Chapter 4

What's the story? Harnessing the power of storytelling in film for experience design

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Stories are everywhere. They are a crucial part of how we understand the world. Regardless of the experience (a film, a form of interactive media, a phone call, a walk in the park), the sense made comes down to the story constructed. Without a story – that is something with a beginning and end, and which brings about emotional and behavioral changes in the user – conscious meaning is absent. As screenwriting lecturer Robert McKee reminds us, stories are equipment for living (McKee 1997). Stories define experience.

Filmmaking in particular has refined the craft of storytelling, with many filmmakers prioritizing story as the key aspect of user experience. This approach has developed as a response to what McKee calls the 'decline of story': a period where, despite the proliferation of media enabling us to connect with ever-expanding audiences, the overall quality of storytelling has eroded, foregrounding visual aspects of filmmaking rather than story substance. McKee argues this has resulted in a predominance of unsatisfying user experiences. Award-winning filmmaker Lars Von Trier counters this by approaching the craft from a shared perspective. As a co-originator of the Dogme manifesto (1995), a filmmaking approach where story and performance are prioritized over other technical aspects of the medium (such as cinematography and production design, which are in fact considered irrelevant), Von Trier has helped create a style of production that has resulted in numerous low-budget yet compelling film experiences.

The aim of this chapter is to explore how story is deployed in filmmaking, and demonstrate that storytelling fundamentals, as evidenced by these examples, are relevant in all experience contexts (remembering that experience cannot exist without story). The chapter will translate this 'story-centered' approach into an online realm, showing it can similarly become a useful tool in producing effective experience design, irrespective of whether the story is part of a fictional world. While filmic stories have been successfully transformed for digital experiences such as DVDs, CD-

ROMs and computer games; the chapter argues for the relevance of story across all types of digital experiences, even everyday utilitarian ones.

Finally, the chapter will look at the potential online contexts offer in how we conceptualize the notion of story itself. With users being interactive participants in both the consumption and creation of online experiences, stories here have enormous scope to become structurally unique. The possibility of constantly evolving interactions, with multiple authors, and numerous, simultaneously unfolding (and not necessarily linear) narratives, means stories in an online context may well go far in challenging the very concept of story itself. As the medium develops, and entirely new understandings of story emerge, these will no doubt influence the nature of storytelling in other media, including that of film.

What is a story?

As its most basic, a story can be regarded as means for making sense of chaos. It can be likened to the ways in which shapes and forms become recognizable on a page of dots:

'Suppose that we are looking at a random pattern of dots on a page. If asked what can be seen amongst the dots, we can imagine scanning the pattern looking for some combination of dots that allows the formation of an image of some sort. To begin with nothing may be seen other than the dots, but in due course let us suppose that an image of a face is identified. Having found the face the dots are no longer a random pattern. Instead we have the experience of seeing a face, of discerning perhaps the eyes and nose, or even an expression. The page of dots is now not what it was. The dots appear to be the same yet we see something which we did not previously see, which we can describe and identify and which was previously absent. This thing which we see is an example of a closure: the outcome of a process of closure... closure can be understood as a process which generates something from a space of possibility.' (Lawson 2001: 5)

Lawson defines this process of making meaning as 'closure', suggesting a point at which the chaos becomes ordered and the sense of mystery is solved. Thus, a story

and the process of storytelling can be seen as the production of meaning to a point of resolution. It can also be conceived as the transformation of data into information:

‘Data are facts; information is the meaning that human beings assign to these facts. Individual elements of data, by themselves, have little meaning; it’s only when these facts are in some way put together or processed that the meaning begins to become clear.’ (David and McCormack cited in Wurman 1989: 38)

If the role of the storyteller is to facilitate this process of sense and meaning making, perhaps information architects can be regarded as storytellers. They organize data in ways which are informative and facilitate its metamorphosis into knowledge and even wisdom (Shedroff 2001: 35). They pave the way for making meaning by forging pathways through data (ibid: 142), helping users to understand the ‘logic’ of the way information is organized, whether it is in a Web site, DVD, computer game or other digital media product.

That there is an end-point to this transformative process (a story) also implies beginning and middle points. Therefore, a story can be described as having a beginning, middle and end resulting in ‘closure’. Structurally speaking, stories or ‘tales’ consist of a series of developments or ‘moves’ (Propp 1968: 92) which may directly follow one another or interweave episodically (ibid: 93). Indeed, according to Propp, stories can be deconstructed into their constituent elements, but they are also more than the sum of their parts. In addition to the moves and developments, there are:

- Characters
- Conjunctive elements (that which stitches the moves within the story together)
- Motivations
- Attributive elements or accessories.

Beyond its basic building blocks, a story has other elements, particularly emotive ones, which facilitate the change process. The way that stories are read, interpreted and remembered is emotionally driven. This is similar to how Shedroff (2001: 4) understands the notion of an ‘experience’, that is, a process beginning with attraction,

leading to engagement and ultimately concluding. Here, the story is more than a sense-making tool, but an emotional journey as well:

‘An experience is more coalesced, something that could be articulated or named. This type of experience may be characterized by a number of product interactions and emotions, but is schematized with a particular character in one’s memory and a sense of completion. An experience has a beginning and an end, and often inspires behavioral changes in the experiencer’ (Forlizzi & Battarbee 2004: 263).

A story may be regarded as an emotionally engaging experience. But perhaps this is what characterises a *good* story: it captivates viewers, holds their attention, and has emotional impact.

‘To be entertained is to be immersed in the ceremony of story to an intellectually and emotionally satisfying end. To the film audience, entertainment is the ritual of sitting in the dark, concentrating on a screen in order to experience the story’s meaning and, with that insight, the arousal of strong, at times even painful emotions, and as the meaning deepens, to be carried to the ultimate satisfaction of those emotions.’ (McKee 1997: 4)

The craft of storytelling has been perfected in the medium of film, where multiple levels of emotion are in operation. Boorstin (1990) describes these as visceral, vicarious and voyeur emotions. Visceral responses are the immediate ‘gut’ reactions to the story. Vicarious emotions are those which control behaviour, influencing whether we continue to sit in a darkened cinema and engage with the story. Voyeur responses are reflective, rationalizing and intellectualizing the story we have just seen and heard. As in film, Norman (2004: 123) argues that these are the same types of emotional responses to any kind of experience, and they can be designed accordingly to induce particular reactions. Cinema has developed its own conventions for this. Producers, directors and designers use story as a framework for the construction of a particular reality. Story is a means of emotional design whereby the world is understood in terms of mapping emotions to events or situations.

Conversely, listeners, viewers and users are engaged in decoding the audio-visual data received by the human emotion system which eventually become perceptions that, in turn, get organised into a form of story: this is called top-down processing (Tan 1996). The user's story is rooted in personal experience: their interpretation of the story being conveyed to them gets compared with their own cognitive scripts, memories which have been labelled and laced with particular emotions – this is called bottom-up processing.

The role of storytelling in digital experience design has been more important to computer and video games (in which story accompanies and contextualizes interaction) than to Web design. Meadows (2003: 18) is critical of this oversight in Web design:

'Most websites (sic) understand the Internet as being little more than a globally distributed brochure. The interactive, social and narrative capabilities of the web remain unexplored…'

The necessity of story as a sense-making device remains more pressing for Web experiences, particularly everyday online interactions. A story might consist of a series of messages an organization seeks to convey about itself. A compelling brand is like a good story in that it communicates the key messages of a company clearly, such as reliability and trustworthiness. Its corporate Web presence needs to reinforce these messages in order not to rupture the story. A corporate Web site that is inaccessible and difficult to use will not correspond with the story that the company is telling about itself. The story is incongruous with the user's experience and recollection, and therefore simply unbelievable. The active creation of belief is an important storytelling technique that can be applied to designing the ways that organizations represent themselves online (Murray 1997: 10).

Studies in cognitive psychology have shown that neurological pathways are activated by story and character (Grodal 1997). The emotion system is person-oriented, and story is a means by which empathy with characters and other humans is developed. Alternatively, it could be argued that story can be a way of humanising an organisation or person. For example, charities demonstrate excellent execution of

stories that elicit emotion (sympathy) and steer the potential patron towards action (donation). Similarly, an Australian bank's automatic teller machines display an image of one of their customer service officers to accompany the instructional text on each screen. The woman faces the camera as if she is saying the instructional text, making the user feel like they are being assisted at every stage of the interaction. This experience gives a human face to the organization and the machine that represents it, supporting the organisation's story that it is customer-focused. It also concurs with Tan's (1996) contention that some of the most important functions of emotion is steering attention, preparing the body for action, then encoding experience into memory.

In film, genre is a strategy for grouping similar sets of emotions, with story as the machinery which generates them (Grodal 1997). In online terms, genre might be described as the 'look and feel' of a Web site, its visual style or format (such as 'informational', 'entertainment', and 'task-oriented'). However, the emotional design often stops there. Story is not deployed to full effect, unlike in games design which follows film in better delineating between genres (such as 'shoot-em-ups', quest or discovery, racing or educational games), thus better managing audience expectations, emotions and their ability to make sense of the product.

Filmmakers understand the gratifications being sought in movie-going. In choosing a movie, viewers are attempting to regulate their emotional state. They select a movie type that will restore emotional equilibrium. Media is used as a kind of emotional 'reset' button. In an experiment in 1985, a psychologist called Zillmann induced a state of monotony into a group of research subjects. The subjects were, individually, presented with making a selection from a library of movies with varying degrees of emotional charge. These individuals tended to select programmes with high emotional excitement. A second group was manipulated into a state of stress, and these individuals tended to select programmes low in excitement. Movie-goers are literate in the genres that can achieve these emotional objectives: there is an expectation that drama, for example, would contain a movement from positive-to-negative emotional charge (McKee 1997).

It is possible that people head online to attain an emotional equilibrium as well. For example, when a customer is frustrated by the long waiting time in a company's automated phone system, finding it inconsistent with the story of the organisation being open, accessible and client-centred, they may turn to the Web site to seek fulfilment of that story and transformation of their emotional state to one of satisfaction.

The power of storytelling lies in the 'willful suspension of disbelief', the capacity of the story to capture the audience through the situation of the characters and make the world fade away and time stop. As mentioned earlier, this also involves the active creation of belief by facilitating a transformed state of 'flow' (Norman 2004: 125 citing Csikszenmihihalyi), a detached state of consciousness which is of the moment, activity and/or sheer enjoyment.

The conditions for 'flow' to occur include:

- Lack of distraction
- Activity which matches or challenges skill level
- Engagement of conscious attention and intense concentration.

In terms of online design, story has the potential to be a particularly powerful instrument. Rather than be dismissed as irrelevant to the non-linear digital age and everyday experiences, Web designers are yet to find ways for successfully inducing states of 'flow' in users. That users are often multi-tasking while using computers means that the stories told and the way they are narrated - regardless of whether they are entertainment-based, informational or task-oriented and irrespective of the particular digital medium being used - have to be especially compelling to ensure that users are not distracted by other stories or experiences. Nor should users be asked to do too much in order to engage with the story and arrive at 'closure'. In a cinema, the viewer is provided with a comfortable seat and a darkened environment, and required to do no more than sit and watch. The conditions of consumption are far more competitive in the online realm and yet, as Meadow (2003: 3), there has been little recognition of value of integrating narrative and interaction.

Traditional linear forms of storytelling

What form might stories take on the Web? A simple story consisting of a several sequential moves can be seen in the 'About Us' section of a corporate Web site, as it has now become *de rigeur* to provide an organizational history as part of a company's online presence. By contrast, a story which involves moves overlapping or intersecting could be in the form of 'News' sections on company Web sites, where information is released periodically: these might detail the early development of a product, its imminent release, and finally when it is available. These are inter-related micro-stories within the grander narrative of the organization.

Given that such online stories are generally brief and simple, how can these be made more appealing? This is not about embellishment, but the structuring and organization of narratives, both grand and micro, in ways that always offers something unexpected and new no matter what the storytelling medium or genre. It may be hilarious, heartbreaking, or horrifying, but viewers / users are seduced by new experiences:

'The process of structuring and conveying elements of time, space and human experience into a series of connected events that inform, educate or entertain has become known as narrative design.' (Burke 2005: 141)

Certainly there are other elements that make for a successful story. But at its heart a good story must be original, in both its content, and its form. There is nothing new in identifying originality as a narrative imperative (the novel wasn't named novel for nothing!). However, in a context where users are well versed in established narrative forms, and no longer persuaded by the artifice of their conventions, new storytelling strategies are needed to entice and engage users.

While the 'About Us' section of a Web site has now become standardized in online design, perhaps this is so conventional as to hinder its capacity to captivate the user. Such conventions have to undergo a degree of experimentation to create new experiences for audiences. Arguably, the potential of the story (even the simplest ones) in Web design has not been fully realized because of the emphasis on pragmatism, task fulfillment, conventions and standards which prioritise the fulfillment of expectations and often demonise the unexpected.

Propp's analysis of fairytales demonstrates that stories can be similar (in narrative structure, the moral of the story, cast of characters, etc), but each one can still offer something new, balancing the expected and unexpected. They are '...schemes handed down for generations as ready-made formulae capable of becoming animated with a new mood, giving rise to new formulations' (Veselovskij cited in Propp 1968: 116). In other words, it is possible to tell simple stories in new ways. To translate this to digital experience design may mean being 'story-centred' while remaining faithful to certain traditions in design and usability. In filmmaking, Lars Von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg pioneered the Dogme95 movement, in which 'story is king', that is more important than the technical execution of a film. A rejection of style over substance, it negates the 'slickness' of films attained with special effects and during post-production. The 'wow' factor comes from differentiating one's product through story and content, and having a profound effect on the audience, rather than delivering superficial visual candy that is quickly forgettable.

This sort of innovation also inevitably leads to complexity as new additions are made to old stories. Propp discusses the process by which simple fairy tales have become more intricate with the assimilation of different genres and 'highly complicated conglomerates' of moves (Propp 1968: 100). Perhaps this is why, as McKee (1997) contends, the story has declined: it has become increasingly complex to the extent that spectacle takes precedence over sense-making. In cinema, this has resulted in a preoccupation with the technical and financial aspects of filmmaking (special effects, box office takings) over story. Web design has also fallen into this trap of assuming there is too much data deluge to enable sense-making tools such as stories to be useful. By contrast, we argue that story is pertinent where there large amounts of data. For example, search engines allow a story to be told about an online product, as its ranking prominence provides the user with some context about the product's reach and credibility.

'The glut [of information] has begun to obscure the radical distinction between data and information, between facts and knowledge...Take the news as an example. Everyday the media seek to deliver us larger amounts of news at a faster rate. We are besieged with accounts of the world in amounts that are impossible to process. And as

we scramble to keep up with the news race, we are more likely to make errors of perception...the more time we spend with reports of separate events, the less time we have to understand the "whys and wherefores" behind them, to see the patterns and relationships between them...Instead we are lulled by a stream of surface facts, made numb, passive, and unreceptive by a surfeit of data that we lack the time and resources needed to turn into valuable information.' (Wurman 1989: 37)

To return to the analogy with a page of dots, it is presumed that in the online world, the dots are so numerous and overwhelming that 'closure' is no longer possible: the bigger picture cannot be seen, only pieces of it. However, not only are traditional forms of storytelling still pertinent in the digital age (as demonstrated above), conversely, the information overload of the digital era necessitates a reconfiguration of stories as we have known them in the past.

Non-linear, customizable stories

There has been much written about the possibilities that the digital realm offers to storytelling. This has involved a rethinking of the notion of story as 'constituent elements of a system rather than a fixed linear narrative' (Burke 2005: 142). However, this debate has largely been concerned with the capacity to immerse users in fictional worlds with multiform stories that structure user participation and interaction through characters or avatars (Murray 1997: 30). Also, it has been preoccupied with the narrative consequences of reconciling traditional story media with digital media, such as 'the disparate languages of books and computers' (Meadows 2003: 4). Much of this literature celebrates the potential that lies in digital interactive technology to invent new vehicles for engagement and connection, as well as remould the conventions around narrative. These exploratory practices that surround around any new technology make possible divergence from, and experimentation with previous traditional and interactive storytelling structures and processes inherited from film and literature.

Certainly, the opportunities interactive digital media offer in creating non-linear information structures or stories have been explored more in fiction, fantasy, virtual reality, games and chatroom environments. Such structures allow for singular, highly customizable user experiences that are open-ended, constantly evolving, and where

the users themselves may have a significant influence on the evolution of both the information and structure of the experience itself. Non-linear structures are less predictable, more adaptable and open to change, and therefore more dynamic and exciting. They can encourage participation from multiple users, offer several narrative threads simultaneously, and are non-hierarchical in emphasis. They can be entered and exited at any point, can grow and evolve, and, significantly, can effect the very nature of the content they relay. They are, then, multi-faceted, complex systems that, if designed well, take on a life of their own and become, in effect, part of their own story. They provide a framework for innovation both in form and in content.

Examples of such non-linear, customizable stories include tree structures and rhizomes. Tree structures organize information in a fixed, ordered paths, leaving no choice for the user other than to follow a finite number of paths which are hierarchically constructed: that is, the story begins from a common point but may finish at any number of end-points. Tree structures represent the classic story of computer file management: I saved my document in the 'My Documents' folder on the C: drive of 'My Computer' which I access via my computer desktop.

On the other hand, rhizomes are web-like, non-linear, decentralized structures that can be entered or exited at multiple points. In botany, a rhizome is a particular kind of root, 'a horizontal, usually underground stem of a plant that often sends out roots and shoots from its nodes'. Ginger is an example of a rhizome. And importantly, just like fingerprints, no two rhizomes are ever identical. The rhizome is an:

'acentered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states… unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible to neither the One or the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added (n+1). It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills. It constitutes linear multiplicities with n dimensions having

neither subject nor object, which can be laid out on a plane of consistency, and from which the one is always subtracted (n-1). When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoes a metamorphosis. Unlike a structure, which is defined by a set of points and positions, the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature. These lines, or ligaments, should not be confused with lineages of the aborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions. Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction: neither external reproduction as image-tree nor internal reproduction as tree-structure. The rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is a short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entranceways and exits and its own lines of flight.' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 23)

Although Deleuze & Guattari developed this theory before the advent of digital information networks, it is evident how, with their capacity to have nodes connecting to other nodes, their potential for non-hierarchical structures, their multiple entry and exit points, digital information networks and their 'open plot structures' (Meadows 2003: 66) can easily be likened to rhizomes. However, rhizomatic stories are not new.

Artists and authors have long experimented with rhizomatic forms of storytelling. The Fluxus Collective's (Spoerri et al) *Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, published in 1962, is a non-linear adventure through associations, memories, and anecdotes evoked from a group of friends by a collection of objects lying at random on a table. Described as a novel of digressions, the book is at once a game, an encyclopedia, a cabinet of wonders, and a story of friendship and creativity.

Similarly, Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, is a novel that literally embodies the labyrinthine multi-dimensional journey it describes. Telling its story from many viewpoints and in many different literary styles (poetry, prose, journal, even academic criticism) the text breaks up, is inverted, or pushed to extremes on certain pages as

readers flick from the front, to references at the back, to divergences in the middle, to the front again. As the central character's consciousness is fragmented, so too is the readers' as it dips in and out of different contexts.

In the world of digital technology, designers have also recognized the value of products that are highly customizable and offer infinite story paths. The metaphor of the rhizome is not only suited to literary stories, but to our everyday lives and interactions. Applications like iTunes (which allow a myriad of ways to organize and access songs and play lists), or the Web-based Flickr (an ever-expanding database of user photos offering infinite ways to organize, collect, and link photos between users) offer numerous ways for users to create their own stories in order to make their own sense. These are narratives that might be termed 'kaleidoscopic' (Murray 1997: 155). As stories and pathways are constantly opened up, the user generates something original, in both form and content, from the space of possibility.

Examples of linear and non-linear storytelling combinations

Despite that much research has been undertaken on interactive narratives for immersive virtual reality environments and computer games, there are other types of digital experiences which span different media and are less focused on fiction and characters, than humans and everyday life. The design of elaborate means of storytelling that integrate traditional linear and rhizomatic non-linear story forms can be found in cross-media and intra-media examples.

A show like *Big Brother* deploys convergent media (magazine, TV, Web, mobile etc) in its storytelling. Centred on the television show, it utilizes conventional drama techniques to make its realist documentary format more compelling, but this allows for only passive participation with a linear narrative structure. However, through its other media manifestations, *Big Brother* encourages participation by a range of users (viewers, contestants, producers, media commentators) in a variety of different ways that intentionally has a material impact on the show's numerous narratives. Whether it is which housemate will be nominated, which live audience member will win best costume, how the housemates will fare in their latest challenge, who the audience will evict, what opinions will be expressed by commentators, how housemate identities are constructed by the show producers, the story outcomes are never fixed or predictable.

Also, in addition to the television broadcast, which is packaged in a variety of ways (live nomination/eviction, daily update, late night uncut), the show uses mobile phone and Web technology to broaden the overall structure. Viewers can vote with their mobile or download live video streams from the *Big Brother* house. They can engage with the Web site to learn more about the contestants. They can receive updates on events in the house via SMS. In essence the show's producers create a rhizomatic framework out of a traditional linear narrative against which the many stories of *Big Brother* will play out, not knowing themselves what the outcomes will be but instead letting them unfold organically. Simultaneously, *Big Brother* is part of a larger meta-narrative about power and surveillance that emanates from a traditional linear story as told in the George Orwell novel, *1984*.

The combined possibilities for linear and non-linear stories that are based more in reality than fantasy are also evident within the singular medium of television. Jensen (2005) believes drama and fictional narrative material are more difficult to enhance through interactive television services. Instead, Jensen asserts that interactivity in television is most appropriate for non-linear content or random access content like news, weather programs, advertisements and sports because it is better suited to being viewed by hyperlinks or selective choices. Examples include the mosaic formats that allow the user to select a particular camera angle from which to view a sports game, whereby narrative is fragmented but the user can exercise choice in the way they prefer to make sense of the content (Murray 1997: 156).

The following examples from Curran's (2003) *Convergence Design* demonstrate that so long as television content is developed from the outset with an interactive framework in mind, enhancements can give the viewer a more complex, multi-layered, non-linear experience alongside the traditional linear story.

Life 360 is a biography series produced by Public Broadcasting System (PBS) in the United States. Each episode is built around a theme, like fire fighting or the Vietnam War, and the concept of the enhanced content is to connect viewers with local events, resources, and organizations in their own communities relating to the show's topic. Viewers are able to respond to polls relating to the theme (such as whether or not they've lost a loved one in Vietnam), and are also invited to send in material for the

following week's show, making them active contributors to the story itself. The enhanced content in *Life 360* is intimately tied to the content of the program and creates a seamless, multi-layered addition. But *Life 360* goes a step further in enabling users to contribute to the program's content as well.

The Discovery Channel's *Extreme Rides* show, featuring the design, engineering, culture, and industry of roller coasters, has both synchronous and non-synchronous interactive content. Viewers of the show see point-of-view footage of rides in action and are given the choice of four different camera angles, technical information about speed, height, g-force etc, biometric information about heart-rate, scream volume, and puke factor, as well as the option of chatting to other viewers while the show is underway. Once over, the enhanced content allows viewers to build their own rollercoaster using selected segments of existing coasters. Their design is compiled into a Quicktime movie which can be watched and voted on by all viewers. This chance to control and participate in the experience gives the users a sense of authorship and a deeper connection to the subject matter.

Finally, an example drawn wholly from the Web can be found in Carla Drago's own work, whatwentdown.tv . The Web site (http://www.carladrago.com/whatwentdown/prototype/index.html) is for a café in Sydney and gives users a sense of its clientele and ambience through a series of video vignettes that can be viewed in any particular order. Instead of having an 'About Us' page, the site provides a 'day in the life' experience of the café where the user feels like they are in the café itself: they can hear customers talking to one another and can read the blackboard menu behind the counter. The site tells a holistic story of the café in an interactive non-linear format.

Summary

Traditional linear forms of storytelling:

- are still pertinent in the digital age in terms of keeping users engaged
- captivate with originality
- employ conventions but may experiment with these to create new experiences for audience.

Non-linear, customisable stories:

- include tree structures: fixed and ordered but allow multiple pathways
- include rhizomes: decentralised, non-hierarchical
- are not new but, through new technology, are offered fresh platforms for innovative deployment.

The integration of traditional linear and rhizomatic non-linear forms of storytelling is appropriate across a spectrum of digital experiences, regardless of device or genre. Although story-centred approaches are not as apparent in Web design as in games, virtual reality and chatroom design, this chapter has demonstrated that story remains relevant to any digital experience where large amounts of data have to be navigated. Stories can be deployed across mixed realities and technologies, but there is much more potential to apply story-centred approaches to everyday online interactions, and not just digital experiences involving fictional worlds:

'Eventually all successful storytelling technologies become "transparent": we lose consciousness of the medium and see neither print nor film but only the power of the story itself.' (Murray 1997: 26)

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