DM2006 Narratives for Interaction

School of Art, Design and Media, NTU Singapore

SYLLABUS

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Context

Both narratives (storytelling) and interaction are human universals. When we blend them creatively, we get a powerful toolset for expression, communication and learning.
In this course we will cover some aspects of interactive narrativity in different emerging storytelling media which have been rapidly transforming our narrative experiences and how we perceive, interpret and present stories. These media formations include digital games, interactive art, interactive documentaries, cinema, database narratives and data visualizations.
Because storytelling is just one mode of narrativity, narratives can also be abstract and actually all narratives are essentially abstract in their form which we interpret and assign it with meaning. There are some patterns in meaning that we recognize readily and have special affinity for them and these narrative models (themes) had achieved special status throughout our evolutionary history. The arts, in general, constantly revisit and explore these themes in different ways, always holding some narrative elements constant but changing some other, adding idiosyncratic (individual) flavors to affect the audience. So even when an artwork does not feature an explicit story, it can motivate us to generate our own narratives.

Course Description

Through creative examination of the narrative factors in interactive media, this course motivates you to integrate learning, research and project production. The focus is on experiment and open-minded approach. You will build up your creative insight into media art through the project-based development of conceptual thinking, technical skills, technological and theoretical knowledge, critical thinking, individual integrity and responsibility.
You are free to choose the ideas, methodologies, forms and media for your projects, with consideration for conceptual cogency, material and logistic feasibility. You are expected to take initiative in mastering the skills and competences working with tools required by your projects.

Strategy

My teaching strategy emphasizes the integration of transdisciplinary approach with technical mastery for the creation of inventive, innovative and socially relevant artwork. The emphasis is on harmonizing the artistic research with experimentation.

Goals

Introduction to the narrative elements of interactive media art.
Acquiring and developing skills for creation, contextualization and evaluation of interactive media narratives.
Developing independent critical assessment of and discourse in new media art.

Program

The program combines hands-on production, lectures, assignments, presentations, consultations and critical discussions. Hands-on production is focused on the development and production of your art projects. The emphasis is on harmonizing the research and experiment with the efficiency and technical sophistication. You are required to improve and successfully defend the conceptual and structural integrity of your projects prior, during and after production.

Class Structure and Activities

#	Activity
1.	**Intro Class** About me (plus read this). About the course: Concept, structure and syllabus. About you: Brief us on your background and current interests. **Assignment 1**: Find the inspiring, thought-provoking examples of interactive narratives in the arts and in popular culture, and prepare individual, media-supported presentation, 5 min long.* Presentations will be scheduled alphabetically in two sessions (due 2. and 3. week). Post your presentations at the OSS after each session. **Assignment 2**: Project team building (due 2. week), preparing project ideas (due 3. and 4. week) and prototyping (prototype demos due 7. week). Final projects due 13. week.
2.	**Lecture 1: Narrative Aspects of Digital Visualization.** **Presentations**: Assignment 1 (Examples of interactive narratives) 1/2. **Presentations**: Assignment 2 (Project teams say hi). **Scheduling the project idea presentations**: 3x45-min sessions for 3. and 4. week. Each project team has 15 min. **Assignment 3**: Individual reading and reflection on recommended essays in new media art theory relating to narrative aspects. Select one of the titles, read it, research about it and post your reflections at the OSS. No less than 950 characters with spaces/130 words/10 lines in 12pt, up to 1900 characters with spaces/260 words/20 lines in 12pt. I will give you the bibliography list in class. Publishing at the OSS due 8. week.
3.	**Lecture 2: Animation and Film.** **Research and resources**: Intro to Digital Art Research Platform and my web site. Get to know some of the resources and methodology for your creative research in new media art, focusing on the narrative aspects of interactive art. **Presentations**: Assignment 1 (Examples of interactive narratives) 2/2. **Team presentations**: Assignment 2 (Project ideas) 1/3
4.	**Lunar NY Holiday**: No class.
5.	**Team presentations**: Assignment 2 (Project ideas) – **ALL TEAMS** – 2x45 min **Field trip logistics brief.** **Guest lecture + talk: Ben Slater**, optionally Special Topics in NfI Lecture: Generative Strategies.
6.	**Field trip: *Minimalism* exhibition in the National Gallery of Singapore.** **Assignment 4**: Select one artwork from *Minimalism* exhibition, research about it and post your reflections at the OSS. Due 8. week.
7.	**Lecture 3: Gaming.** **Project prototype demos and discussion**: Each team has 15-20 min to showcase the demo, plus we do a discussion on each.
8.	**Recess**: Final project development. Deadline for posting *Minimalism* visit impressions at the OSS.
9.	**Consultations 1**: In-progress project discussion. Each team updates me on their project development, and we discuss all the relevant aspects.
10.	**Lecture 4: Generative Narrativity.** **Consultations 2**: In-progress project discussion. Each team updates me on their project development, and we discuss all the relevant aspects.
11.	**Guest lecture + talk: Kristy Kang.** **Consultations 3**: In-progress project discussion. Each team updates me on their project development, and we discuss all the relevant aspects.
12.	**Consultations 4**: In-progress project discussion. Each team updates me on their project development, and we discuss all the relevant aspects.
13.	**Consultations 5**: Final project presentations and discussion. Each team presents their finished projects, and we discuss the outcomes. You should participate in all discussions.
14.	**Critique**: Final project discussion in which we round up the impressions and thoughts on your projects, and identify the possibilities for further development and/or new projects.

*Timing is for orientation only and may vary.

Lectures Overview

How Many Words in an Image?
Narrative aspects of art projects based upon digital image creation and manipulation, and upon the principles of digital (discrete) encoding.

Animation and Film
Commercial (narrative) cinema within the context of digital paradigm, and new media artworks critically exploring the phenomenology of commercial film.

Gaming 1: Context
Cultural, educational, economic and political context and consequences of computer gaming as one of the paradigmatic domains of digital interactivity.

Gaming 2: Art
Strategies and problematics of the artistic computer games.

Generative Narrativity
Narratives in generative art as a heterogeneous realm of artistic approaches based upon combining the predefined elements with different factors of unpredictability in conceptualizing, producing and presenting the artwork.

Guest Lectures
New media artists will present and discuss the narrative aspects of their art projects, and/or talk about special topics related to the interactive narrativity.

Requirements

Produce and present one narrative media project working in teams of 3 to 4 (or solo in special cases).
Document your project conceptualization, process and development.
Fulfil the assignments as specified in *Class Structure and Activities*.
Actively participate in consultations and class discussions.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. If you arrive more than 15 minutes late you will be marked as absent.

Learning Outcomes

The students will have broadened their understanding of the narrative aspects of interactive media.
They will have acquired and develop skills for creation, contextualization and evaluation of interactive media narratives.
They will have developed skills for independent critical assessment of and discourse in new media art.

Student Assessment

Students will be assessed based on the following criteria: delivery, inventiveness, creative thinking, clarity of expression and initiative in self-driven learning.

50% Assignments and (weekly) progress of your final project
30% Final project execution
20% Class participation

Textbooks and References

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Ihmels, Tjark and Julia Riedel. "The Methodology of Generative Art." Medien Kunst Net website. http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/generative-tools/generative-art/1/0

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Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001.

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Nakatsu, Ryohei, Matthias Rauterberg and Paolo Ciancarini, eds. *Handbook of Digital Games and Entertainment Technologies*. Singapore: Springer Science + Business Media, 2017.

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Salen, Katie. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004.

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Zielinski, Siegfried, David Link, Eckhard Fuerlus and Nadine Minkwitz, eds. *Variantology 2: On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies*. Köln: Walther König, 2007.