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Interactive storytelling design and ideation methodologies

Co-edited by
Samuel Gantier and Sandra Gaudenzi

Call for contributions

The development of networked and mobile media, and the commercialisation of multi-platform authoring software, has led to an explosion of interactive storytelling projects over the last decade. Web-documentaries, interactive fictions, serious games, augmented books, graphic apps, immersive installations, immersive theatre, virtual, augmented and mixed reality experiences are all part of this continuously evolving landscape.

The resulting “film-interfaces” (Di Costa, 2009)¹ incorporate forms of audiovisual media alongside graphic interfaces, a form of content that is specific to digital media (Jeanneret, 2007)². Through interaction and user experience design the user, player, inter-actor, or “spectator” (Weissberg, 2000)³ is invited to read, watch, manipulate, contribute or co-author its narrative flow. Regardless of their format, such interactive artefacts invite a renegotiation of the complex relationships between enunciation, reception and hypermedia content (Balpe, 1990)⁴.

The production of these interactive projects requires collaboration across separate cultural industries (journalism, documentary, film, art, graphic design, interactive design, game design, coding, etc.) that rarely follow similar workflows and production methodologies. The clash between waterfall and agile development is thus amplified in teams where each actor is working to her/his own industry frameworks. The proposition here is that the transition

¹ Di Crosta Marida, 2009, *Entre cinéma et jeux vidéo : l'interface-film*, Métanarration et interactivité, Bruxelles/Bry-sur-Marne, De Boeck/INA.

² Jeanneret Yves, 2007, *Y a-t-il (vraiment) des technologies de l'information ?*, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Presses du Septentrion.

³ Weissberg Jean-Louis, 2000, *Présences à distance: Déplacement virtuel et réseaux numériques : pourquoi nous ne croyons plus à la télévision*, Paris, L'Harmattan.

⁴ Balpe Jean-Pierre, 1990, *Hyperdocuments, Hypertextes, Hypermédias*, Paris, Eyrolles.

towards functioning multi-disciplinary creative teams necessitates a readjustment - or maybe a re-framing - of a common methodology of work.

Furthermore, a recent array of academic articles (Bénézech and Lavigne, 2016⁵; Gantier, 2016⁶; Gaudenzi, 2017⁷; Miles, 2014⁸; Nash, 2014⁹, 2015¹⁰) highlights the on-going challenge of interactive authorship and the gap between authorial intent and user experience. We therefore need to explore the causes of user confusion: why do users, experience challenges in *sense making* despite an often significant focus on the user experience? Considering that a substantial amount of money has been invested in the development of interactive narratives in the last ten years (see the TFI New Media Fund, Knight Foundation, Mac Arthur Foundation, National Film Board of Canada, France Télévisions, Arte, CNC, Pictanovo, etc.) this is a pressing issue.

Within this context, this issue of *Interfaces Numériques*, wants to identify the pros and cons of existing ways to conceive, ideate, write and produce interactive narrative artefacts. It wants to analyse the appropriateness, and efficiency, of existing cross-disciplinary methodologies and question how to best mix processes coming from worlds as diverse as cinema, television, radio, web design, game design, service and product design, architecture, virtual and mixed reality, collaborative design, etc.

Scholars, researchers and practitioners are invited to explore questions such as:

- Which points of convergence/dissonance can we identify between methodologies of conception, ideation and production coming from TV & broadcasting, Web & design thinking or game design?
- Are there methodologies and processes that are becoming mainstream in the digital cultural industries, where do they come from and how can we assess them?
- To what degree do interactive narrative platforms (web, mobile phone, tablet, virtual reality, interactive space, etc.) dictate the best methodology to follow?
- Can storytelling (as author-led linear process) and user centered design (as user-led iterative process) cohabit? Is there a successful middle ground?
- How can a user experience be conceived, designed, tested and evaluated in interactive narratives?
- What to prototype, when, with whom, and at what cost?
- How to convert user testing to a better user experience without losing artistic value and depth of meaning?

⁵ Bénézech Marine et Lavigne Michel, 2016, « Jouer le documentaire », *Entrelacs*.

⁶ Gantier Samuel, 2016, « Évaluation de l'expérience utilisateur d'un documentaire interactif : contrat de lecture, utilisabilité et construit de sens », *RIHM*, Vol. 17 n°1.

⁷ Gaudenzi Sandra, 2017, "User experience versus author experience: Lessons learned from the UX Series", *I-docs: the evolving practices of interactive documentary*, New York, Columbia University Press.

⁸ Miles Adrian, 2014, "Interactive Documentary and Affective Ecologies", *New Documentary Ecologies: Emerging Platforms, Practices and Discourses*, K. Nash, C. Hight, and C. Summerhayes (dirs.), p. 67–82, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ Nash Kate, 2014, "Strategies of interaction, questions of meaning: An audience study of the NFBs Bear 71", *Studies in Documentary Film*, Vol. 8.

¹⁰ Nash Kate, 2015, "Simulation games, popular factual media and civic engagement: an audience study of Asylum Exit Australia", *Media, Culture and Society*.

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- How to test and evaluate “sense making” and emotional reception of interactive artefacts?
 - What best practices are coming from other industries, or new design paradigms, that could be applicable to interactive and immersive storytelling?

We welcome contributions coming from a vast array of professional practices that use approaches as varied as:

- Case study analysis;
- Quantitative or qualitative research around the reception of interactive artefacts;
- Ethnographic studies of roles and attributions within creative teams;
- Cognitive and neuro-scientific studies around users’ experiences of interactive artefacts;
- Communication, socio-cognitive and socio-semiotic evaluations;
- Flow design, design conception and the modelling of creative interactive methodologies;
- Historical, cultural, socio-technical analysis of design thinking approaches such as user centered design, experience design, co-design, participatory design, agile methodologies, etc;
- Other possible approaches.

Submission

Please submit by attaching a single rft, doc or odt document to your email, and save it using your family name.

In the document, do include the following:

- an abstract of 600 words maximum
- a short biography of the author/s, which includes title, affiliation and area of research

Deadline: 15th of December

Submissions to be sent to both email addresses: samuel.gantier@univ-valenciennes.fr and s.gaudenzi@westminster.ac.uk

Provisional calendar:

- 15 December 2017: proposal deadline;
- 22 January 2018: response to all authors;
- 20 April 2018: deadline for first draft submission;
- From 23 April to 22 June 2018: peer-reviewing and communication with authors;
- 03 September 2018: deadline for final article;
- November 2018: digital and paper publication.

Selection process:

A first editorial committee will select abstracts and reply by the 22nd of January 2018.

The paper, written in English or French, will need to follow the journal's style guidelines and will have a maximum length of 4000 words (notes and bibliography included). The paper will be sent by email before the 20th of April 2018 in two versions: one with and one without name (anonymous copy).

A second international committee will follow the double reading and communication with the authors.

The final version of the paper needs to be sent by the 3rd of September 2018.

Failure in following the recommendations and submission deadlines will unfortunately result in exclusion from the publication.

Contacts: samuel.gantier@univ-valenciennes.fr and s.gaudenzi@westminster.ac.uk;

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