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Narrative Modeling and Authoring

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Abstract. Despite a long tradition of interactive storytelling (IS) researchers drawing inspiration from narratology, and recent interest by narratologists in interactive storytelling, there is still a gap between the two fields. Even when IS researchers make use of narrative models, it is not clear how authors use these models. This workshop brings together narratologists, developers of IS authoring systems, and creative practitioners to share their experiences, and prototype new approaches to authoring, grounded both in the needs of authors, and in recent approaches to narratology and narrative modeling.

Keywords: interactive storytelling, narrative models, narratology, authoring.

1.   The gap between narrative models and authoring

There has long been a tradition of interactive storytelling researchers drawing inspiration from narratology for approaches to modeling interactive stories. Despite this tendency for interactive storytelling researchers to make reference to narratological models, there has historically been a lack of interaction between the disciplines of AI/interactive storytelling and narratology. Although this is slowly starting to change, there is a need for more discussion and interaction between AI/interactive storytelling and narratology. This includes a need for a broader exposure to and use of narrative models, beyond the specific models often used in interactive storytelling. There is also a need for awareness of more recent, innovative approaches to narratology, such as possible worlds theory and unnatural narratology.

In addition, there is a need for more consideration of the impact of the design of authoring tools and the representation of these underlying models on the authoring process, and more involvement of authors in the process of designing these tools and representations. Unlike an author of a non-interactive story, the author of an interactive story often needs to be conscious of the underlying narrative model, due to the technical demands that result from the authoring process. This requires some way of representing the underlying model to the author, in a way that makes sense from a storytelling perspective, in the form of an authoring tool. Such an explicit representation of the model can both afford and constrain particular approaches to storytelling with a given model as represented in a particular tool. Both tool designers and narrative theorists would benefit from taking this into consideration.

These issues are particularly important now that areas such as location-based and transmedia storytelling, augmented reality, and virtual reality are growing in popularity and are being picked up by the mainstream entertainment industry, often with little consideration for the ways that these new forms of storytelling impact both the stories that can be told, and the ways that these approaches to storytelling can inform and impact our theoretical understanding of narrative.

There has also been an increase in the development of interactive stories within the hobbyist community, often using tools such as Twine that have little or no incorporation of more complex models. This in itself raises interesting questions, such as whether using simple, accessible tools that do not embody any particular model (the equivalent of pen and paper for interactive storytelling) could enable more authors to create interactive stories, or whether the use of complex computational models is more appropriate? If the answer is the latter, then how to empower authors to write the stories they want using these complex models? Or should authors be empowered to create their own approaches to modeling interactive stories, and if so, how can these models be implemented in authoring tools? A key concern with this last approach is how to enable this type of authoring, given the technical demands involved in both conceptualizing and implementing underlying models in an authoring tool.

2.   Structure of the workshop

This full-day workshop involves two parts. The first part involves informal sharing of experiences by authors, tool designers, and technologists regarding narrative models, approaches to authoring interactive stories, and the design and use of interactive storytelling authoring tools. The second part of the workshop consists of small groups brainstorming and prototyping new approaches to authoring based on narrative models and approaches to representation and authoring discussed during the first half of the workshop. Participants are encouraged to submit position papers and/or examples of authoring tools or creative works for distribution to other participants proper to the workshop. These form the basis for the presentations during the first part of the workshop. Outcomes of the workshop include new insights and inspirations for narratologically-grounded approaches to authoring and interactive storytelling, and (ideally) ideas for new collaborative projects between participants.