Hypernarratives in Class:
A Fusion of Creativity, Imagination and Technology

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Abstract

According to John Dewey, “The roots of aesthetic experience lie in commonplace experience, in the consummatory experiences that are ubiquitous in the course of human life.” [1] This serves as a good foundation in the design of hypernarratives. It is because this paper proposes that a hypernarrative is in itself an aesthetic experience with the different life experiences fused with the imagination of the producer of the story. Hypernarratives can be very useful in enhancing creativity, reading, writing, use of the English language, use of an imaging software and deployment of the project in the web for scrutiny and reading pleasure.

This paper intends to share the Philippine experience at De La Salle University the use of hypernarrative projects. It is also the belief of this paper that John Dewey’s ideas on art as experience in the mid-1930s are still very much evident in this time and are applied to the development of hypernarratives. While the experience of the mentor on this occasion was to initially encourage hypertext or non-linear structure of story-telling, the eliciting of ideas, concepts for the story became dynamic. Different approaches and structures came about. And all the elements of hypernarratives further reinforced the concepts of John Dewey that “the experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality.” [2]

Introduction

One of the most interesting insights of John Dewey in his time was on aesthetics. He believed that “the process of intelligent use of materials and the imaginative development of possible solutions to problems issuing in a reconstruction of experience that affords immediate satisfaction, the process found in the creative work of artists, is also to be found in all intelligent and creative human activity.” [3] This means when there is integration of valuable experiences and meanings of life, aesthetic quality is produced in the process. It is the same as the experience becoming an aesthetic experience.

Anchoring on this idea, this paper attempts to promote the development of technology-based student art projects that are relevant in secondary and higher education levels in the form of hypernarratives. These hypernarratives are practical and can be designed to allow student collaboration. The outputs can be easily deployed in the web.

Sergio Coccini made a good explanation of the concept of hypernarrative, derived from the words hypertext and narrative. Hypertext refers to “a series of pages (or nodes) connected with each other in a non-linear way by means of different links.” A narrative on the other hand, “is a succession of events, often identified as micro-propositions, segments or narrative cells,
episodes or themes. These narrative cells have variable dimensions and are relatively autonomous from each other.” And hypernarratives are “all those hypertexts in which the segments are (or seem to be) parts of fabula or a story. It can also be a web hypernarrative. [4]

For Dewey, art has substance. This substance comes in different forms such as originality, sincerity in the form, cooperation of the producer of the art and, space and time. [5]

Similarly, a hypernarrative requires the following: (1) a set of stories, (2) the structure to be followed, and (3) a seemingly creative interface to match the theme or the stories and the language. Having a major plot will also help. The plot can be a major event, a conflict, or a minor convergence event for the characters. Since it is quite interesting for the students to do this, the output most often than not, is original and a sincere effort to deliver a good, fascinating and or imaginative story.

Both teacher and students can make this as a worthwhile hypertext, a writing and a reading experience that refers to movement in Dewey’s terms. The reader can jump to any page, story or information he wants to read giving him space and time. And this exercise per se gives opportunity to an aesthetic quality thinking experience as presupposed by Dewey.

The utilization of various media, the suitable interface, imagery, layout and sound for instance, reinforces the hypermedia [6], a fundamental element in a hypernarrative.

**The Hypernarrative Projects** [7]

**1. Simple Structure**

The story exhibits a flat structure—one main event can be a beginning or an ending that ties up the different characters in the story.

**2. Cross Incident Structures**

The story runs for a week. The events have cross incident structures that allow the interactions of the different characters on different times of the day or different days of the week. Similar structures even tell the feelings or thoughts of the character during the interaction.

**3. Complex Story Structure**

Complex story structure would link not only the characters but even the objects and places around the characters; even their beliefs. In this kind of structure, use of forums, blog entries and even external web sites can be useful.

The example below was inspired by the bombing of the Light Railway Transit in...
Manila. The story includes the survivors, their differences in beliefs and perspectives why they survived or the reason for the bombing. Unknowingly, they are also tied up by some other events and/or objects.

http://www.geocities.com/franchise63/about_the_story1.htm - by Francis Sia

4. Blog Structure – By Dave Lim

In this example, the story was presented in a blog format, the hypertext structure is hierarchical with no ending of the different stories.

http://www.geocities.com/chuajameson/ - by Jameson Chua

5. Different Story Endings

An interesting structure is similar to a role playing game. The decision of the main character will lead to different ending of a story. The story will end to a decision like --- “What should I tell Hans?”

a.) Tell Hans the truth that I also love Michelle.
b.) Tell Hans that I need some more time.
c.) Tell Hans that I will help him with Michelle.

6. Creative Interface

In this example, the hypernarrative is a set of horror stories about the past owners of a strange house. Each owner is represented by an object in the house.
This one is about the different houses in a neighborhood. Each house has a story to tell and is somehow linked to another house.

Issues in Implementation

There are, of course, issues in these projects.

- What story is acceptable and not acceptable? Should it be an original story idea?
- What language is to be used? Will it be better to use Filipino or English?
- Will grammar be an issue or part of the rating scheme?
- Will the web front end design as significant as the story? Will it be part of the rating scheme?
- How many stories, characters or events are required? Is there a minimum?
- How will the project be evaluated?
- What are the project milestones?

Conclusions

Hypernarratives reinforce the idea of Dewey that when there is integration of valuable experiences and meanings of life, aesthetic quality is produced in the process. It is the same as the experience becoming an aesthetic experience. [8] The outputs generated in by the students of HCI proved to be an aesthetic experience itself. The students have produced their own original work, the outputs were sincere efforts, and the cooperation of the students had been very, very evident.

Hypernarratives require a theme, a story, a structure and a language. Hypernarratives can be very useful and effective in the fusion of technology, creativity and imagination using the web and technology as the medium.

For mentors who intend to try it in class, it is recommended to employ the following:

1. Set clear project specifications;
2. Set a workable timetable;
3. Require deliverables in each milestone (submission of the concept plot and ideas are clear, separate deadline for the layout and interface etc.);
4. Encourage project collaboration;
5. Encourage peer review and critique;
6. Get students’ view on the project after the evaluation is done;
7. Set clear evaluation scheme.

The class projects failed to employ collaborative work but this can be done in the next batches. More dynamic links to other websites, forums and events are recommended to make the narratives more exciting to read. Allow individual projects with similar topics to link with one another.

Course integration with a Literature or Grammar course may be done. This will help facilitate the thorough checking of the content and narrative and not just focusing on the hypertext structure.

Indeed, a hypernarrative is a thinking experience. As Dewey puts it “the experience of thinking of the maker results to an esthetic quality.” And the fusion in which physical things we cannot emulate.

References

[7] Hypernarrative Projects developed in the HCI class of Ma. Victoria Pineda and used as materials in this paper:
   ▪ Ron Gerard
   ▪ Walter Lao
   ▪ Francis Sia
   ▪ Dave Lim
   ▪ Jameson Chua
   ▪ Keith Lao
   ▪ Cheska Verona