



Research Training Group
“The Experience of Stories in the Digital Age” presents

Applied Storytelling

Speakers: Prof. Hartmut Koenitz, Prof. Dimitar Uzunov & Prof. Daniel Hessler

Organizers: Prof. Birgit Lugrin & Prof. Gerhild Nieding



July 28th - July 30th 2026



9.30am - 12.30pm / Lunch Break / 1.30pm - 4.30pm



R103, **Herbert-Brause-Medienkompetenzzentrum**, Campus Hubland Süd

funded by



Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

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July 28th

CV

Dr. Hartmut Koenitz is a scholar, designer, and an artist. He is a Professor in Media Technology at Södertörn University, and a visiting researcher at the University of Amsterdam. His research is concerned with the theory, practice, education, and societal impact of interactive narratives. He describes these works as means to represent and better understand the complex world of the 21st century, the project behind his latest book, *Understanding Interactive Digital Narratives. Immersive Expressions for a Complex Time* (Routledge 2023) (<http://understandingidn.com>). Recently, he investigates the impact and application of generative AI tools and explores interactive narratives for mental health. He is the creator of the authoring tool ASAPS (https://github.com/sumo961/ASAPS_New). In 2024, he was named a HEVGA Fellow (Higher Education Video Game Alliance) and amongst the top 2% of scholars worldwide (<https://topscinet.com>). Koenitz is the president of ARDIN, the Association for Research in Digital Interactive Narratives (<https://ardin.online>) which organizes the International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling and the Editor-In-Chief of the Journal of Interactive Narrative (<https://journal.ardin.online>). He is also a visual artist, and his works have been shown in Atlanta, Paris, Istanbul, Seoul, Copenhagen and Porto.



Workshop

Talk (morning): How to think about interactive digital narrative

The talk will problematize narrative and related terms such as storytelling in the interactive domain and consider different theoretical and practical approaches. It will consider narrative as a fundamental cognitive human function, and on that basis see literary theory as one particular, but not exclusive approach toward the understanding of narrative. Considering what changes in the interactive medium, it will surface limitation in the application of existing narrative theory, identifying narrative fundamentalism and narrative indifference as issues with considerable impact on applied research and practice. The talk will introduce the specific theory of the SPP model as a productive approach for researchers and practitioners alike.

Workshop (afternoon): Creating Interactive Digital Narratives (IDNs), applying GenAI in ideation and as material

The workshop will cover the creation of IDNs with and without GenAI assistance, identifying pitfalls and opportunities. Based on an introduction of IDN design fundamentals, we will explore human and mixed-initiative authoring using the ASAPS authoring tool. ASAPS embodies narrative system building and the SPP (System, Process, Product) model and exposes GenAI as material for narrative design. The workshop will explore these concepts in group work and aims to produce working prototypes.



July 29th

CV

Dimitar Uzunov is a director, producer, and scriptwriter. In 2008, he founded Famille Mundi theatre company in Paris, with which he won the Young Talent of Paris prize twice. Dimitar is a co-founder of Sofia-based Arte Urbana Collectif and Summer Scriptwriting Base, an immersive international summer school for the storytellers of today and tomorrow.

He is also the founder and director of the platform Theatre & Science and the interdisciplinary art and science festival Theatre of Wonder in Bulgaria. More recently, he has been the coordinator of the European project Please ASK! - Art Science Kick for the creation of stage productions in collaboration with scientists and scientific institutions. Dimitar has lectured, given keynote talks and held workshops in over 20 countries around the world. His workshop Creative Storytelling: How to Create and Tell a Good Story was included by ERIC magazine among the 10 best creative events in London in September 2018.



Workshop

“Tell me the facts and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.” - Native American proverb

Stories guide and give meaning to our lives. People need stories to convey meaning, values, and hope. Human knowledge is built on stories, and the human brain is a kind of cognitive machine that helps us understand, remember, and pass on stories. Stories are a simple reflection of human thought.

This workshop will introduce participants to fundamental storytelling elements and models through the lens of successful examples from popular culture and insights from neurology and cognitive psychology. Using games, interactive exercises, group dynamics, and other creative methods, participants will learn and practice the basics of storytelling and will develop their own stories.



July 30th

CV

Daniel Hessler teaches and conducts research in the fields of game design, interactive storytelling, serious games, media theory, and humor theory.

He studied dramaturgy, modern German literature, and psychology at LMU Munich / the August Everding Bavarian Theater Academy and worked from 2002 to 2012 in the independent theater scene, at the municipal theater, and on international touring productions as a dramaturg, director, writer, and performer.

Since 2005, he has been developing and publishing games in the genres of Action RPG, RTS, VN, and TTRPG, including for Kalypso Media and Ulisses Spiele. From 2015 to 2022, he taught Media Studies and Media Practice (B.A.), Computer Game Studies (M.A./M.Sc.), and Literature and Media (M.A.) at the Game Innovation Lab at the University of Bayreuth, as well as gamified didactics at the Bayreuth Center for University Teaching. He was a lecturer at HMT Leipzig, Karlsruhe University of Applied Sciences, and Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Creative Director of the LevelUp project at JLU Giessen, and has served as a juror at the German Dev Days since 2020.

In June 2024, he assumed the professorship for Game Design at the Dortmund University of Applied Sciences and Arts, where he heads the Serious Games & Digital Knowledge (B.A.) program. He is a member of the GameLabs network at universities and a founding member of the German Society for Game Studies.



Workshop

Goals, Rules, Actions

Playing games is all about interaction, which often enough clashes with the affordances of traditional narrative concepts. In this workshop, we will take a close look on spatial, emergent and branched narratives, and we will investigate how their specifics are interwoven with game mechanics. We will apply our observations by creating small prototypes, both analog and digital.

Please bring a digital work device with a working internet browser.