Narrative History I: Japanese and Western Roleplaying Games

Videogames as Multimodal

What is Narrative Design?

- "A narrative designer has tremendous influence on the game's story and how it meshes with gameplay to deliver the intended player experience" (Breault 1).
    - Narrative design thus pertains not only to a game's plot or its storytelling, but to the coherent integration of a game's systems, mechanics and other representational elements with its narrative themes.
    - Narrative design is how videogames build their fiction without only cinematics or words.
- 3 tasks of a narrative designer
    - Writing
    - Design
    - Collaboration
- Fundamentally iterative and adaptive creative process of varying importance.
- Game design is "*the art of crafting the player experience…* Once you define that experience, every aspect of your game design should work toward delivering it" (Breault 9)
    - Depends on the interplay of all aspects of a videogame's multimodality.
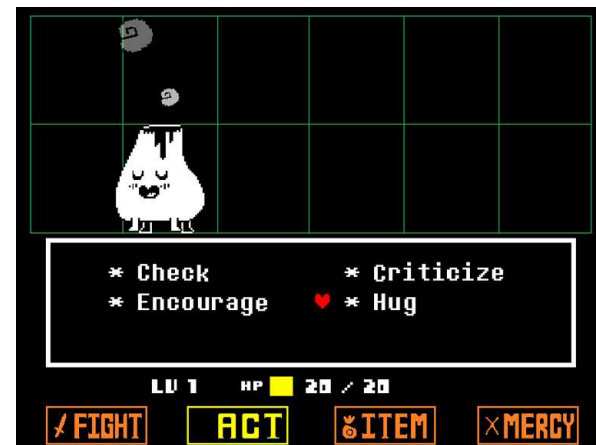   - What media modes do videogames incorporate—and to what effect?

Game Design

- How do we make the game fun?
- How do we engage players throughout the game?
- How do we balance challenge and playability?

Narrative Design

- How do we make the game meaningful?
- How do we make the different elements of the game coherent?
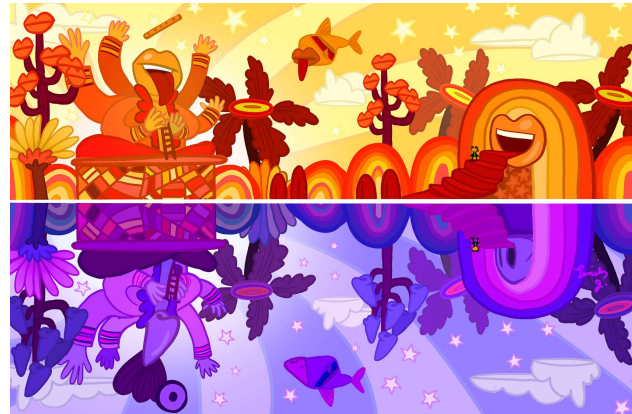- How do we effectively merge story and gameplay?

Videogames as Multimedia

Writing and Worldbuilding
Dark Souls

User Interface
NieR: Automata

Concept Art
Psychonauts 2

Animation

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

Grand Theft Auto IV

Music
Undertale

Snowdin Town (Pacifist)
Snowdin Town (No Mercy)

History of the Western Role-Playing Game (WPRG)

- Inspired directly by *Dungeons and Dragons* as digital adaptations.
    - Preceded by fantasy text adventures like *Colossal Cave Adventure* (1976) and *Zork* (1977).
    - Early games *Wizardry* (1981) and *Ultima* (1981) focused on the dungeon crawling and stat management aspect of *DnD.*

- *Ultima IV: Quest of the Avatar* (1985)
    - Featured a story more about character self-actualization than defeating an evil force.
    - All NPCs can be interacted with and have individual names. Some can be recruited.
    - Genre became defined by non-linear exploration and player-driven character building (agency).
        - In what ways does *Baldur's Gate* succeed and/or fail in this promise?

WRPG History cont: Interplay, Bioware, Bethesda

- **Interplay**: *Fallout* (1997), *Baldur's Gate* (1998), and *Planescape: Torment* (1999)
  - All drew on TTRPG inspirations to offer a digital, single-player campaign experience with high replayability.
  - *Baldur's Gate* allowed players to import their own assets for the game to personalize their character.
    - *E.g. avatar portrait, voice lines, backstory*
- *Baldur's Gate II* (2000) and Bioware's following games put a large focus on nuanced character interactions involving friendship building and romancing.
  - E.g. *Dragon Age's* Approval system
- Bethesda's *The Elder Scrolls* games executed the spatial promise of early WRPGs, building massive 3D worlds explored in a first-person perspective.
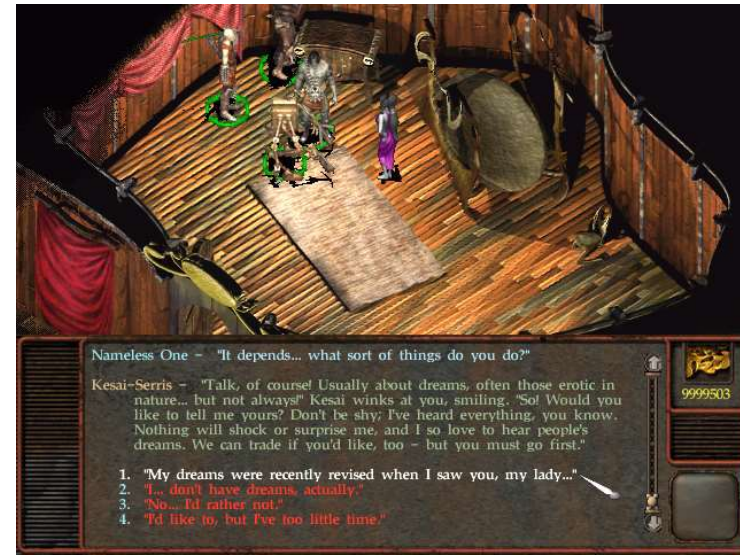
History of the Japanese Role-Playing Game (JRPG)

- Defined as a genre by *Dragon Quest/Warrior* (1986)
  - Designed and written by Yuji Hori
  - Streamlined, cartoonified *DnD/Wizardry* with more numbers hidden and mechanics revealed through NPC conversations.
- *Dragon Quest IV* (1990) and *Dragon Quest V* (1992) began experimenting with storytelling.
  - DQIV is divided into multiple short story chapters focusing on a different character.
  - DQV is a bildungsroman-style story taking place over generations of a character's life.
- Other early series like *Shin Megami Tensei* and *Phantasy Star* expanded the genre to horror and sci-fi worlds, respectively.
 - SMT's characters were more self inserts that develop moral alignments based on in-game choices.

JRPG History cont. (1988-1997)

- *Final Fantasy II/IV* (1991) and *Final Fantasy III/VI* (1994)
  - *FFIV*
    - Features an [anti-hero redemption arc](#).
    - Characters are defined by their class archetypes and skillset.
    - They also have their own narrative agency.
  - *FFVI*
    - Drew on cinematic techniques for framing cutscenes and introducing musical motifs.
    - Characterization now more fluid. No longer tied to DnD archetypes/classes.
- *Final Fantasy VII* (1997) and onward
  - The JRPG was a set of mechanical conventions as well as a genre continuously evolving storytelling techniques and characterization.
  - Set the stage for modern 'serious' AAA blockbusters like *The Last of Us* and *God of War* (2018).

Amplification through Simplification (McCloud)
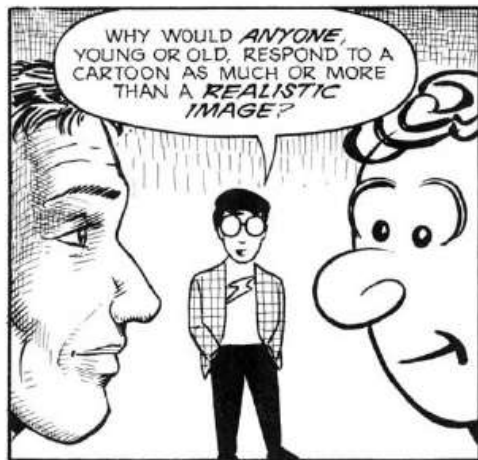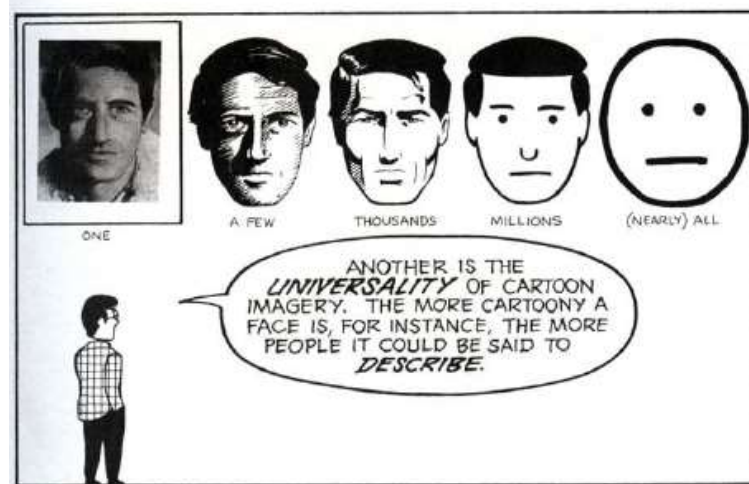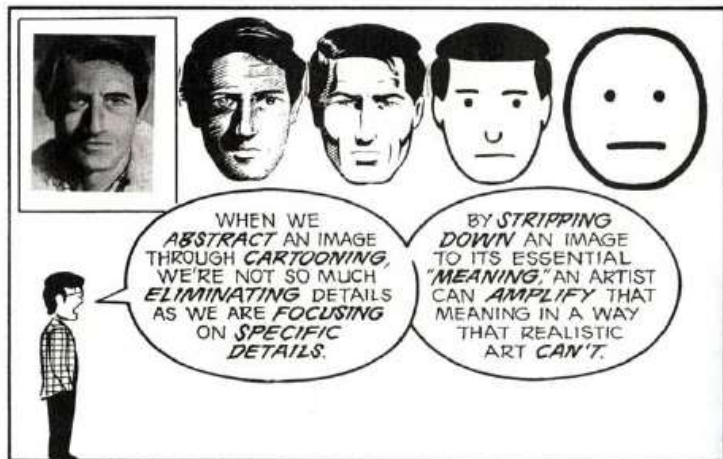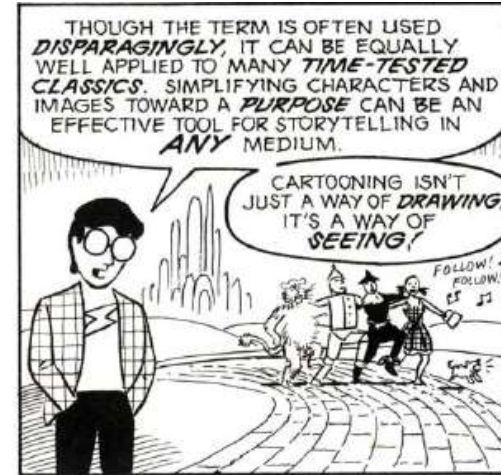
Paratexts as Narrative Design

Akira Toriyama

Yoshitaka Amano

Theme of Love (Rosa's Theme) – Nobuo Uematsu

Other Paratexts