



Chapitre d'actes

2015

Published version

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How to cite

SZILAS, Nicolas, CHEN, Fanfan. Narratologically-Inspired Models for Interactive Narrative. In: Interactive Storytelling. 8th International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling, ICIDS 2015. H. Schoenau-Fog, L.E. Bruni, S. Louchart & S. Baceviciute (Ed.). Copenhagen (Denmark). Berlin : Springer, 2015. p. 400–401. (LNCS) doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-27036-4

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:82409>

Publication DOI: [10.1007/978-3-319-27036-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-27036-4)

Narratologically-Inspired Models for Interactive Narrative

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Abstract. Narratologically-Inspired Models for Interactive Narrative.

Keywords: Interactive digital storytelling · Interactive narrative · Narrative theories · Narratology

1 Narratology and Interactive Digital Storytelling (IDS)

Back in the early time of Interactive Digital Storytelling (IDS), at a time when artistic work on this new media remained a mere dream, researchers frequently referred to narrative or drama theorists: Laurel [1] as well as Sgouros [3] cited Aristotle, Machado and colleagues cited Propp [2], Szilas cited Bremond [4], Young cited Bal [5], etc. This was — and still is— a surprising encounter between two domains that were not supposed to interact: Artificial Intelligence and narrative theories. Note however that this encounter was not really an encounter: researchers in computing cited narratologist but we doubt the latter would have even imagined that the formers were interested in their field. Still today, conferences in the vast domain of narrative rarely take a look at AI and IDS. This comes as no surprise. Narrative theories study narratives, so why would narrative theory study IDS if hardly no artistic work has been produced? But if AI researchers cite narrative theories it is because to a certain extent they need them for constructing computational models suited to IDS or story generation.

Since the end of the last century, relation between narratology and IDS has changed a bit. From the narratology point of view, AI research is now slightly more visible¹, a phenomenon that has certainly something to do with the growth of the field of Digital Humanities. From the AI side however, we observe that the initial trend has not expanded as far it could have been expected. Instead of expanding their narrative horizon too quickly, AI researchers have sought to consolidate their initially narratively inspired computational approach. As a result, a few narrative theories, such as Propp's morphology of folktales, inspire many papers in IDS, while concepts such as metalepsis, hypotyposis or synecdoche (figure as fiction), analepsis, prolepsis or simultaneity; repetitive or singulative telling; ellipsis or expansion (narrative order,

¹ See the special session on “Computational Models of Narrative” at the 2014 International Conference on Narrative.

frequency, pace), diegetic or hypodiegetic/embedded narrative (narrative levels), or five combinations of narrative voice and vision (heterodiegetic or homodiegetic narrator against zero, external or internal focalization) — to name a few — are rarely explored, despite their potential interest. Scientific research that ventured into the exploration of untouched (by IDS researchers) narrative concepts exists, but it is scarce and deserves more visibility.

Still incomplete, a rather accurate portrait of the relations between narrative theories and IDS can be found in a wiki build during a European project [6].

2 Reviving Narrative Theories for IDS

It is time now for what we call narratologically-inspired models —by analogy with the “biologically-inspired models” in cognitive science— to find a second wind. Sole computational principles (planning, logic, user modeling, case-based reasoning, etc.) may not suffice to achieve the ambitious goal of IDS. Still, some mistakes should not be repeated: 1) expecting that narrative theories provide off-the-shelf models for IDS; 2) forgetting that experiencing a linear narrative vs an interactive one are dissimilar experiences and therefore theories of the former cannot be blindly adapted to the latter; 3) working in isolation, that is reading narrative work but not enough meeting/working with narrative theorists.

A (series of) workshop(s) gathering computer scientists and narratologists is in consequence highly needed. We are confident that if researchers/theorists come to such a workshop with an explicit idea of how a given narrative concept/theory may be used in IDS, then the confrontation of these ideas will considerably open the horizon of research. For capturing these emerging ideas and for building exciting interdisciplinary research directions, the above-mentioned wiki [6] makes a well- suited platform, beyond the workshop’s time.

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