**Narrative in code**

The year is 1590. You, William Shakespeare, are sitting in the London Theatre, waiting for your code to be executed. You have spent months meticulously labouring over each little line of code, ensuring that there are no contradictions or logic errors which could jeopardise the whole project. But now it is time to compile, your actors enter the stage, and you anxiously observe as Romeo\_and\_Juliette.js is played out before you for the first time. The program runs wonderfully, the Juliette function calls for the Romeo function, just as you had defined in the script, and everything goes smoothly. You are truly a skilled coder.

*The end*

It is fortunate that the manuscripts of Shakespeare are all so well preserved. Using these manuscripts, actors are able to perform his works without needing to stray too far from the original vision. As is often the case, these narratives are defined by strict rules and sequences, which govern everything from what line of dialogue is spoken, to where the person stands while speaking it. I find these parallels to coding to be quite interesting, and perhaps it could be used as a baseline for further discussion.

The word “narrative” derives from the latin verb “narrare”, which means “to tell”, but I would also like to explore the role of those who are “to receive” the narrative. How does the relationship between author and receiver differ between different kinds of media? For this assignment I feel I would like to explore the ways in which narrative structure may differ between interactive and non-interactive media and entertainment. In this context, I would also find it interesting to discuss the concept of authorship, given that interactive media oftentimes allows for the user to appropriate the narrative in the sense, by forging their own path in the overall narrative. Perhaps in this context it would be fitting to draw upon the texts we’ve read about Generative Art, where authorship is also discussed.

The way actors insert themselves into the characters of a play, is perhaps not too unlike the way players might insert themselves in the worlds of various video games or other interactive media. In this context, the concepts of *leniency* and *agency* are quite interesting to me. For example, the player of a video game is oftentimes given a lot of leniency in how they choose for the story to unfold before them, which can ideally make the narrative appear to be much more personalised and unique for the player, however, it can also at times come at the cost of the believability of the narrative as a whole.

**Freedom in non-linear narrative structure**

It’s interesting to think about the agency of the actors in the story. In a traditional play for example, the agency of the actors is quite predefined to the structure of the narrative, this may not always the case in interactive media, though. Open world games featuring non-linear narratives have become quite a popular genre within video games, often bearing the promise of providing the player with freedom in how they choose to progress through the story. One might ponder whether or not freedom is at all possible when working within the confines of code that is already pre-defined. When the agency of the actors in the story is decided through both the players, programmers and writers, to what extent do the characters themselves have agency?

Perhaps it could also be interesting to explore the ways in which narrative can be used politically and ideologically. To “push a narrative” is a phrase often said bearing negative connotations, and perhaps it could also be an interesting thing to explore. We’ve previously read texts about how ‘code’ is not at all neutral, often containing either implicit or explicit political or ideological elements. While the public at large may perceive code to be neutral, narratives in terms of storytelling are actually mostly always expected to convey some sort of ideology or message. I wonder could be argued that such agenda is obfuscated in software that utilises user-defined or otherwise non-linear narrative structure, seeing as a user-tailored narrative may give one the impression that they are creating their own personal story, while in reality it has all been defined in advance by programmers and writers. Even if this is not the case, it could be perhaps be an interesting point of discussion.

**Summary and closing thoughts**

I must admit I still have quite a bit of uncertainty regarding the nature of my final project, but hopefully this can kind of serve as a stepping stone into a greater process of reflection. To summarise, I’d like to explore how narrative, both traditional and modern, can be seen as a form of computation, either dictated by a manuscript, or lines of rigid computer code. From this I feel it could be relevant to examine how character agency is affected in the context of interactive software, and how supposed user freedom may reflect impact the narrative structure as a whole. I’d also like to reflect on the concept of authorship over the story, seeing as interactive media allows for the user to in a sense appropriate the narrative based on their own experiences and choices within the media. It could also be interesting to explore how agenda and design philosophy could be reflected in how a piece of interactive media is structured. It is important to acknowledge that these are not the only forms of narrative, improv theatre could for example also be fun to explore to a certain extent, but it is not something I’ve reflected too much on up until this point.

Going forward I’ll have to explore this idea further to see if it is possible to base an entire assignment around. I’ll also need to track down a greater amount of literature from which I’ll be able to argue.

I just thought of this now, but it could also be neat to discuss the concept of emergent storytelling through gameplay, which is more unique to video games. I’m coming for you, Sea of Thieves.