Lecture 3: Story (cont.)
Protagonist, Plot, and Narrativity

CM 148
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Did you join late?
Are you on the mailing list?

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Expressive Processing Discussion

• Two notions of Expressive Processing

• Noncomputational media processes

• Operational logics and effects (Tail Spin, Eliza, Sim City) covered in class soon!
The Protagonist

• “View your work from the inside out, from the center of your character, looking out at the world through your character’s eyes” – McKee (p. 136)

• The protagonist is the central character – who the story is all about

• Provides a motive force for the action
Caveat

• These theories of McKee (and others) are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*.
• Meant to be general statements on *observations* they make about the films that take up the great majority of commercial cinema.
• You don’t *have* to follow these rules.
• Useful to know the common patterns.
The Protagonist

• Is **not** always the **main character**
  – The main character represents the audiences’ eyes into the story
  – The main character is not always the key focus of the story

You play as Kaitlin uncovering the story of Kaitlin’s sister Sam

Sam is the (non-playable) protagonist
The Protagonist

• Might be plural!
• A duo, a trio, or a whole social class
  – Plural-protagonist
• Or there might be multiple protagonists with intertwined points of view
  – Multiprotagonist
The Protagonist

• Must be willful
  – No passive protagonists
  – Might seem passive, but actually be reactive
Empathy

• The audience must be able to empathize with the protagonist
  – Understand and share their feelings
  – Not the same as sympathy – doesn’t mean you have to like the character
Identification

- In Aristotelian drama, empathy results in identification – the audience experiences what the protagonist experiences
- That character is *like me*
VIDEO GAME PROTAGONISTS

Kids love brown-haired 30-something white males.
Empathy and Identification
The Protagonist

• Must want something / have a conscious object of desire
  – And know it
• Maybe has an unconscious object of desire
  – Doesn’t know it
  – Audience can sense it

• The character who is driven to pursue the goal is the **Protagonist**
The Protagonist

• Must stand a chance of achieving their object of desire
  – “An audience has no patience for a protagonist who lacks all possibility of realizing his desire. The reason is simple: No one believes this of his own life.” –McKee

• Acceptable:
  – Failing to achieve the goal
  – Really super long-shot goal

• Not Acceptable:
  – Having no hope whatsoever
The Protagonist

• Must have the will and capacity to pursue their object of desire *to the limit*
  – “*The art of story is not about the middle ground*” – McKee

• How the story builds to the final action beyond which audience cannot imagine another
  – “The audience wants to be taken to the limit, to where all questions are answered, all emotions satisfied.” –McKee
Conflict

- The will of the protagonist must be resisted
  - The protagonist takes the minimal, reasonable action to achieve their goal, but provokes antagonism
  - This is different from real life – most of the time our actions don’t provoke antagonism (though we may encounter resistance)

- Inner conflicts
  - Mind, body, emotions

- Personal conflicts
  - Family, lovers, friends

- Extra-personal conflicts
  - Social institutions, individuals in society (social roles), physical environment
The Gap
The Gap

“These cracks in moment-to-moment reality mark the difference between the dramatic and the prosaic, between action and activity.

... Mere activity is behavior in which what is expected happens, generating no change or trivial change.”

– McKee
Discussion Questions

• Pick a videogame
  – Who’s the protagonist and what are their goals?

• What are some games where
  – The protagonist doesn’t fit the description we just learned
  – You don’t play as the protagonist
Who’s the protagonist in Tetris?

- The player is the one working towards the goal
- Challenged by the game world – conflict
- Make the best move you can and it gets harder and harder
Jesper Juul’s Art of Failure

- “[Failure] involves the player working toward a goal, either communicated by the game or invented by the player, and the player failing to attain that goal.”

- “The experience of failing in a game is different from the experience of witnessing a protagonist failing in a story.”

- Why do we subject ourselves to failure via games?

[Link](http://www.salon.com/2013/07/13/video_games_make_us_all_losers/)
Plot

• “To navigate through the dangerous terrain of story, and when confronted by a dozen branching possibilities, to choose the correct path. Plot is the writer’s choice of events and their design in time.” –McKee (p. 43)
Plot

Classical Design
Archplot

Causality
Closed Ending
Linear Time
External Conflict
Single Protagonist
Consistent Reality
Active Protagonist

Causality
Closed Ending
Linear Time
External Conflict
Single Protagonist
Consistent Reality
Active Protagonist

Open Ending
Internal Conflict
Multi-Protagonist
Passive Protagonist

Coincidence
Non-linear Time
Inconsistent Realities

Minimilism
Miniplot

Anti-Structure
Antiplot
Narrativity

• Narratologists like to debate *What IS narrative?*
  – “It must involve a narrator recounting a sequence of past events to a narratee!”
  – “So plays and ballet and stuff don’t count!”

• Before, we learned this general equation:
  narrative = story + discourse
Narrativity Scale

• Consider “narrativeness” a scalar value (more or less narrative) rather than a boolean value (is or is not a narrative)
  – Do this by defining 8 narrative dimensions – if a specific media instance strongly has all these properties, then it has very high narrativeness (a “classical” story)
  – Subsets of the dimensions can be considered for specific purposes
Narrativity Scale

• Spatial Dimension
  – 1. Narrative must be about a world populated by individuated existents

• Temporal Dimension
  – 2. The world must be situated in time and undergo significant transformations
  – 3. The transformations must be caused by non-habitual physical events

• Mental Dimension
  – 4. Some of the participants in the events must be intelligent agents who have a mental life and react emotionally to the states of the world
  – 5. Some of the events must be purposeful actions by these agents, motivated by identifiable goals and plans

• Formal and Pragmatic Dimensions
  – 6. The sequence must form a unified causal chain and lead to closure
  – 7. The occurrence of at least some of these events must be asserted as fact in the story world
  – 8. The story must communicate something meaningful to the recipient
Twine Grading Rubric

• Turn in:
  – URL to your game and source code
  – Written responses
• 50 pts total
  – (10 pts) Incorporate the theme of change. Include at least 10 passages. Make use of images, custom CSS, and embedded passages.
  – (10 pts) Make use of Twine scripting to manage and change state variable(s)
  – (30 pts) Analysis of how your game uses story elements. If it doesn't, say why.
    • Talk about how you used constituent/supplementary events.
    • Point out some of the beats or scenes you designed. How did they serve the story?
    • If there was conflict, what was it? If there was a protagonist, what was their goal? What value(s) changed and how did they change?
Variables and Conditionals in Twine

- Can use fancy macros, but at bare minimum, use something like this:
  - [http://twinery.org/wiki/set](http://twinery.org/wiki/set)
  - [http://twinery.org/wiki/if](http://twinery.org/wiki/if)
  - [http://twinery.org/wiki/link](http://twinery.org/wiki/link)

<<if $body is "wounded">>You are <<if $blood <= 5>>about to die<<else>>bleeding<<endif>>. Seek help!<<endif>>

<<set $meals to 1>>

[[The lamp is red][${lamp = "red"}]]
[[The lamp is blue][${lamp = "blue"}]]
<<set $playerMoxie to either(2, 4, 6)>>
<<set $playerAttire to either("green", "black", "rainbow")>>
You have <<print $playerMoxie>> moxie points, and <<print $playerAttire>> armour.

You plunge into the [[glowing vortex|either("12000 BC","The Future","2AM Yesterday")]].

The snowballs are useless against this lava beast! Undo! [[Undo!|previous()]]
No required reading this weekend

• Work on your game!

• Optional:
  – Watch *The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters*
    • [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aawj_C8ygWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aawj_C8ygWE)
  – Read *Video games make us all losers!* By Jesper Juul
    • Chapter 1 of Art of Failure