of Blast Theory's works from the last 10 years that provoke and challenge the idea of audience. I will look at how Blast Theory develops strategies for engaging their audience and indeed how the audience is situated as co-author of the work.

Starting with the seminal work Kidnap (1998), I will look at how Blast Theory has used a highly participatory approach to performance to place the audience at the centre of the work. Following from Kidnap, I will focus on the significant shift in Blast Theory's practice, precipitated in the late 1990's through the collaboration with Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham. Whilst the audience remain as a central concern, the work developed since 1999 has been driven by a technology-based performance and research agenda.

Works such as Desert Rain (1999), Can You See Me Now? (2003) and Day Of The Figurines (2005) use a range of interactive modes such as augmented reality, GPS and SMS to develop gameplay where the experience of the audience is determined through their interaction and participation with the work. The newest work Rider Spoke (2007) is perhaps the most collaborative work between artist and audience. Participants take a cycle ride through the streets of the city, with a Nokia N800 mounted on the handlebars. They are given a question and invited to look for an appropriate hiding place to record their answers. The screen of the device acts primarily as a positioning system, locating the audience and showing if there are any hiding places nearby. It invites the public to be co-authors of the piece and a visible manifestation of it as they cycle through the city.

It locates the venue precisely in its local context and invites the audience to explore that context for its emotional and intellectual resonances.

Rider Spoke and other Blast Theory projects pose important questions about the meaning of interaction and, especially, its limitations. Who is invited to speak, under what conditions and what that is truly meaningful can be said?

Julianne Pierce is an Australian curator, writer and producer specialising in digital and media arts. In September 2007 she relocated to the UK to take up the position of Executive Producer with Blast Theory. She has worked in the Australian arts and digital media sector for over twenty years and from 2000 to 2005 was the Executive Director of ANAT (Australian Network for Art and Technology). She has curated several events and exhibitions including Primavera, the annual exhibition of emerging Australian artists for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney in 2003 and the Artists[1] Week program for the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 2006 and 2008. In 2000 she curated Biomachines for the Adelaide Festival including artists such as Times Up, Matt Heckert and Triclops International. Julianne is a founding member of the influential computer artist group VNS Matrix, who exhibited widely in Australia and internationally from 1991 - 1997. She is also a regular contributor to magazines and journals including Realtime, Artlink and Photofile and in 2006/2007 was guest commentator on new media and screen culture for ABC Radio arts program ŒThe Deep End[1].

http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/

Kate Amstrong

Elements of dynamic or locative narrative

Kate Armstrong is an artist, writer and independent curator working with networks, urban space, poetics, and computation. In her work she looks to bring digital structures into low-fi models and physical spaces as a way to interrogate contemporary culture. She works with text and experimental narrative, especially open and dynamic structures. This has taken a variety of forms including net art, installation, psychogeography, events, and robotics. Armstrong is a lecturer at Simon Fraser University in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology and an adjunct professor at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver, Canada. She is the Director of Upgrade Vancouver and works collaboratively in the field of public art with the architecture and design firm bnode. Her book, Crisis & Repetition, Essays on Art and Culture, was published in 2002.

For the Narrative Strategies seminar Armstrong will present past projects that contain elements of dynamic or locative narrative, and discuss strategies such as recombinance, psychogeographic exploration, movement as a generative process, and the tradition of intervention in art practice.

http://www.katearmstrong.com

Bronwynn Mertz-Penzinger
Improv-Theater

We have moved a long way from the improvisation games / short forms that are based on comedy and sometimes lend themselves to the gags of slapstick entertainment. We see impro as an art form that has the potential to explore life and art on a more ‚meaningful' level, to inspire us in a search for a relevant theatre in the modern world. This work is based on various forms and tools which we continually create, adjust, explore and (re)search.

The „form" is a collection of restrictions and guidelines for a particular impro piece. The form might dictate time structure, for example linear narrative, or a deconstruction of the time-line. Or it may require certain input from the audience dealing with times, genres, buzzwords or other decisions in the theatrical narrative.

The core remains a ‚narrative'. Long form impro is not about ‚the laughs', our focus in long form impro is more about using narration, telling stories that are as deep, moving and complex as a „normal" piece of theatre. Our problem, and therefore our training and rehearsal, is about developing tactics and strategies to work, as an ensemble, through a form, to remain open to new input from our co-performers as well as our audience and still hold a narrative together.

Our current work leads us further into the labyrinth of archetype, myth and alternative expressions of storytelling, into the realms of abstract theatre, pulling a collection of ideas from experimental theatre as well as other forms like physical clowning, performance art, movement based expressions etc. Opening up the structures that we use, we include new narrative forms and need to develop new strategies as the older ones fade into irrelevance.

Bronwynn was born in the USA but grew up in Australia. She received her theatre degree from Murdoch University in Perth Western Australia and since then has been working all over the world as an actress for both stage and screen, she is also an experienced impro player/ teacher/ director, CliniClown, voice-over artist, etc… Bronwynn lives in Vienna with her husband and 2 sons. She has been performing and teaching here since 1992 in both English and German (sometimes simultaneously!) with the English Lovers, the Vienna Theatre Project, Meet the Monster, Vienna's International Theatre as well as various independant theatre and film projects. Since 2002 she has been a regular collaborator/ teacher/ performer at countless International Improvisation and Theatre Festivals throughout Europe and the USA. In 2006 she became the artistic director of the experimental company „Twisted Theater".

www.twisted-theater.com

Mia Makela
Live Cinema

Live Cinema creators explore narrative structures that can be applied in realtime. The working methods are varied; for some it resembles creating music: modular structures, clip libraries, samples, processing, generating and looping the visual material. For others working with live cameras or using internet as database for the performance. The performances tend to follow abstract or meta-narrative strategies, literally speaking; structurally closer to poetry than prose, as aesthetic and evocative qualities of material are used in addition to ostensible meaning. Live cinema employs also spatial narration and montage which adds more complexity to the narrative structure.

Mia Makela (a.k.a SOLU) is finnish media+live cinema artist, teacher, investigator and cultural activist residing in Barcelona.

http://www.solu.org/

Nik Gaffney, Theun Karelse and Maja Kuzmanovic

Stories are seeds of possible worlds. Of worlds that perhaps have been, maybe are now - somewhere else, or might yet come to pass. There are many stories in each of us, people who create and share stories, semipermeable membranes and as such, we are held together by stories. As porous bodies have the ability to absorb and leak, these stories leak through our many skins. Through our flimsy physical epidermis, expressed in the movement of muscles, facial expressions, goose bumps, smiles and frowns. Through our second skin - through clothing, a membrane between private, intimate worlds and the external, social worlds - the stories are visible in rips, holes, stains and tears. Stories echo through the interiors and their surfaces (walls, floors, table-tops), the containing spaces in which stories travel and propagate. Finally, stories are embedded in built and grown environments. The spatial arrangement of buildings and parks guides the paths of stories in our daily life. In these environments, the stories become sedimented, sometimes forgotten, for centuries… As the people who create them, so stories themselves are porous as well. They are easily absorbed in different media and they easily absorb events and other stories into themselves. Good stories are leaky, and we pour our own experiences into them to keep them growing. They are not top-down grand narratives in which we have to believe, but bottom-up grown, richly detailed worlds in which we can belong…

For Narrative Strategies, we'll think about creating not just stories, but situations in which new stories can emerge. In words, colours, or movements, through all our skins. We'd like to share our stories, leave them open, let them leak and absorb, becoming a source, not an end.

FoAM (http://fo.am) is a hybrid between a research centre and an artistic studio, based in Brussels and Amsterdam. Since its conception in 2000,

FoAM's aim has been to permeate through the gaps between creativity and innovation, traditional crafts and emerging technologies, stories and realities. FoAM blends digital and physical worlds on a human scale, from materials to whole environments. In these mixed realities, FoAM encourages vibrant social situations to emerge, where food, art and technology intermingle to create 'total experiences'. Within the lab and in the field, they train new generations of interstitial explorers, through workshops and publications. Their lives and works encourage a playful interdependent and holistic approach to the world. FoAM's motto, ‚grow your own worlds' encourages collaborators and audiences to move from wasteful consumption to responsible participation in all aspects of their lives.

http://fo.am/

Time's Up

Time's Up's work is, at least on the face of it, not based upon any idea or understanding of narrative. Interactive systems, audiovisual systems, large pieces of steel with visitors standing upon them wobbling into abstracted Tron-worlds are physical items with no embedded story. So we thought.

The late Swiss anthropologist and film maker, Robert Fischer, visited us several years ago and, after investigating what we were doing, declared that we were not (as we were using somewhat tongue in cheek for our propaganda) pseudoscientists, but rather that our visitors, as they explored the networked space that the installations offered, were acting as protoscientists. As the visitor works their way through the environment, they encounter a number of objects and systems that are usable in some way. Investigating the ways that they work, that motion is possible and effects correlate with those motions, they are investigating the world in some kind of proto-scientific fashion.

We have noticed, over and over again, that this investigation is not a purely individualistic one, but that many visitors feel the need or desire to communicate their findings to other visitors. Thus we observe some kind of protoscientific discourse, a discussion about the world and its inner rules. One of the basic capacities of people seems to be the discovery of sequences of actions that belong together, to determine correlations and causalities and to describe them in little micro-narratives. This sequence of investigations, understandings, misunderstandings and communication about them in such micro narratives has come to be known as the exploration narrative, a term that we hope encompasses many of the important aspects.

We are interested in extending this into the realm of traditional narratives, where long term installation work takes on a long term dynamic that is best explained as narrative based upon imaginary characters.