

Workshop 1: Netprov - Realtime Speculative Fiction as Processing and Problem Solving

Rob Wittig

1 What is netprov?

Netprov is networked improv: networked, improvised literature. Netprov is collaborative fiction-making in available media, usually the social media of the moment. Netprov is role-playing in writing and images. Netprov is storytelling in real time. Netprov is a great game for students and friends. Netprov is an emerging art form of the digital age. And netprov is fun!

This workshop session, led by an experienced netprov player, creator, and scholar, will provide hands-on experiences of collaborative digital storytelling. For the past ten years, Rob Wittig has been helping develop the netprov form for use in everyday life via Meanwhile Netprov Studio, and in the classroom during his decades at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

Netprov offers an opportunity for synchronous or asynchronous writing and critical thinking by small or large groups of authors in digital media. The principles discussed in this workshop apply across many social media platforms and can be used for narratives that are variously: comic, dramatic, or activist. Topics will include successful character creation, playing multiple characters, narrative development, and successful collaborative authorship. Specific techniques covered include how to support other netprov players: by quoting, by voting, by using emojis, stage directions and other phatic communication, by imitating, and by extending. The workshop also offers advice and support for those who wish to stage netprovs of their own. Bring a digital device and come build characters and stories with us!

2 Realtime Speculative Fiction as Processing and Problem Solving

By virtue of being improved in real time, netprovs always contain a bit of the news -- of current events. But the netprovs I facilitated and observed being done by others during COVID have been haunted by the pandemic and its stresses in a powerful way. Players in the general public, and students in the classrooms of my writing partner Mark C. Marino and myself dug deep within themselves to use the playful, fictional starting points of simple netprovs as a way to deal with their own psychological distress, and to begin to prepare themselves for a post-pandemic “after-life” already clearly marked by political, social, and scientific transformation. So . . . while having the usual fun we do in all netprov workshops, I want to focus particularly on this aspect of netprov

as a potential laboratory for change — a safe place to practice new attitudes, new roles, new modes of relating in the world.

3 Modules

This three hour, half-day workshop will have the following modules. Topics for these modules will be chosen from current events at the time of the conference.

Please register by sending an email to rwittig@d.umn.edu, with m.s.vosmeer@hva.nl in CC.

- **A quick icebreaker game** to get comfortable in the available media and meet teammates.
- **A simple, solo netprov**
Intro: developmental path of mimicry, dolls, puppets, roleplaying
Character development: social sensitivity and basics; careful with characters of vulnerable status; play to the top of your own intelligence
Character tricks: Unreliable narrator; mimic a social media orthographic style; create a sense of urgency
- **Playing two characters in a netprov**
Intro: duets on your own; internal dialogue in literary tradition; minimum: two selves
Character development and relationship in real time writing
- **Playing Well With Others**
Intro: listening as a master skill; rarity of feedback in literature as opposed to theater and games; ‘yes, and’; being a character who grows; keep another character up your sleeve
Feedback basics: read out loud what makes you laugh
- **Debrief and reflection; celebration**

Bio of the organizer

Rob Wittig plays at the crossroads of literature, graphic design and digital culture. He co-founded the legendary, pre-web IN.S.OMNIA electronic bulletin board with the Surrealist-style literary and art group Invisible Seattle. From this came a Fulbright grant to study the writing and graphic design of electronic literature with philosopher Jacques Derrida in Paris. Rob's book based on that work, *Invisible Rendezvous*, was published Wesleyan University Press. He then embarked on a series of illustrated and designed email and web fictions. Alongside his creative projects, Rob has worked in major publishing and graphic design firms in Chicago, leading R&D teams. In 2011 Rob earned a Master's in Digital Culture at the University of Bergen, Norway. He is currently developing high-design, collaborative fiction in a form called netprov, networked improv narrative. Rob just retired from decades as Assistant professor in the Art & Design and Writing Studies departments of the University of Minnesota Duluth to do creative work full time. His new book, *Netprov, Networked Improvised Literature for the Classroom and Beyond*, appeared in December 2021 from Amherst College Press and is available via Open Access: <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12387128>