PRAGUECITYUNIVERSITY

Storytelling in Times of Technological Changes and Challenges

5. 11. 2024, Prague City University

PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

Table of Content

The following texts have not been proofread in English.

The individual authors are responsible for the content of their abstracts.

Keynotes

Jaroslav Švelch (Charles University, Czechia)

Player vs. Monster: The Making and Breaking of Video Game Monsters

Based on Švelch's recent book Player vs. Monster (MIT Press, 2023), the talk will examine the history of video game monsters as well as contemporary examples. While scholars of both myth and horror think of monstrosity as sublime and unspeakable, games often portray monsters as predictable targets of player action. While acknowledging the appeal of such simplistic representations, the talk will also explore how the medium can present more nuanced depictions of monstrosity that are in line with contemporary conceptualizations of otherness.

Simon Mckeown (Teesside University, U.K.)

Preserved and Future Memories Beyond Death

The presentation will visualise how in the future (2050) Big Data will be able to be (mis)used to drive synthetic digital life, affording opportunities to reconstitute reality itself, by bringing memory back to 'virtual' life through digital technology and social media activity. McKeown proposes with Preserved Memories, the loss of a loved one will be transformed. Family members will be able to be added to family trees, which could also include celebrities and legends, all of whom will already 'know' about the user. Using emotion-sensitive human-computer interaction, artificially intelligent (AI) participants will continue to acquire knowledge long after their death – they will essentially evolve digitally.

Panel – Challenging Film

Mahesh Kumar Meena (Central University of Punjab, India)

Exploring the Role of Computer-generated Imagery in Shaping Modern Storytelling in Hindi Films

Hindi filmmakers have started emphasising the importance of computer-generated imagery (GCI). The methods used in Hindi films to create reality through cinematic images can be seen as a novel introduction to narrative structure. Fantasy and imaginary scenes are created through digital images based solely on digital visual effects. This article explores the various uses of digital visual effects (DVFX) to create believable shots and cinematic space. As part of the interview schedule, data was collected from Hindi film directors and visual effects supervisors. This article argues that while Hindi film directors have recently begun to use digital technologies to present new stories, they have historically paid less attention to computer-generated fantasy in their work. This article also raises questions about the new form that DVFX is using to shape Hindi cinema by creating pleasing shots, incredible action and details in every scene with visual effects. Additionally, other Hindi films that have used DVFX to tell the story of cinematic time and space are analysed, raising the question of whether this represents a new era in the storytelling skills of Hindi filmmakers.

Sava Saheli Singh (York University, U.K.)

Screening Surveillance

Screening Surveillance (https://www.screeningsurveillance.com/) is a series of short near future fiction films that aims to raise awareness about how different inter-operating surveillance systems within the contexts of social media, wearable devices, smart cities, and educational technology use our data to analyze, shape, and often disrupt our lives in different ways. We need to consider the implications of these systems on society and critically examine the logics and practices within big data systems that underpin, enable, and accelerate surveillance. Intended as public education resources to spark discussion and extend understandings of surveillance, trust, and privacy in the digital age, each film focuses on a different aspect of big data surveillance and the tensions that manifest when the human is interpreted by the machine. This paper is to discuss these films and the issue of technologically facilitated surveillance.

Luka Knezevic (Prague City University, Czechia)

The Narrative Function of Space in Storytelling

Space is one of the most important, yet insufficiently researched components of cinematic (and narrative) storytelling. Whereas many theoreticians and practitioners of production design invoke the concept of "narrative" (e.g. Tashiro, 1998, Affron, 1995) or even "dramatic" (D'Arcy, 2019, Carol, 2007) function of film space when talking about cinematic art direction and production design, the concept seems to leave a lot of clarification to be desired. It appears, namely, that the term "narrative" in their case describes any situation where spatial components are present and somewhat linked to the narrative. Since this appears to be the case most of the time (at least in cinematic representation), the concept appears too vague and dependent on other potential spatial functions. The chapter will propose a radical narrowing of the term "narrative" in relation to spatial aspect in order to cover only the situations where spatial components are absolutely inseparable from the unfolding of narrative events – that is to say, where space itself serves as a narrative catalyst. Such an approach can find some of its theoretical framework within the studies of spatial narratology (see: Ryan, Foote, Azaryahu, 2016), where theoreticians such as Marie-Laure Ryan offer a distinction between strategic and emotional spaces. Whereas many studies and interpretative works have been touching upon or building around the latter, the focus of this chapter will be on the former. After covering its methodological approach, the chapter will dive deeper into historical and speculative predictions about strategic spaces and their narrative function in three areas – firstly, some of the most prominent works of Western literary canon (e.g. the climactic ending of Homer's Oddyssey). Secondly, the filmological perspective of narrative function in classical Hollywood cinema (Chaplin's City Lights and/or Hitchcock's Rear Window), as well as it's post-modern subversions such as Vincenco Natali's Cube or Alex Proyas' Dark City. Finally, the chapter will tread the speculative territory of potential new media of both present and future. Particular attention will be paid to the passive vs. active role of the recipient, as well as the limitations and creative possibilities of strategic spaces in the potential merging of new interactive media with the open-world model of interactive storytelling. In conclusion, the chapter will serve as a call to clarity in theoretical reasoning about spaces and narrative and further attention paid to their increasingly organic interlinking in contemporary new media.

Viraj Tadwalkar (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India)

Vertical Visions: Rise of the 9:16 Aspect Ratio

The history of cinema has been marked by significant technological shifts, from silent to sound, black and white to color. Now, the ubiquity of smartphones has ushered in a new era of vertical video consumption, which might soon challenge long-established filmmaking conventions. This paper aims to examine the

emergence of vertical aspect ratio (9:16) in filmmaking, its roots in smartphone technology, and its potential to reshape the landscape of visual storytelling in the digital age.

This paper will analyze how the vertical format influences visual composition, narrative structure, and audience engagement techniques. It will explore Henri Jenkins' concept of "mobile aesthetics" emerging from media convergence, examining how smartphone-centric viewing habits are influencing new forms of visual expression. This investigation will shed light on how the vertical aspect ratio is not only affecting viewers but also transforming the entire process of image creation, particularly in terms of framing and composition.

The emergence of the vertical format marks significant shift in viewing dynamics will have varied implications for audience engagement and content consumption patterns. By employing Jussi Parikka's concept of 'technics of the body,' I will investigate the short-term and long-term effects of this aspect ratio on viewers at cognitive and physical levels, exploring potential behavioral changes. This inquiry can be further expanded to reveal effects on visual literacy and attention span among the general population.

I will argue that this technological shift demands a reconsideration of what constitutes "cinematic" in the digital age, potentially leading to new paradigms in film education and criticism. The paper will examine how vertical format challenges traditional notions of cinematic aesthetics and how it might be integrated into existing film theory and practice.

Furthermore, I will explore the growing corporate interest in vertical format, with major players experimenting with vertical content creation and distribution. By examining this trend, I aim to understand the potential mainstreaming of vertical format in filmmaking and streaming platforms, and uncover the reasons behind these developments.

This paper, by examining the technical, aesthetic, and social implications of vertical aspect ratio, will contribute to ongoing discussions about the future of visual storytelling in an increasingly mobile-centric media landscape.

Panel – Challenging Experience

Maruša Levstek (University of London, U.K.)

The Keeper of Paintings: Turning the National Gallery into an Immersive Experience to Engage Younger Audiences

In the world of rapid technical innovation, every generation is born into an even more technologically advanced world, meaning children not only represent an ever-changing (and increasingly changing) audience group but also future adult audiences. For example, the current generation of children grow up with more media and interactive devices than ever before, with data from 2023 suggesting two-thirds (66%) of children aged 8-11 in the UK use phones (Ofsted, 2023), and US data suggesting substantiative increases in media engagement over the years (Rideout et al., 2022). These changes in children's engagement with technology pose a potential new way of engaging them with media and culture while also posing a challenge to ensure children are engaged in an ethical and mindful way.

This paper examines the potential of interactive immersive storytelling for engaging children with the arts in novel ways, with The Keeper of Paintings project conducted with London's National Gallery as the case study. Co-developed with a group of children, The Keeper of Paintings (KoP) is an in-gallery augmented reality experience aimed to engage children with The National Gallery collections in a playful and educational way. Our study was conducted with 132 families, 66 of whom used the KoP app during their visit in the Gallery and 66 that did not use the app during their visit (family groups were self-selected but did not differ in

demographics). Survey and observation research results suggest that children who engaged with the KoP app had an overall more engaging and educational experience of their visit than those who visited the Gallery without using the app. Specifically, children who used the app enjoyed their visit more, were more pro-actively engaged with the collection and spent on average 40 minutes longer at the museum (2 hours in total), compared to those who did not use the app. Furthermore, parents whose children engaged with the app perceived their children's enjoyment of learning about art, knowledge of art and sense of belonging to The National Gallery to increase because of their visit and engagement with the app. Their estimates of children's enjoyment of learning, knowledge of art and sense of belonging to the Gallery were also higher than of parents whose children did not engage with the app.

Implications of the use of digital technologies in cultural institutions such as The National Gallery, London will be discussed, specifically in light of inclusivity, sustainability and social justice.

References

- Ofsted (2023). Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report 2023 – interactive data. https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023-interactive-data
- Rideout, V., Peebles, A., Mann, S., & Robb, M. B. (2022). Common Sense Census: Media use by tweens and teens, 2021. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense. https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-census-integrated-report-final-web_0.pdf

Franco Hüller (Prague City University, Czechia)

Storytelling in the Age of Technological Evolution and Algorithmic Influence

Storytelling is inherently about the sequence of events and their connections—an organic collection of fragments such as words, images, or scenes. This structure is evident in traditional storytelling forms like Japan's Kamishibai, the Chōjū-jinbutsu-giga scroll, Java's Wayang beber, and the European contastoria, which can be viewed as early examples of storyboards. Today, technological advancements in social media algorithms and AI have significantly reshaped storytelling, influencing both its form and reception. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which now support longer and more complex narratives through features such as photo carousels and extended video lengths, signal a shift in audience engagement towards more elaborate stories.

The evolution of storytelling is not limited to format but extends to fundamental questions about truth, originality, and authorship. AI-driven tools, like those in Photoshop, bring up the concept of "verosimiglianza"—the semblance of truth—blurring the lines between fiction and reality. The collaborative nature of contemporary creativity often challenges traditional notions of individual authorship, reflecting a broader cultural shift where creative value is increasingly seen as shared.

The need for comprehensibility in storytelling, rooted in medieval illuminated manuscripts, remains relevant today. As storytelling evolves, the role of interpretation becomes central. Whether interpreting a sacred text or an image, the act of interpretation introduces individual freedom, something often suppressed by authoritarian regimes. Historically, from the Council of Trent's regulation of religious imagery to contemporary propaganda in Russia and North Korea, the fear of dissent through interpretation has been evident.

In modern contexts, communication with AI via text or voice prompts underlines the growing importance of narrative structure and clarity. This paper will explore how technological changes, particularly algorithms and AI, challenge traditional storytelling frameworks, raise ethical questions, and reshape our understanding of creativity, truth, and freedom in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Divyani Dubey (Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication, India)

Shared Spaces: Exploring the Intersections of Immersive Art, Social Media and Audience Engagement in India

Immersive art has long been used for engagement and exchange. Talking about the digital media revolution in art, digital strategist Jia Jia Fei contends that the emergence of social media platforms has reimagined the 'art' object as a 'social' object (TedX Talks, 2016). Within this framework, this study explores the cyclic relationship between social media and the growing popularity of immersive art experiences in India – with a focus on the Van Gogh 360 immersive art exhibition that has become a cultural sensation across the country.

Globally, the research on immersive art installations such as the Van Gogh 360 point to the fact that these spaces are not just sites of passive art consumption but also a site of active engagement with the artefacts, where the visitors document and post their experiences on social media (Mondloch, 2022). These technological mediations mark a cultural shift in the way we perceive and engage with art.

Building on previous research, this study critically examines the role of share-ability and aesthetic value of immersive art which contributes to its virality in the social media economy. Moreover, the paper also delves into the reasons for sharing and how it impacts the audiences' real time engagement with the art. Through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the paper also seeks to analyse whether the audio-visual medium, which contributes to the immersive experience, fosters a heightened sense of connection, community and understanding among the audience.

Art exhibitions in India are generally made inaccessible for a large section of the population due to their high pricing and their location being exclusively metro cities. In the Indian context, there is a need to employ a de-westernised perspective to examine whether these awe-worthy experiences facilitate true democratisation of art or contribute to further commodification and exclusionary practices amidst a neoliberal landscape. This study hopes to contribute to the growing discussions around the pervasiveness of technology in the art sphere and its digitally mediated futures.

- TEDx Talks. (2016, March 2). Art in the Age of Instagram | Jia Jia Fei | TEDxMarthasVineyard [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DLNFDQt8Pc
- Mondloch, K. (2022). The influencers: Van Gogh Immersive Experiences and the Attention-Experience economy. Arts, 11(5), 90. https://doi.org/10.3390/arts11050090

Maia Horniak (Prague City University, Czechia)

Immersive Vs Interactive / Experience Design in Collective Storytelling

The evolution of storytelling has always been influenced by cultural shifts, technological advancements, and the changing dynamics between creators and audiences. In recent years, audiences are increasingly seeking embodied experiences that allow for personal agency and emotional investment. Audience participation has emerged as a transformative force in storytelling, reshaping narratives from passive consumption to active engagement. In an era where technology often seems to isolate rather than connect, the potential for transformative storytelling experiences through audience co-creation is more vital than ever.

This shift is evident in various embodied live events, such as interactive theatre, escape rooms, immersive cinema, and interactive performances. Each of these forms highlights how audience needs for embodied experiences are altering the future of storytelling.

In this talk, I plan to explore how innovative experience design can revolutionize storytelling by inviting audiences to become active co-creators rather than passive consumers. Through immersive environments, interactive narratives, and the integration of emerging MR technologies, storytellers can craft experiences that

resonate on personal and communal levels, to foster genuine interaction and emotional engagement in social gatherings.

By examining case studies such as "Sleep No More" , "The Secret Cinema", "Then She Fell", "The Infinite Hotel", "Ghostlight", and companies such as "Blast Theory"(UK), we can look at the tools used in interactive storytelling that can lead to increased emotional resonance, enabling participants to feel more invested in both the narrative and their peers. By integrating technology that enhances real-world interactions—rather than detracting from them—event designers can create environments that facilitate deeper social bonds, shared understanding and collective storytelling.

This session will delve into the principles of transformational experience design, focusing on methodologies that prioritize interactivity and engagement. We will discuss the implications of this shift in storytelling for various fields, including theatre, film, and digital media, and consider how these practices can create more inclusive, empathetic communities. The hope is to gain insights into crafting stories that not only captivate but can foster a more connected, compassionate society and also empower audiences to shape their own narratives, ultimately transforming the way we connect with each other and the world around us.

Panel – Challenging Information

Masa Hilcisin (Prague City University, Czechia)

Personal Storytelling through AI Image Generators and Their Impact on Individual Well-being

The study researches whether visual storytelling, and re-framing personal narratives through AI tools could be one of the effective ways in fostering creativity, and increasing well-being of individuals and communities while reflecting on ethical considerations in community work.

In the article published by the UN News on health, it is stated that in the "the Health Evidence Synthesis report, from WHO's Regional Office for Europe, analysed evidence from over 900 publications supporting ways in which the arts can help improve physical and mental health, in the most comprehensive review of its kind to date."[iii] They call for art engagement to be invested more in the health sector and further researched.

People who lack domain expertise may identify novel ideas but may be unable to provide the details that would make the ideas feasible. They can't translate messy ideas into coherent designs. (How Generative AI Can Augment Human Creativity Use it to promote divergent thinking. by Tojin T. Eapen, Daniel J. Finkenstadt, Josh Folk and Lokesh Venkataswamy, Harvard Business Review, From the Magazine (July–August 2023))

Visual Storytelling workshops were addressed to 12 diverse communities and about 150 individuals. Study focuses on teenage groups (13 – 16), young adults (ages 18 – 26), early adulthood (ages 26 – 39), and middle-aged individuals (40 – 55) who participated in workshops conducted for the purposes of this paper. Recently developed workshop "Personal Storytelling: Self-expression through Experimental Art and Theatre via AI Art Generators" addressed 4 diverse individuals.

Susanne Kass (Charles University & Prague City University, Czechia)

A Future Climate of Open Endings – Environmental Narratives in the Face of Uncertain Climate Futures

The discourses around climate change and the Anthropocene have spurred both utopian and dystopian environmental narratives, that speak of inhuman temporalities, and speculative future scenarios. These novel perspectives are informed by scientific research that employs the affordances of visual media to develop and disseminate knowledge about the Earth system and its processes. Visualisations of abstract concepts such as 'the changing climate' are usually illustrated with photos of extreme weather events as expressions of this phenomena. However, operational images, maps and illustrations, and information graphics are an equally important part of the visual culture of environmental narratives around climate change. Learning to read these images is an important aspect of practices of narrative construction and comprehension. Events and processes occurring on inhuman scales become comprehensible when visualised, even if they signal events that are unprecedented in human experience. The conventional 'resolvable' story can no longer be easily resolved because the conditions of the future environment we will inhabit is becoming increasingly difficult to visualise as a playful imaginary exercise. The 'open ended' nature of environmental and climate narratives is ultimately an optimistic stance held open by the uncertainty of what is to come, which depends in large part on how we imagine, narrate, design and act on the knowledge and histories available to us. What is utopian for some may be dystopian for others, so it is also a challenge for storytellers to 'stay with the trouble' and tackle the open-endedness of future climate narratives with a sensitivity to the role of images in shaping the environmental imaginary and develop practices for working with images that are in themselves open-ended. Leaving the narrative unresolved can be a strategy to encourage dialogue and the ability to imagine futures within the condition of the uncertainty.

Dagmara Rode (University of Lodz, Poland)

Abortion Storytelling and Affective Solidarity on Social Media

The collective sharing of personal stories has a long history as a tool for social change and has been widely used by many emancipatory movements. The feminist movement is no exception in this regard. Used by consciousness-raising groups in the 1970s as a proven and effective tool for organising, mobilising and producing knowledge, storytelling is still present in feminist activism today, albeit in a different form. It can be seen as fundamentally relevant to the practices of digital feminism - such as the #metoo movement - that use social media for their purposes.

In my paper, I focus on storytelling as a means of advocating for safe and accessible abortion on social media. Sharing personal experiences related to abortion has been evaluated as a particularly useful strategy, both for personal understanding of abortion and for political influence. New media tools, such as social media, have brought a number of changes to this strategy. I am particularly interested in the transformations in the reception of abortion stories and their ability to build a community based on personal and shared experience that differs in crucial ways from earlier, non-mediated practices of consciousness raising. I intend to analyse audience responses to abortion stories presented by selected pro-abortion campaigns on Facebook and Instagram, such as the activities of the Abortion Dream Team (Poland), Shout Your Abortion (USA) or In Her Shoes - Women of the Eight (Ireland). Using a variety of examples from different cultural and legal contexts, I will argue that a key category that explicates the specificity of the impact of abortion storytelling in social media is affective solidarity, understood by Clare Hemmings as arising from affective dissonance.

Anubhav Mathur, Sharoni Banerjee (Bennett University, India)

Beyond the Screen: Metaverse and Journalism

The future of journalism relies on immersive story-telling where journalists can create 3D environments and disseminate content in that space rather than just using text, images and videos in a traditional manner which offers limited interactivity. Technologies like Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are becoming

essential tools which many organizations such as The New York Times and BBC have started adopting. VR not only offers engaging news experiences but also allows people to "live" through these events rather than just to read or watch them passively. Metaverse users have avatars instead of profiles and social hubs, replacing news feeds. AI-Powered virtual news anchors and bots make delivery of news faster and more efficiently. This virtual space allows agency for content co-creation, wherein audiences are active participants in stories instead of being their passive consumers.

This significant change is not only going to transform news production but also the way audiences will consume and engage with news stories. The metaverse, is thus set to change the character of journalism by offering new ways of content creation, storytelling techniques and offering ways for increased engagement with audiences.

This paper tries to look at how media organizations can adapt to this new space and stay relevant. It also highlights the potential for immersive storytelling, audience interaction and content production and at the same time considering the ethical and technological challenges involved. It will further define the ways journalism will evolve from a human machine communication perspective where audiences will interact with AI-driven and human- controlled avatars. These developments will certainly bring new challenges and opportunities for both content producers and consumers.