Research into Interactive Digital Narrative: A Kaleidoscopic View

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Milestone Moment

IDN through the Kaleidoscope

First Wave 1966-1993

Acceleration 1993-1997

Second Wave 1997-2017

The Disciplinary Advantage

Studying IDN as its Own Context

IDN-specific Aesthetic/Formal Vocabulary

Coda: Shrödinger's Narrative

A Milestone Moment

Critical mass of objects to study

Critical mass of scholarship

Distinct framework

    Overlaps with other disciplines

    Self-validating

Hartmut Koenitz
@hkoenitz
Following

Post Thanksgiving re-announcement (Please RT)

Introducing #ARDIN
(Association for Research into Digital Interactive Narratives),

Sign up for news and to be part of the discussion at signup@interactivenarrative.org

More here:

facebook.com/ICIDS/posts/87 ...

ARDIN

ASSOCIATION FOR
RESEARCH INTO DIGITAL
INTERACTIVE NARRATIVES

10:37 AM - 28 Nov 2017

Kaleidoscopic view

Same objects in multiple coherent arrangements

https://myamericancrafts.com/products/white-diamonds-three-mirror-kaleidoscope

Kaleidoscopic View of IDN Research

Interactive Narrative Research is a coherent disciplinary pattern

There are multiple taxonomies of IDNs possible within IDN Research

IDNs support analysis of the same event in multiple contexts

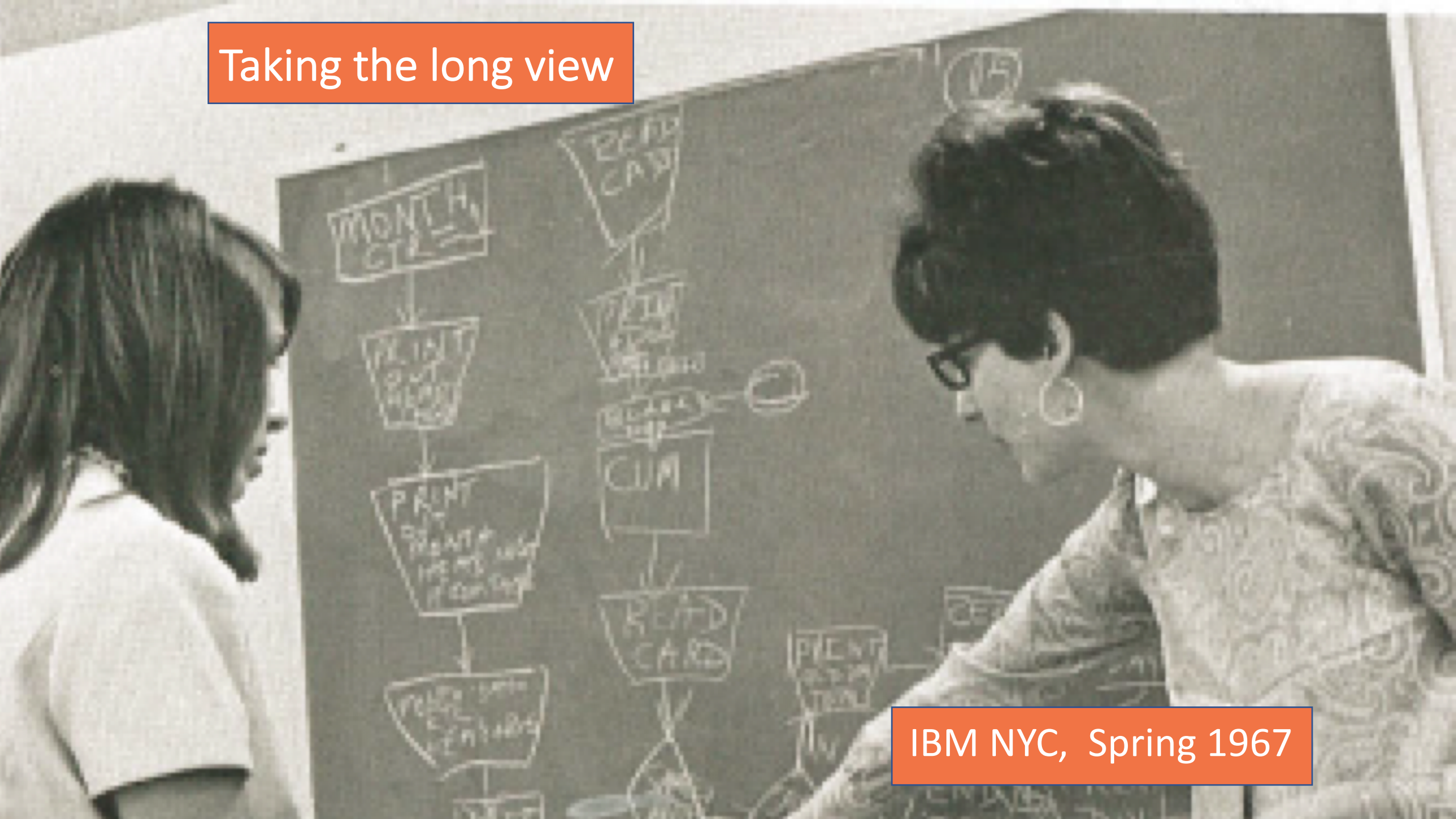IDNs support imagination multiple variants of the same scenario

Taking the long view
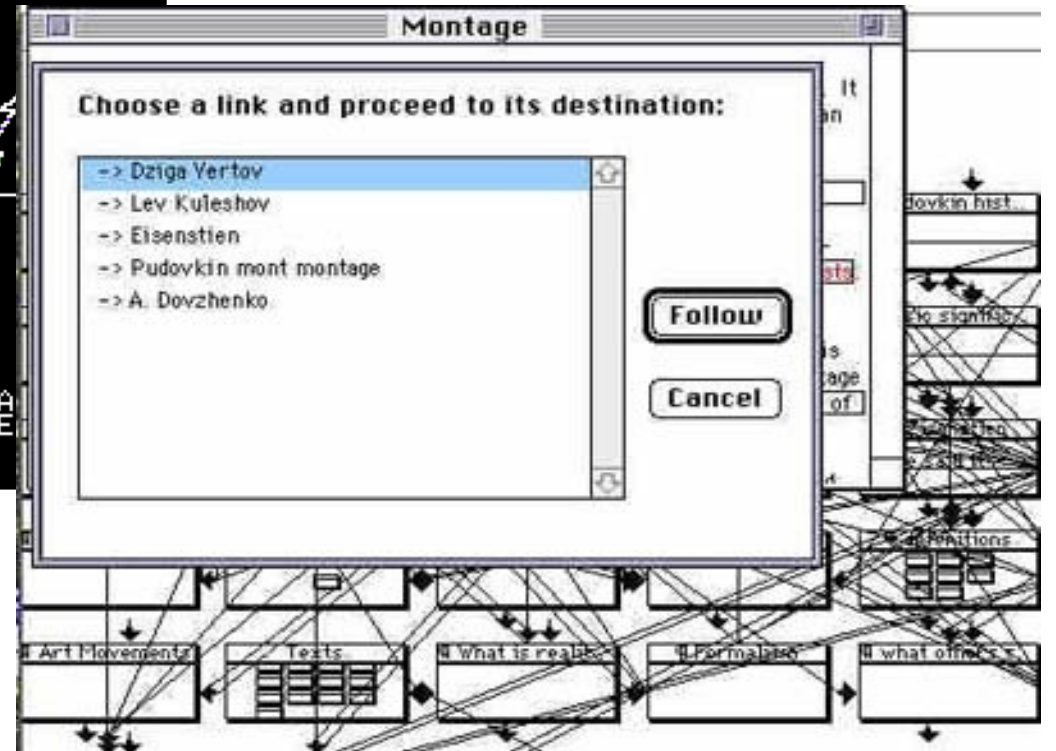
The Book of Kells c800

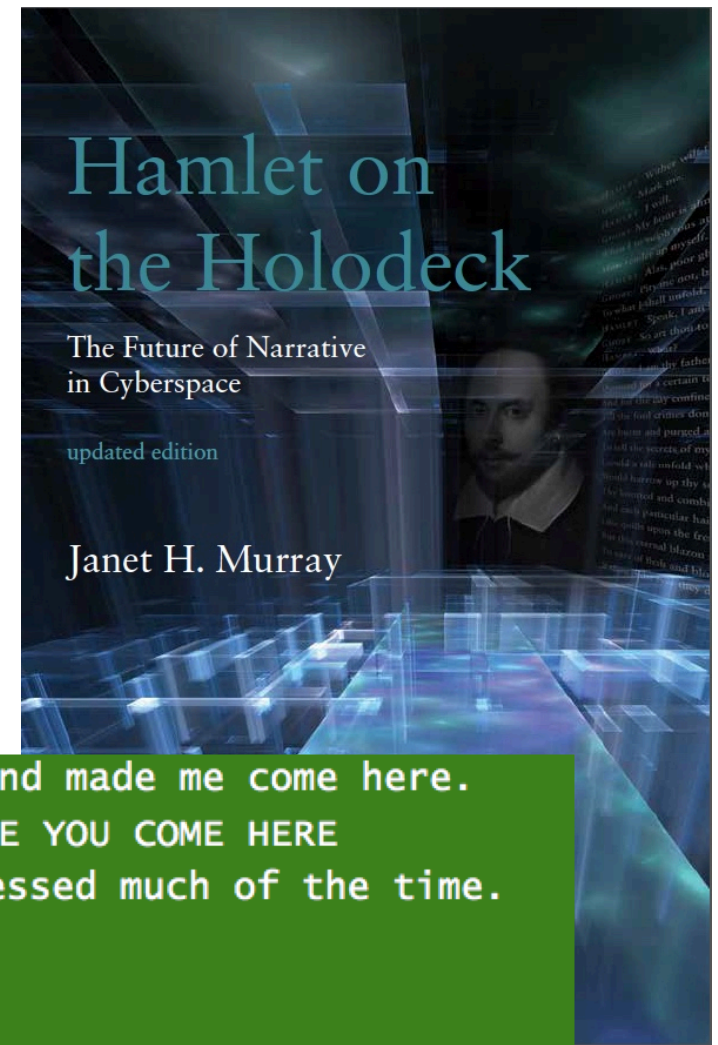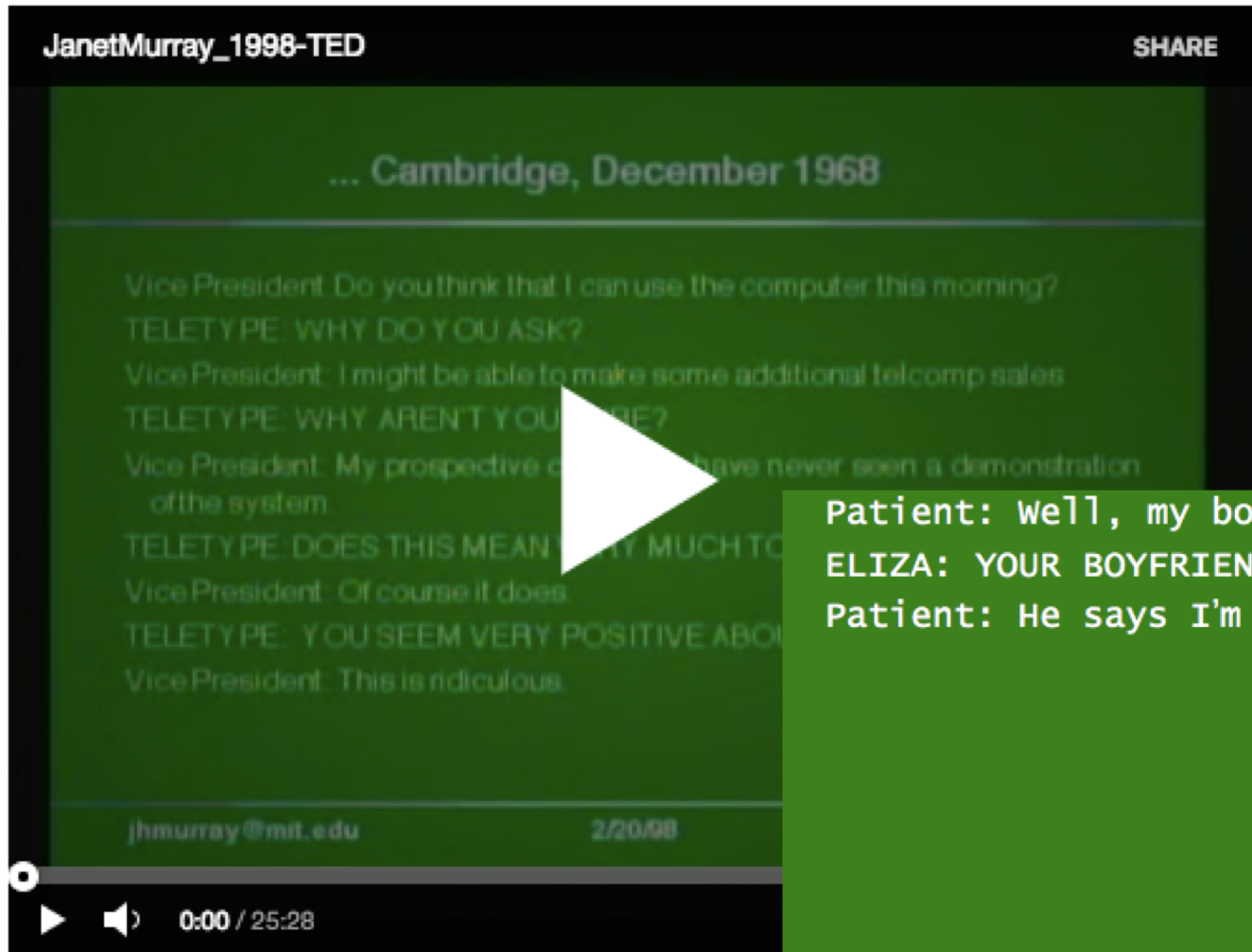Taking the long view

IBM NYC, Spring 1967

First Wave 1966-1996

Patient: Well, my boyfriend made me come here.
ELIZA: YOUR BOYFRIEND MADE YOU COME HERE
Patient: He says I'm depressed much of the time.

YOU ARE IN THE FRONT YARD OF A LA
ABANDONED VICTORIAN HOUSE.   STONE
LEAD UP TO A WIDE PORCH
----------------------- ENTER COMMAND?

Montage

Choose a link and proceed to its destination:

-> Dziga Vertov
-> Lev Kuleshov
-> Eisenstien
-> Pudovkin mont montage
-> A. Dovzhenko

Follow

Cancel

The First Interactive Digital Narrative
Joseph Weizenbaum, Eliza 1966

JanetMurray_1998-TED   SHARE

... Cambridge, December 1968

Vice President: Do you think that I can use the computer this morning?
TELETYPE: WHY DO YOU ASK?
Vice President: I might be able to make some additional telcomp sales
TELETYPE: WHY AREN'T YOU ...RE?
Vice President: My prospective ... have never seen a demonstration of the system.
TELETYPE: DOES THIS MEAN ... MUCH TO ...
Vice President: Of course it does.
TELETYPE: YOU SEEM VERY POSITIVE ABO...
Vice President: This is ridiculous.

jhmurray@mit.edu   2/20/98

▶ 🔊   0:00 / 25:28

Patient: Well, my boyfriend made me come here.
ELIZA: YOUR BOYFRIEND MADE YOU COME HERE
Patient: He says I'm depressed much of the time.

Hamlet on the Holodeck
The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace

updated edition

Janet H. Murray

https://inventingthemedium.com/2015/05/14/my-ted-talk-1998/

The First Wave: Computational Silo

Eliza (1966) → Chatbots, AI research

Adventure (1975) Zork (1977) → Infocom (1979-89) → Text adventures, RPGs

Text-based MUDs (forerunners of MMORPGs) (1978-)

Theory

      Roger Schank, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding* (1977)

Association for Computers in the Humanities founded 1978

In 1994, Espen Aarseth and Janet Murray spoke at ACH at the Sorbonne. The President of ACH referred to "glitzy" applications that were overvalued compared to important work like the TEI.

The First Wave: Adventure Games Silo

Sierra On-Line
  Mystery House (1980)
  King's Quest Series (1980-1998, 2016)
Nintendo *Super Mario Brothers 3* 1988
LucasFilm
  Monkey Island Series(1990-2010)

Theory:

Clara Fernandez-Vara, *Shaping Player Experience in Adventure Games* (2008)

In 1980s, Infocom fans greeted games with graphics like movie purists who resisted talkies

The First Wave: Hypertext Silo (Literary Community)

Storyspace community of practice 1987
>   Michael Joyce, *Afternoon* 1987
>   Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden 1992*
>   Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl 1995*

Eastgate Systems (fl 1990-97)

Theory

George Landow, *Hypertext* (1992)

Robert Coover "Hypertext is only the beginning" NYT Book Review, 1993

Jay Bolter, co-designer Storyspace

Electronic Literature Organization founded 1999

In the early 1990s the literary hypertext community deplored the WWW as an inadequate implementation of hypertext and ignored videogames
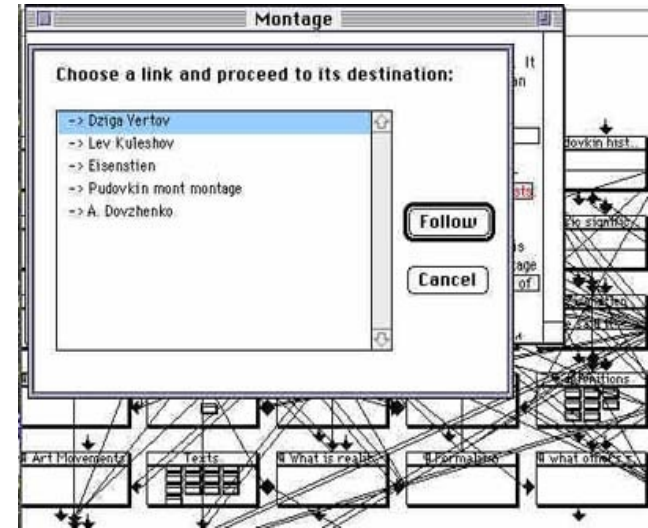
The First Wave: Hypertext/Hypermedia Silo (Wider Distribution)

HyperCard (1987-1998), SuperCard (1989-) community of practice
- Voyager interactive books (1984-1997)
- *A la recontre de Phillipp*e interactive video on videodisc (Yale UP 1993)
- *Myst* (1993) adventure narrative implemented in Hypercard
- *Dans un quartier de Paris* interactive video on cd-rom (Yale UP 1999)

MIT Media Lab founded 1985
Interactive Video part of the establishing demos
Glorianna Davenport Elastic Cinema Group

Word Wide Web (1989-) Mosaic browser (1993)
The Simpsons Archive – first fan site 1994
YouTube (2005; Peabody Award 2008) community of practice
Twine (2009) community of practice

Acceleration 1992-1997

University Programs
    Joe Bates' Oz Group at CMU (1990)
    First IDN course at MIT (1992)
    Information Design and Technology MS Georgia Tech (1993)

Narratives with Mass Appeal
    Myst (1993) (in Hypercard!)
    Tamagotchi (1997)

Authoring Systems
    TADS (1988, 1990s) RPG Maker (1992), InForm (1993)
    First game mods: *Doom* (1993), *Quake* (1995), *Petz* (1995)
    First machinima (1996)
    Director v.6 (1997)

Brenda Laurel, *Computer as Theater* (1991) first theory book

Late 1990s turning point

When 30 years of diverse development began to coalesce into a recognizable new media practice.

- Janet Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* 1997
- Espen Aarseth, *Cybertext* 1997
- Jay Bolter, *Remediation* 1999
- Terry Winograd, *Bringing Design to Software* 1996 (HCI takes off)
- Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media 2001*
- Nick Montfort, *Twisty Little Passages, 2003*
- *Nick Montfort and Noah Waldrip-Fruin, The New Media Reader 2003*

First PhD Digital Media, Georgia Tech, 2005

Second Wave 2000s

The Sims (*2000*) Simulation game as bildungsroman, genre fiction

Grand Theft Auto3 (2001) Open Genre World series

Second Life (2003)

Tell-Tale Games (2004-2018)

Façade "interactive drama" (2005)

Bioshock (2007)

Conference Organizations

    ICVS 2001

    TIDSE 2003

    DIGRA 2003

    ICIDS 2008 (incorporating ICVS and TIDSE)

Second Wave Examples since 2010

Anna Anthropy, *Dys4ia* (2012)

MolleIndustria, *Unmanned* (*2012*)

Fullbright Company, *Gone Home* (*2013*)

Emily Short*, Blood and Laurels* (2014)

Lucas Pope, *Papers Please* (2014)

Telltale Games, *Game of Thrones* (2014 -)

Meg Jayanth and Jon Ingold, *80 Days* (2014)

Annapurna Interactive, *Florence* (2018)

** add your own candidates **

Less successful as interactive stories

Devolver Digital, *Reigns* (2016)

Steven Soderberg, *Mosaic* interactive series (2017)

The Disciplinary Advantage

Assume that interactive narrative is important as an object of study in *its own right*

- Do not feel the need to validate IDN investigation by embedding it in the discourses of games, legacy narrative forms, legacy critical vocabulary, political ideology, computational virtuosity….

Assume that interaction and procedurality offer new affordances to *expand the expressivity* of stories

- Look for traditions of practice and structural innovations that exploit digital affordances to expand coherence, dramatic impact, complexity

Disciplinary Advantage: We can avoid pointless conversations

- Are stories bad for games?
- Are games more "real" than stories?
- Are games devoid of cultural/psychological meaning beyond abstract systems?

(the answers are No, No! No!!

but the discourse is not productive for understanding IDN)

Turn the kaleidoscope!

Ask **not** what narrative elements can do for games

but
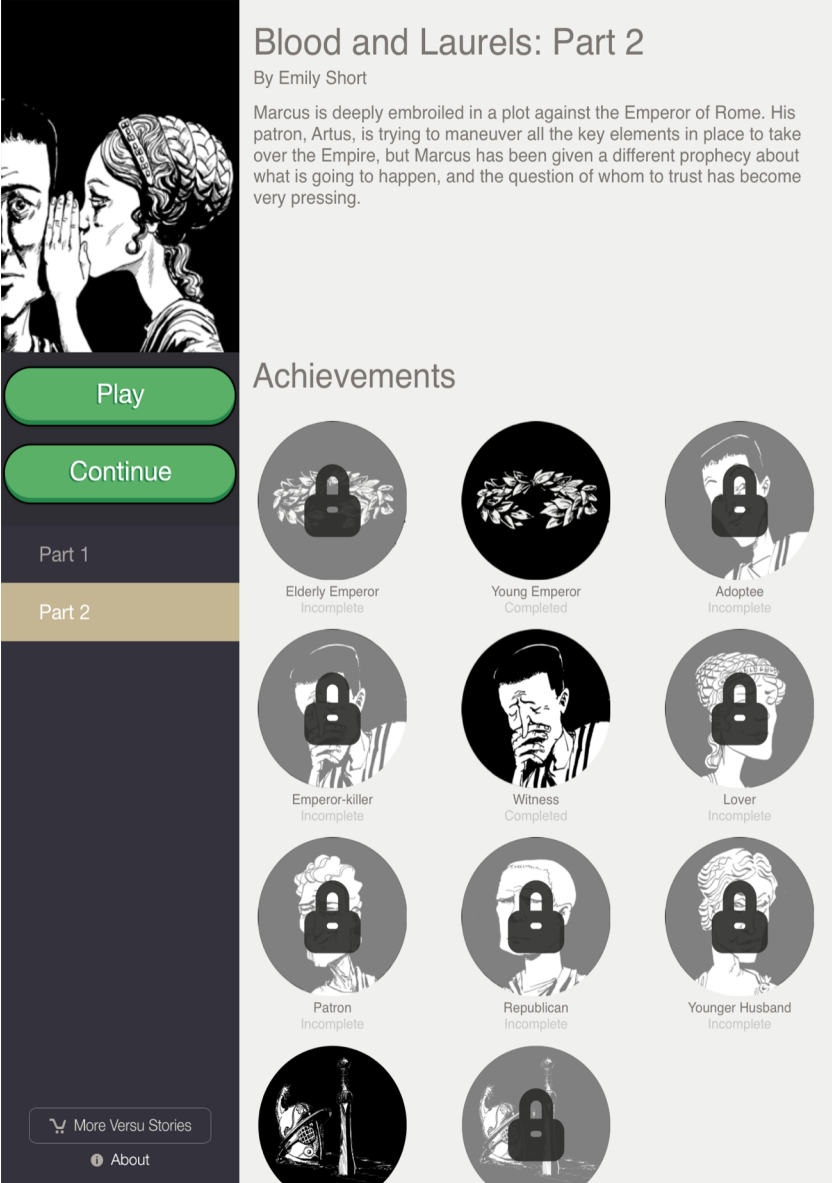
what **interaction mechanics** developed for games

can do for **storytelling**

Appropriating game mechanics as expressive enactments for an interactive memoir
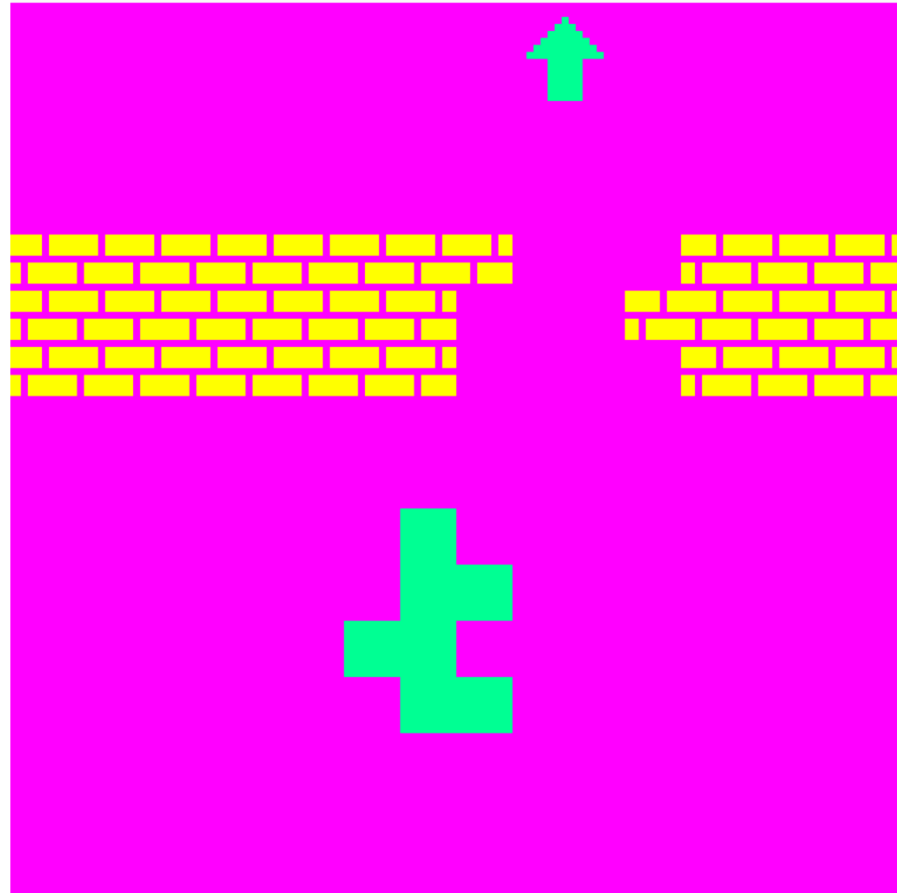
Adapting achievement badges
to keep track of multiple versions in a
well-segmented, multiform story, with
compelling dramatic variants

Conventions that work across genres, platforms to create belief: Lock doors to reinforce experience of navigating a space


```
The Troll Room                              Score: 45        Moves: 27

>get sword
Taken.

>open trap door
The door reluctantly opens to reveal a rickety staircase descending into
darkness.

>d
The trap door crashes shut, and you hear someone barring it.

Cellar
Your sword is glowing with a faint blue glow.

>n
The Troll Room
This is a small room with passages to the east and south and a forbidding hole
leading west. Bloodstains and deep scratches (perhaps made by an axe) mar the
walls.
A nasty-looking troll, brandishing a bloody axe, blocks all passages out of
the room.
```

Same strategy works In *Zork* and *Come Home* and VR

Embedding objects with backstory

Classic game pattern – Useful for "Easter eggs," mystery clues and red herrings, immersive detail.

Used in set design, Promenade Theatre, and increasingly in AR, VR

Disciplinary Advantage: concrete vocabulary

- Not "nonlinear" but multi-sequential and multiform
  Multi-sequential: Same events, multiple points of view or orders of discovery or subsets of information
  Multiform: Same scenario, multiple variations if events and outcomes
- **Moral physics** makes action coherent and meaningful
- Aesthetic of **Replay** with significant parallels and contrasts
- Aesthetic of **Dramatic Agency**
  When interaction lines up with dramatic expectations and rewards.
  Not the same as winning.
  Not the same as having a direct effect that changes the story.

Façade Assessed for Dramatic Agency

- Segmentation by story beat
- Generation of coherent variation
- Motivation of replay
- Flawed interaction design
  - Expectation setting with free text input
  - Wrongheaded open world aesthetic for conversation

Florence (2018) Dramatic agency through expressive enactment
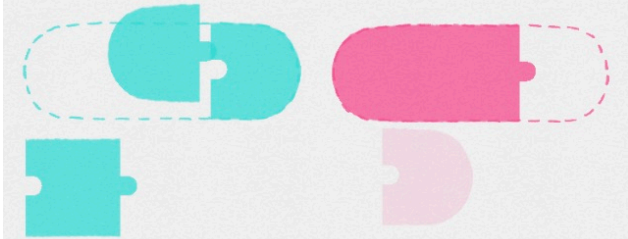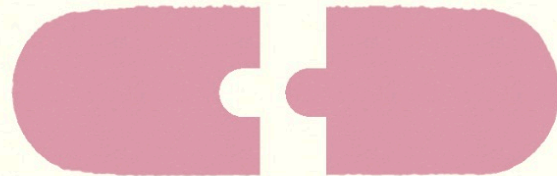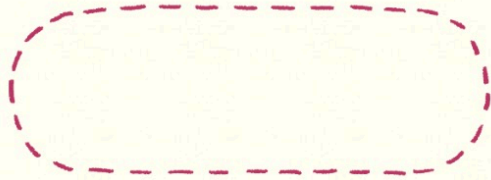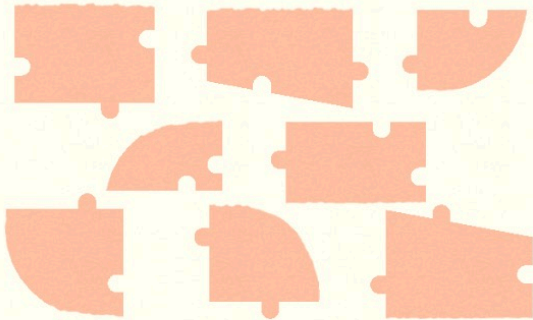
Jigsaw puzzle
as metaphor
for shattered
relationship
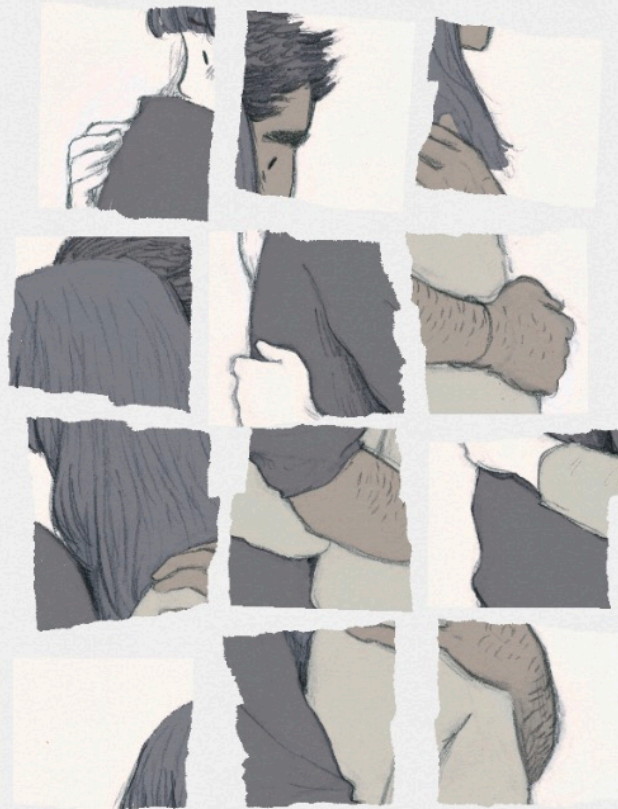
Dramatic Agency in futile actions

The young heir cannot be saved by your advice (not a strategy game)

Fits the moral physics of the storyworld

Game of Thrones: Ice from Fire Telltale Season 1

Compare with *Reigns*

Should some ruffian come to seize you, pull the alarm rope! Then grab your candlestick, and wail away until guards arrive!

General Henge

Strategy game conventions in this game have strong potential for IDN

But immersion in the story is undermined by lack of dramatic agency:
* little payoff on player choices
* generic actions with no parameterized variation
* no moral physics beyond survival

Good models for interactivity because well segmented, dramatically parallel

All 7 timelines combined - Community Remedial Chaos Theory

Malcolm in the Middle
"Bowling" Season 2 ep 20

Community
"Remedial Chaos Theory" S 3 ep 4

Compare with *Mosaic* (2017)

Storyboard used by developers

Branching interface to episode-length segments.
Poor segmentation.
Poor motivation for choice.
No dramatic agency.

80 days: post-colonial moral physics and "unfair" gameplay (Meg Jayanth)

Even better would be game that let us switch POVs

Even better would be IDN that let us switch POVs

Disciplinary Advantage

Investigate the potential of IDN as an expressive framework for engaging with the most pressing themes of human culture of the 21st century, and as a cognitive scaffold for increasing our individual and collective understanding of complex systems.

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Humanist project of 21st Century: Save Shrödinger's Cat
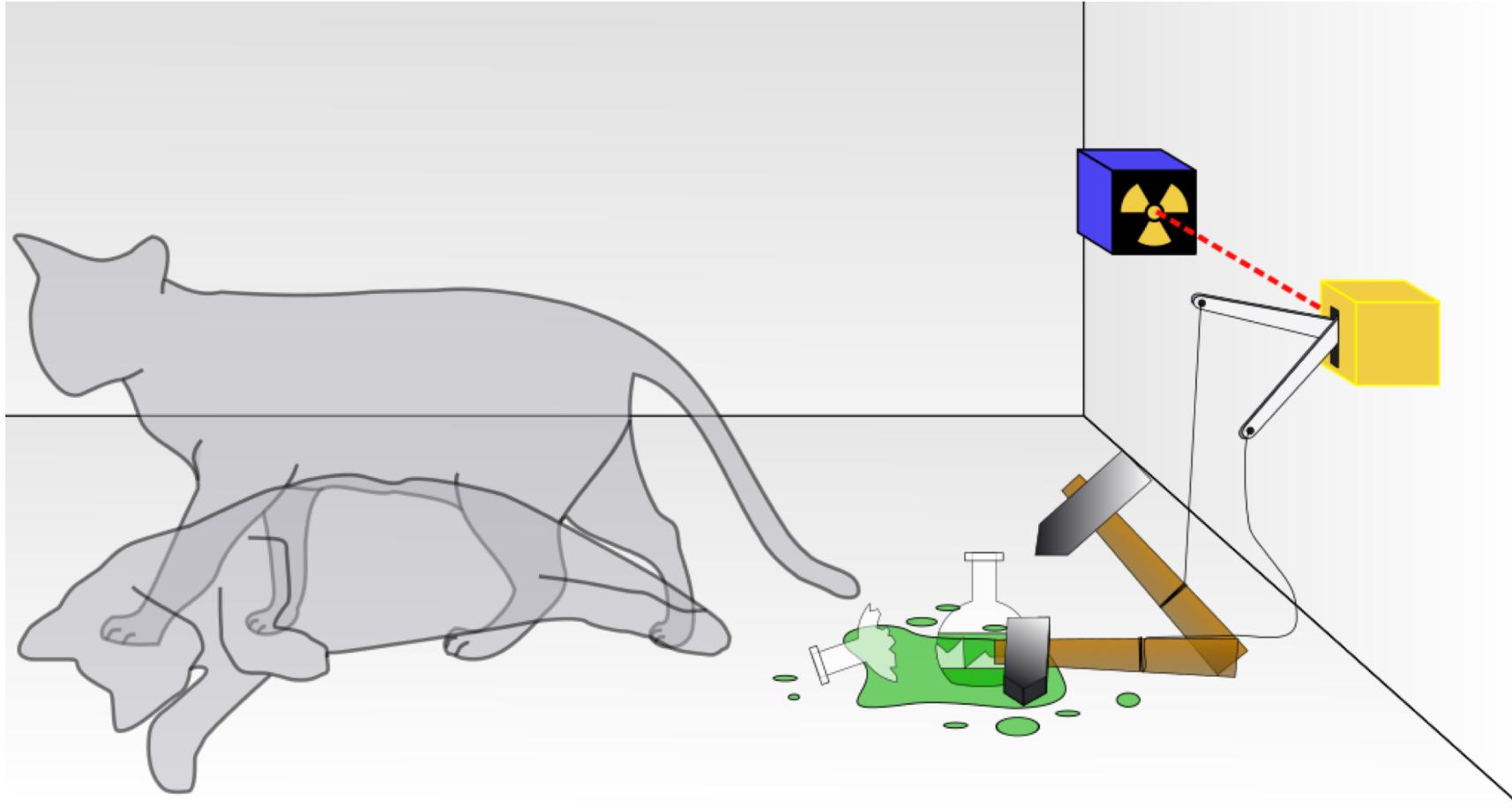
IDN Research to the rescue....
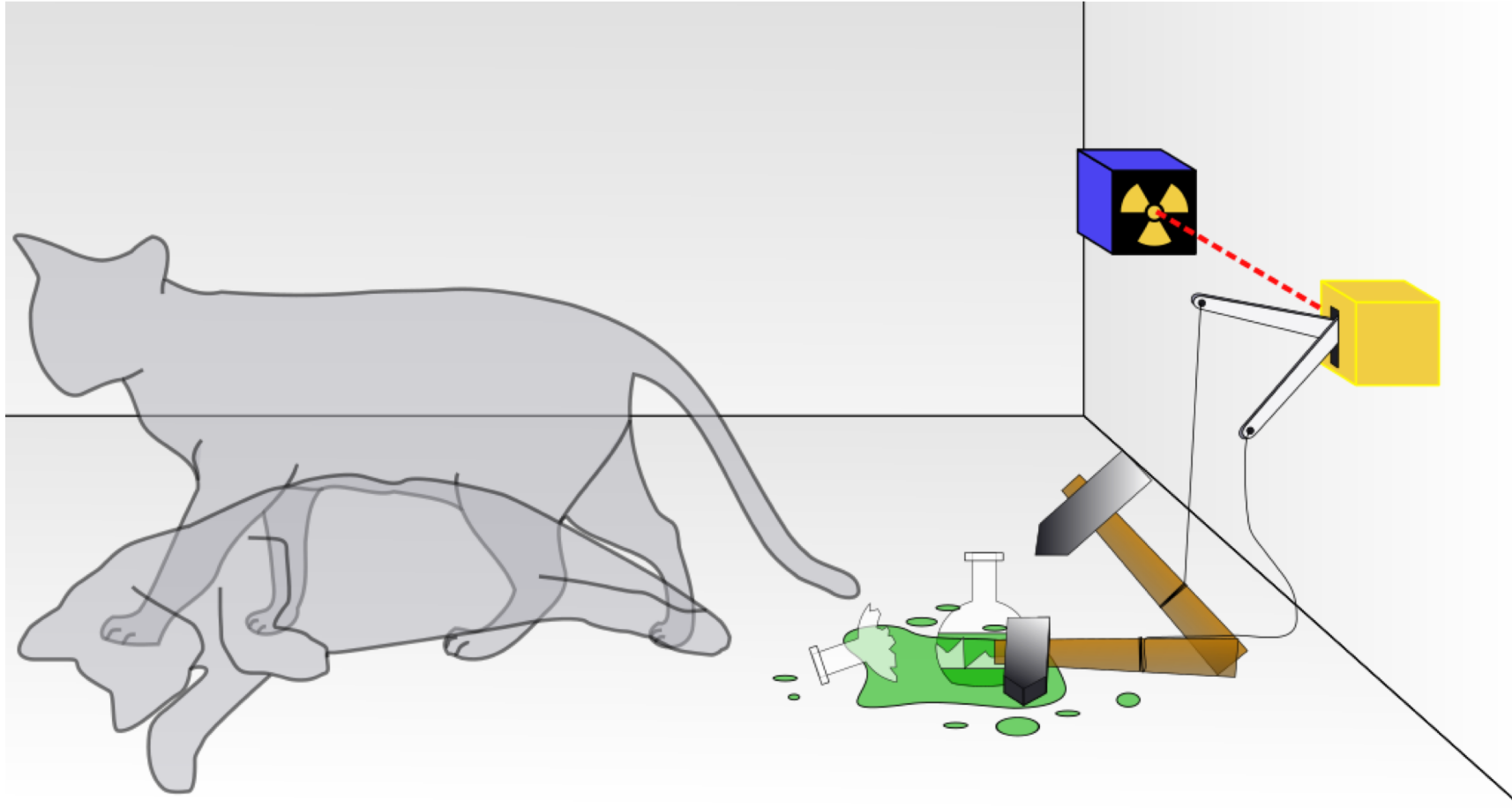
By allowing us to articulate and share more coherent, kaleidoscopic modes of understanding our multiform reality

Thank you!