

Catch Up Class: AGENCY/NARRATIVE

Readings

Murray, Agency
Juul, Games Telling Stories
Costikyan, Breaking the String

Goals

- Introduce concepts of agency (in an ideal world, recap of contents)
- Discuss the relationship between games and stories

Ludology Terms

- Agency
- Components of story (chatman)
- Narrative
- Embedded/emergent storytelling

AGENCY: Q: Definition:

“The satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices”
(Murray, p. 126)

- More refined term than “interactivity” - it's not about the response of the system alone, but about affecting the world of the game
- Relates to MEANINGFUL PLAY – dusting chess pieces is not part of the game, moving them according to the rules is – what the system lets us do or not has meaning in the system, e.g.:
- problem-solving
- maze navigation
- The player is an agent in the story, creating DRAMATIC OPPORTUNITIES which the player has to reenact
- Examples:
 - Second Sight – IM Conversation
 - Final Fantasy VII – Aeris' death
 - Grand Theft Auto IV – Pick up your hat
 - The interactor is not the author of the narrative but has power on the world → it's AGENCY
 - Example: MUDs

Pretend Agency – Actions that feel meaningful but do not have an effect on the world

Ex: talking to your pet in Nintendogs consciously.

Games as Narratives

- We're dealing with 2 CRITIQUES of approaching games as narrative (introduce Juul and Costikyan)

Q: *How are these games narrative:*

- *Tetris*
- *Super Mario Bros.*
- *Zelda*
- *PacMan*

→ NOT ALL GAMES TELL STORIES

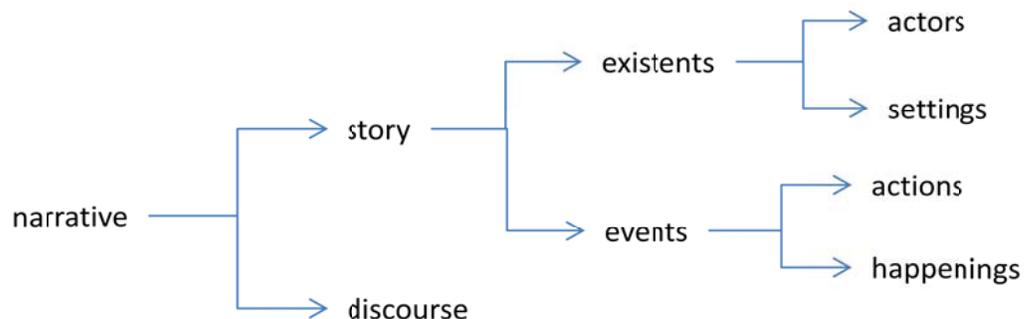
Ludology vs. Narratology → NARRATIVISM

- initial controversy
- Helped start discussion on games and narrative
- LUDOLOGY
- (narrow definition) – Study of games as systems, formal properties
- (more like it) – Study of games as a cultural form, and as a social phenomenon, including players – what we do.
- NARRATIVISM focuses on the relation between games and narrative.

GO THROUGH JUUL'S ARTICLE, COUNTER-ARGUMENTS TO ALL POINTS (INCLUDING POSITIVE)

Focus on:

- Intros/Backstories are not the only part of the story
- Parts of Story (Chatman)



- Adaptation – always changes the original
- Retelling doesn't translate dynamic system
 - Retelling is ONE TYPE of NARRATIVE IN GAMES
- Embedded Storytelling (Costikyan)
- Emergent Storytelling
- algorithmic systems
- multiple approaches to problems
- Narativist RPGs – LARPs

Figuring out the story is also a game (eg. detective stories)

Emergent Storytelling works well for humans to process – show cardgames *Once Upon a Time* and *Gloom*

generating stories for computers is easy, but they are not satisfying. Generating stories is not necessarily a game

Different

- games about generating stories
- games where stories generate from the world (The Sims, Grand Theft Auto)

Are Choose Your Own Adventures games/stories? What is the relationship? What is game-like in a CYOA?

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

CMS.300 / CMS.841 Introduction to Videogame Studies
Fall 2011

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.