Lecture 2: Story

CM 148
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Let’s play

EXTRASOLAR
Approximate Weekly Schedule

1. Story [HW: Twine Game]
2. Interactivity [HW: Play games]
3. Operational Logics and Game Fictions
4. Interactive Narrative – more in depth, including contemporary debates [HW: Play IF games]
5. Inform 7 [HW: Get started with Inform 7] [Midterm]
6. AI and Story [HW: Story Grammars]
7. Author Modeling
8. World and Character Modeling [HW: Apply Grammars]
9. Overflow
10. Interactive Drama [Final Inform 7 Project Due] [Final]
Reading Discussion

• The future of interactive media???
  – Hyper-engineered technology to keep us in a state of catatonic bliss, or something more?

• What was interesting?

• What questions did you have?
Why is story important?

*Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living.*

— On Stories, Richard Kearney

*To be a person is to have a story to tell.*

— Isak Dinesen
Why do you make games?
• Is story the most important aspect of a game?

• Is gameplay/mechanics the most important?

• Which games integrate story and gameplay well?

• What are some games where the story and the mechanics seem too separate, distract from one another?
“Story” Narrative

Narrative = Story + Discourse

Sequence of events

How those events are represented
Story (data) + Discourse (rendering alg)

```
myFunction1(...)  
for c in curves do  
  this <-- that
  myUnimportantFunction(this)
  foo = myImportantFunction(that)
      a = that / 2
      b = that * 2
    return a + b
  if foo == bar then
    print foo + bar

= Narrative (final rendering)
How it’s finally experienced by the player
```
Same Story, Different Discourse
In the S bus, in the rush hour. A chap of about 26, felt hat with a cord instead of a ribbon, neck too long, as if someone’s been having a tug-of-war with it. People getting off. The chap in question gets annoyed with one of the men standing next to him. He accuses him of jostling him every time anyone goes past. A sniveling tone which is meant to be aggressive. When he sees a vacant seat he throws himself on to it.

Two hours later, I meet him in the Cour de Rome, in front of the gare Saint-Lazare. He’s with a friend who’s saying: “You ought to get an extra button put on your overcoat.” He shows him where (at the lapels) and why.
You ought to put another button on your overcoat, his friend told him. I met him in the middle of the Cour de Rome, after having left him rushing avidly towards a seat. He had just protested against being pushed by another passenger who, he said, was jostling him every time anyone got off. This scraggy young man was the wearer of a ridiculous hat. This took place on the platform of an S bus which was full that particular midday.
I was not displeased with my attired this day. I was inaugurating a new, rather sprightly hat, and an overcoat of which I thought most highly. Met X in front of the gare Saint-Lazare who tried to spoil my pleasure by trying to prove that this overcoat is cut too low at the lapels and that I ought to have an extra button on it. At least he didn’t dare attack my headgear.

A bit earlier I had roundly told off a vulgar type who was purposely ill-treating me every time anyone went by getting off or on. This happened in one of those unspeakably foul omnibi which fill up with hoi polloi precisely at those times when I have to consent to use them.
Style: Haiku

Summer S long neck
plait hat toes abuse retreat
station button friend
Some fancy words

• Story/fabula
  – The objective sequence of events that constitutes the story

• Narrative discourse/sjuzhet
  – The presentation of the story (always involves manipulation)

• Diegesis
  – The story world, the time-space continuum of the story (the story is a sequences of events in the diegetic world)

• Narration
  – The mechanics by which the discourse is produced from the story (e.g. third vs. first person etc.)
# Primer

A comprehensive timeline by Laura Ellis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐  ☐ are working on an invention, a device that will partially block gravity, making objects lighter.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐  ☐ discovers that they unknowingly made a time machine and builds two versions big enough for humans and ☐  ☐ intent to keep ☐  ☐ secret license the need to know everything about it.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>☐  ☐ tells ☐  ☐ in sick to work and isolates himself in a hotel room.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐  ☐ enters ☐  ☐ and gets out after 15 hours.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐  ☐ meets with ☐  ☐ and tells him about the device, showing him under the storage facility where ☐  ☐ are being kept.</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐  ☐ is threatened by ☐  ☐ with a shot gun. ☐  ☐ are not at the party, but hear about the event.</td>
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<td>☐  ☐ falls into a vegetative state, concerning ☐  ☐</td>
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[link to the full timeline on Laura Ellis's site](http://cargocollective.com/lauraells/primer-timeline)
The narrative situation

Diegetic universe

Story

Discourse

Prolepsis (flash-forward)

Analepsis (flash-back)

Interpretation
Focalization
How same events get told from different perspectives
Constituent and Supplementary Events

• Constituent events are the backbone of the story – the necessary events and their causal structure that define the story.
  – Adding and dropping constituent events changes the story.

• Supplementary events fill out the story backbone.
  – Adding and dropping supplementary events changes style and rhetoric.
Supplementary Events in Heavy Rain
Constituent Events

That'll be two dollars, sir.

www.mahalo.com/Heavy_Rain
change constituent event

change supplementary event

change story
(sequence of events)

change narrative discourse
(how it’s told)
Dramatic Structure

Life story vs. life told
Distillation of the essence of life

Structure is a selection of events from characters’ life stories strategically composed to express specific emotions and points of view.
Atomic nuggets of story

• Story event
  – A story event turns (changes) a story value

• Story value
  – Universal binary qualities of human experience
  – Alive/dead, love/hate, freedom/slavery, courage/cowardice, wisdom/stupidity, ...
  – Great thing to encode in a computer?!

• Conflict
  – Change in the story value is achieved
Scenes and Beats

• Scene
  – A story event that changes at least one value (from negative to positive or vice-versa)
  – No exposition – information should always be communicated through value change
  – “What’s at stake in my character’s life at this moment?”
  – Test of “sceneness” – could the story event be expressed in a unity of time and space? Is there a focus on a single story value?
  – If a value doesn’t change at the end of the scene, why is it there?

• Beat – action/reaction pairs that shape the turning of the scene
  – The smallest unit of value change
# A computational look at beats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat_id</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value_change</th>
<th>Tags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1       | A asks out B, B cruelly rejects A | A_sad++  
A_embarrassed++  
A_B_friendship-- | Ask out, romance, rejection, cruel |
| 2       | A asks out B, B nicely rejects A but still wants to be friends | A_sad++,  
A_hope++,  
A_B_friendship++ | Ask out, Rejection, friendzone, romance |
| 3       | A asks out B, B accepts | A_happy++  
A_B_friendship++  
A_B_romance++ | Ask out, acceptance, romance, happy |
A computational look at beats

- Beat Manager:
  - Find me a beat that...
    - Increases tension between characters A and B
    - Does NOT involve romance
    - Fits the preconditions of A and B’s current relationship status

```python
def get_beat(world_state, char_a, char_b, constraints):
    for beat in beats:
        if beat.is_valid(world_state) and beat.satisfies(constraints):
            return beat.enacted_with(char_a, char_b)
    return None  # no beat found...
```
Sequences, acts, and stories

• A **sequence** is a series of scenes (typically 2 to 5) that culminates with greater impact than any previous scene
  – Each scene turns its own value
  – The sequence turns a greater value that subordinates the others

• An **act** is a series of sequences that peaks in a climactic scene causing a major reversal of values, more powerful than any preceding scene or sequence

• The story, in the story **climax**, brings **about absolute and irreversible change**
  – The audience can’t imagine any change past this
Sequences, acts, and stories
Readings

• Required
  – Chapter 1: Introduction. *Expressive Processing* by Noah Wardrip-Fruin

• Optional
    • Narrative = Story + Discourse
    • Constituent and supplementary events
  – Chapter 1: The Structure Spectrum. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and The Principles of Screenwriting* by McKee
    • Life story vs. story told
    • Scenes and beats
    • Sequences, acts, and stories
Twine assignment

• Theme: *Change*

• Exercise what you’ve learned about story/narrative
  – Story events that change values through conflict
  – Scenes and beats
  – Sequences, acts, stories
Hosting your game online

• www.neocities.org
  – Modern reinterpretation of geocities

• http://itch.io/
  – Simple hosting of many kinds of indie games

• http://philome.la/
  – Twine-specific super simple hosting

• http://its.ucsc.edu/web/hosting/personal-pages-tutorial.html
  – http://people.ucsc.edu/~your_username/