DIGITAL THEATER

Blurring the line between game and performance
THESIS

- Plot structure/character development
- Deeper connection between theater and games
- “Digital theater”
  - Immersive elements of video games
  - Artistic/interactive/subversive elements of theater
  - Social purpose beyond aesthetics and entertainment
- A few connections/definitions:
  - ARGs
  - Theater vs. performance art
OUTLINE

- Plot in theater and games
  - Freytag’s Triangle
  - *Sleep No More* and *Gone Home*
- Types of games and theater
- Blurred lines
  - *RMB City Opera*
  - *M.U.R.S.*
- Games, Theater, and Social Action
In class:
  - Storyline/Plot
  - Character

Evolving concept of plot arcs
  - Freytag’s triangle vs. Freytag’s spider (Laurel 200)
    - Medieval pageants, immersive theater, video games
Figure 6.7. The little play shown on each pageant wagon has its own plot. As the audience experiences all three (or more), a larger plot emerges so that we have nested dramatic shapes.
EXAMPLES OF FREYTAG’S SPIDER

Sleep No More and Gone Home
“Sleep No More, one of the most talked about shows in New York, is an “environmental,” audience-interactive reworking of Macbeth by the English company Punchdrunk, set in the giant fictional McKittrick Hotel, where the audience walk around at their own pace, choosing whether to following a particular character or explore segments of Shakespeare’s play in whatever order they choose” (Homan and Homan 172).

MIT Collaboration: http://opera.media.mit.edu/projects/sleep_no_more/
SLEEP NO MORE
SLEEP NO MORE
SLEEP NO MORE
Gaynor on *Gone Home*:
- “audience...occupies the same three-dimensional space as the fictional inhabitants”, “inside that space, players, like theatergoers, can choose where to focus their attention” (Homan and Homan 169).

Pebbles on *Gone Home*:
- “You piece together a sense of who everyone is and what happened through seemingly disconnected items and evidence hidden around the house” (Homan and Homan 169).

Demo (*Gone Home*):
http://store.steampowered.com/app/232430
TYPES OF GAMES AND THEATER
“the parameters of interaction are clearly structured, movement is limited, story or narrative is one-directional, and play is an iterative, repetitive experience” (Burrill 496)

- Player as actor
- Traditional dramatic form
“In flat games, players choose one of several actions that may eventually alter the outcome of the experience, usually offered to the player through a series of information screens consisting of numbers, charts, and icons” (Burrill 496).

Player as actor and director (to an extent)

Brecht’s episodic drama (Mother Courage and Her Children)
  - Micro-conflicts/episodes that need to be resolved before “logging off” (Burrill 496)
  - “Relational events that do not emphasize finality, process, or a finite length” (Burrill 496).
“Open games emphasize player creativity, few or often passive rules, and multiple vectors of interaction and mobility.”

- Player as actor, director, and playwright
- “Happenings”, environmental theater, performance art
  - “the performance is not (or is only very loosely) scripted, the boundary between audience and performer is blurred, and the duration and location of the performance are not easily identifiable.” (Burrill 497)
  - Emphasis on experience and social cooperation
BLURRED LINES BETWEEN GAME AND PERFORMANCE
Artist Cao Fei created an alternate world in Second Life as an art piece
- Representative of a Chinese city
- Anyone can interact in RMB City

Created RMB City Opera later:
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJc0kxiAtnQ#t=145](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJc0kxiAtnQ#t=145)

Social Action:
- Subvert Chinese political system and oppression
- Themes: “Play, romance, identity, utopia/dystopia, communication/isolation, nature of reality and the global, interconnected world in which we live”
Barcelona based theater company *La Fura dels Baus*
- Specialize in mass spectacle, use of unusual theatrical elements
- “Worlds first smartshow”
- Subdivided into different ways technology can improve our lives:
  - Security
  - Well-being
  - Fortune
  - Green-living
People interact with the spectacle physically and via an app on their phone

Trailer (1:54): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1enDmTd9yA&t=24
Theater enhances games:
- Empathy with real world people/connection with environment
- Representing physical movement (augmented vs. virtual reality)
- Artistic aspect of theater enables games to take on a power beyond just entertainment and raise larger questions about the state of society/social issues/etc.

Games enhance theater:
- More likely to empathize with a character when you are acting AS them, not just watching them perform
- Can explore new spaces that aren’t possible in the real world (i.e. RMB City). New way of subverting norms.
- Enables group/collective interaction on a scale we haven’t seen before (i.e. M.U.R.S.)
- Concept of feedback—digital natives don’t always want to sit back and watch a performance, they want to interact with it
  - Punchdrunk on video games and theater: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r-V5fMCUqg#t=114](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r-V5fMCUqg#t=114)
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