

# From Player-Centered to Agent-Centered: A New Paradigm for Interactive Narrative in the Age of Large Language Models

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## INTRODUCTION: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN NARRATIVE PLEASURE

Game studies has long shown that pleasure is not reducible to winning, mastery, or choice; it is produced through involvement, affect, interpretation, and the situated identities of players (Calleja, 2011; Anable, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989). This paper

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examines a new pleasure structure emerging in LLM-based interactive narrative: pleasure organised around relations with semi-autonomous agents that remember, infer, improvise, and sometimes fail.

Traditional interactive narratives position players as the primary locus of meaningful action within rule-bound systems (Aarseth, 1997; Murray, 1997; Ryan, 2006; Salen and Zimmerman, 2004). Earlier AI-driven interactive drama already linked believable agents with plot management (Mateas and Stern, 2005), but LLM-driven systems disturb the balance of narrative control. AI characters in *1001 Nights* (Sun et al., 2023; Sun, 2024) function as both narrative interface and situated conversational partner; *Generative Agents* (Park et al., 2023) models social worlds that continue without player presence; *SIMA 2* delegates embodied action to a generalist agent able to reason, converse, and act across unfamiliar game worlds (SIMA Team, 2025). We call this emerging form agent-centered interactive narrative: interactive narrative in which narrative momentum is distributed across players, designers, agents, and computational infrastructures. From this comparison, we develop the Agent-Centered Narrative Pleasure (ACNP) framework, which connects agency distribution, authorship configuration, and pleasure structures.

## **METHOD AND CASE SELECTION**

To avoid treating these examples as isolated novelties, we conducted an exploratory comparative analysis of five recent agentic systems: *1001 Nights* (Sun et al., 2023), *Generative Agents* (Park et al., 2023), *AI Town* (a16z-infra, 2023), *Instantale* (Daruma to Akabeko, 2024), and *SIMA 2* (SIMA Team, 2025). Cases were purposively selected because each makes agent autonomy perceptible to players: through conversational constraint, memory, social simulation, persistent world change, or delegated embodied action. For each case we coded three layers: interaction grammar (what the player can ask, command, observe, or repair), agentic capacity (memory, planning, reflection, persistence, and opacity), and affective economy (which pleasures and displeasures the system invites). These comparisons produced the three dimensions that constitute the ACNP framework below.

## **THEORETICAL POSITIONING**

This framework builds on interactive digital narrative (IDN) research that distinguishes authored systems, interaction processes, and experienced narrative products (Koenitz, 2023), on recent work evaluating how generative AI changes IDN authorship (Fisher, 2023; Koenitz et al., 2024), and on surveys of LLMs in games (Gallotta et al., 2024). It also speaks to human-computer interaction accounts of mixed-initiative creativity, where human and computational actors iteratively suggest, evaluate, and modify creative outputs (Deterding et al., 2017). However, agent-centered narrative pushes beyond “AI as tool” accounts: the agent is not merely assisting an author or player, but becomes a social, procedural, and sometimes resistant site of narrative production.

## **CASE ANALYSIS: NEGOTIATION, SOCIAL EMERGENCE, AND DELEGATION**

In *1001 Nights*, players cannot simply command the system; they must embed target concepts in stories the AI King can accept. When the King reinterprets modern weapons through an ancient, mythic worldview, the pleasure lies in linguistic

negotiation and in discovering the boundaries of another intelligence's coherence. LLM hallucination becomes neither pure error nor pure feature, but a managed ambiguity that can generate curiosity, comedy, or frustration (Vi et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2024).

Generative Agents and AI Town relocate pleasure from intervention to witnessing. Park et al. (2023) show how a single planted intention, a Valentine's Day party, diffused through a twenty-five-agent community over two simulated days. Players encounter narrative as social archaeology: routines, rumours, relationships, and false memories have already accumulated. Instantale extends this logic into fantasy worlds whose characters age, shift allegiance, and generate plot developments across multiple time scales. The player's agency is curatorial, not sovereign.

SIMA 2 marks a third configuration: collaborative delegation. Instead of controlling every movement, players issue high-level intentions and watch an embodied agent interpret, plan, and recover from ambiguity. Pleasure becomes anticipatory trust: the suspense of seeing whether another entity understands the task, the environment, and the player's intent.

## **THE ACNP FRAMEWORK**

The Agent-Centered Narrative Pleasure (ACNP) framework proposes three dimensions for analysing agent-centered interactive narrative. Agency distribution describes how narrative capacity moves from player-monopolised choice to ecologies of human and nonhuman actors. Its key question is not "How much agency does the player have?" but "How is agency allocated, withheld, delegated, and made visible?"

Authorship configuration describes how story material is produced. In branching narrative, designers pre-author possibilities and players select among them. In agent-centered systems, designers author rules, prompts, memories, safety constraints, and world models; agents and players then co-produce situated events. This is asymmetric co-authorship because the human actors remain institutionally responsible, while agents introduce improvisational uncertainty.

Pleasure structures describe the affective pattern generated by these configurations. Agent-centered systems offer relational pleasures: caring for, testing, observing, trusting, doubting, and repairing agents. They also produce troubling pleasures: enjoyment entangled with hallucination, opacity, labour extraction, cultural bias, and unequal comfort with AI intimacy. Agentic pleasure is intersectional because players' experiences of being understood, misread, represented, or excluded by language models are shaped by language, race, gender, disability, class, and platform access (Crenshaw, 1989; Anable, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION: FUTURE TRAJECTORIES**

Agent-centered interactive narrative is not a replacement for player-centered design but a shift in narrative gravity. Its central design question is how to make autonomous agents pleasurable without making their authority invisible. Future work should test this framework through player reception studies with diverse participants and through design research on accountable agent authorship, inclusive conversational norms, and pleasures that remain meaningful when control is shared.

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