

ARTISTIC RESEARCH

How can you use workshops as a testbed for storyworld development and research?



Oslo early February 2024: It is very cold outside and people are walking very carefully on the ice covered streets. The Filmschool Westerdal at the Kristiania University has invited me to do a 60 hour day and night non-stop workshop with 130 talents at the film bachelor education. Its is organised as a world jam, a term and concept which the teacher Hans Gunnar Brekke has invented for the occasion. The workshop is almost like an experiment and a part of the schools new paedagogical IMPACT programme.

The term jam, comes from the game world, who again took the term from music. In a game jam like the famous Nordic Game jam (<https://nordicgamejam.com>), hundreds of professional game developers and game talents meet for 48 hours. People work in groups developing a game within the 48 hours and finally a game i voted the best game. The rule is that everybody starts from scratch. No cheating.

When entering Westerdals filmschool it feels like entering a university. Big modern building, reception, entry cards to get through doors etc. But in the university theres is a huge space. Big enough for all 130 students to work in groups and sleep over in sleeping bags. The challenge the students get is to create a storyworld and two product ideas. In 60 hours. I have never done a workshop this big, and standing in this big empty space I am super nervous if everything will just be total chaos.





During the last five years I have been running workshops with more than 4000 students and professionals from major artschools in the storytelling realm: film, game, animation, theater, litteratur ... This has been as a part of my job at the National Filmschool of Denmark. But also been an important and integral part of my artistic research into storyworld creation and developing methods and models for creating storyworlds. And my experience is that while traditional research (reading, theorising and interviewing) is a great basis for my exploration, the real new findings have come through workshoping with artists, talents and students. One example is how I during the artistic research project Storyworld 2.0 (<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/profile/show-exposition?exposition=982784>) realised that the way game developers work and create characters, worlds and stories, are similar to the way devised theater is made .



The students arrive, and we start at 9.00 sharp with a 3 hour crash course in storyworld development and transmedia. In this course I share my knowledge, method and my own experience through three speed workshops of 10-15 minuttet. In these speed workshops each student get to create a storyworld and develop ideas for transmedia experiences. You can say that they get to prototype the method before the actual worldjam starts. At 13.00 we ring a gong and then the workshop starts. THE WORLD JAM STARTS!



The storyworld workshops I have been conducting during the last five years come in many forms and I always customize each workshop to reflect the participants' background and needs. But the structure is the same. The workshop structure consists of a lecture in three parts: 1: World-building. 2: World-devising. 3: Transmedia development. During the workshop (between each part of the lecture) the participants use the knowledge I share in practical work. They create a storyworld, create prototypes of material (scenes, texts, images, paper prototypes, filmed pilot etc) that takes place in the storyworld they create. And finally they create product ideas unfolding the universe in at least two different media/artforms. The workshop can last a few hours, several weeks and even months depending on time and budgets, for which I have created a web page with different packages (<https://sites.google.com/filmskolen.org/master-of-the-universe/start>).

Besides sharing my research and having a supplementary income to my research, the workshops help me prepare and even test workshops for my research project, and thus I always integrate new elements in the workshops that subtly adjust minor and major elements in method and thinking.

Besides a "testing" purpose, the workshops are also a constant source of input. In particular workshops with younger generations and the different industries (film, theater, game, literature etc.) are a way of quality testing relevance and resonance of the method and the thinking. And I always come out of a workshop with new material, references that I don't know from my own field and not least questions that are a great inspiration for my work as a creator and researcher.

As the gong ring I am super nervous when the students start working. In this workshop my experiment is that I will only do one lecture at the beginning with a minimal amount of talk. I want to give them all I know first and then give them as much freedom as possible to “jam” a world. On top of creating a storyworld the task is to create product ideas from at least two artforms/media derived from the worlds they create.

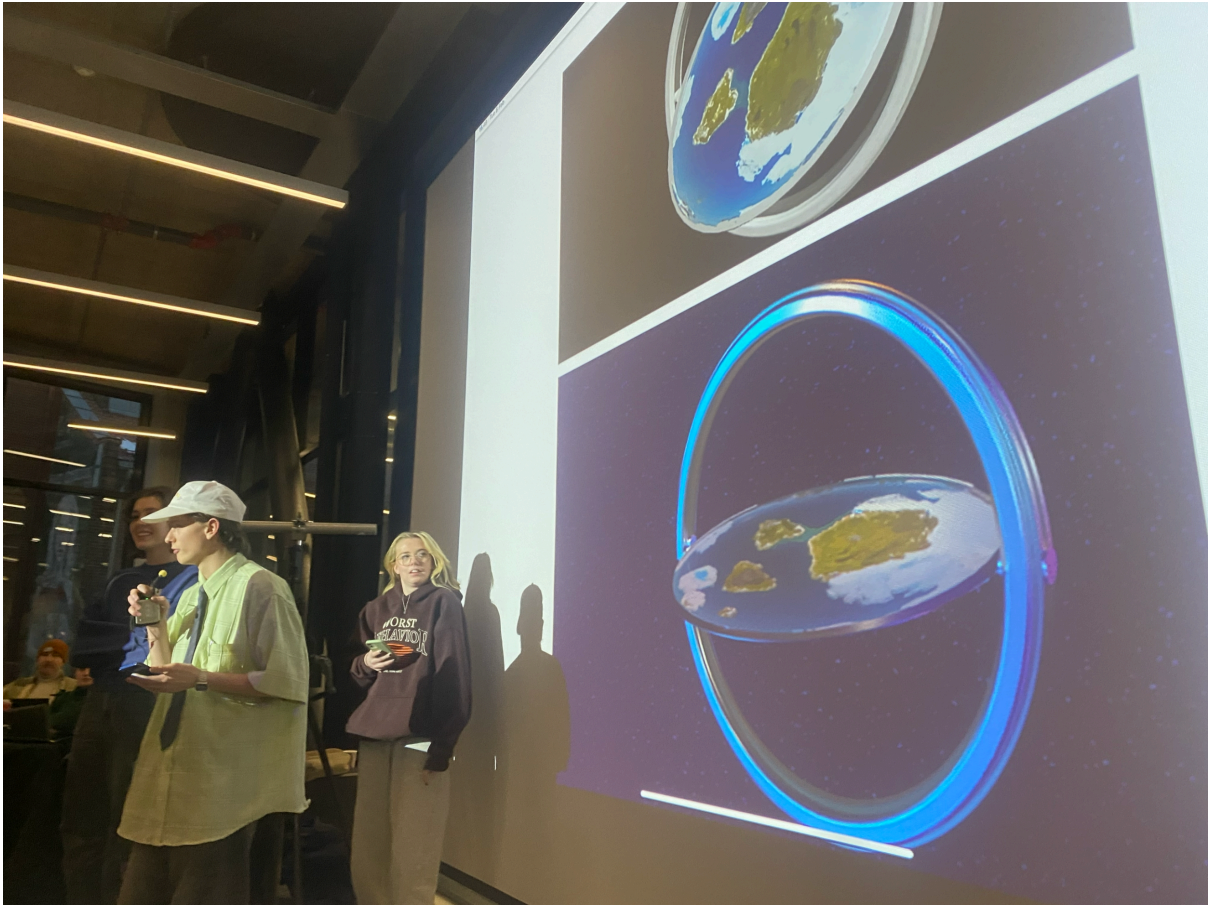
The students start working in teams of four to five creating worlds in text and drawing maps of their worlds. In an online google document they can ask questions. Only a few questions are asked clarifying the deliveries and the method appear (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/19ayF3ssZeGEOZGPqXa24wnK-8h-jBFgvY25dEXhdcZc/edit>).



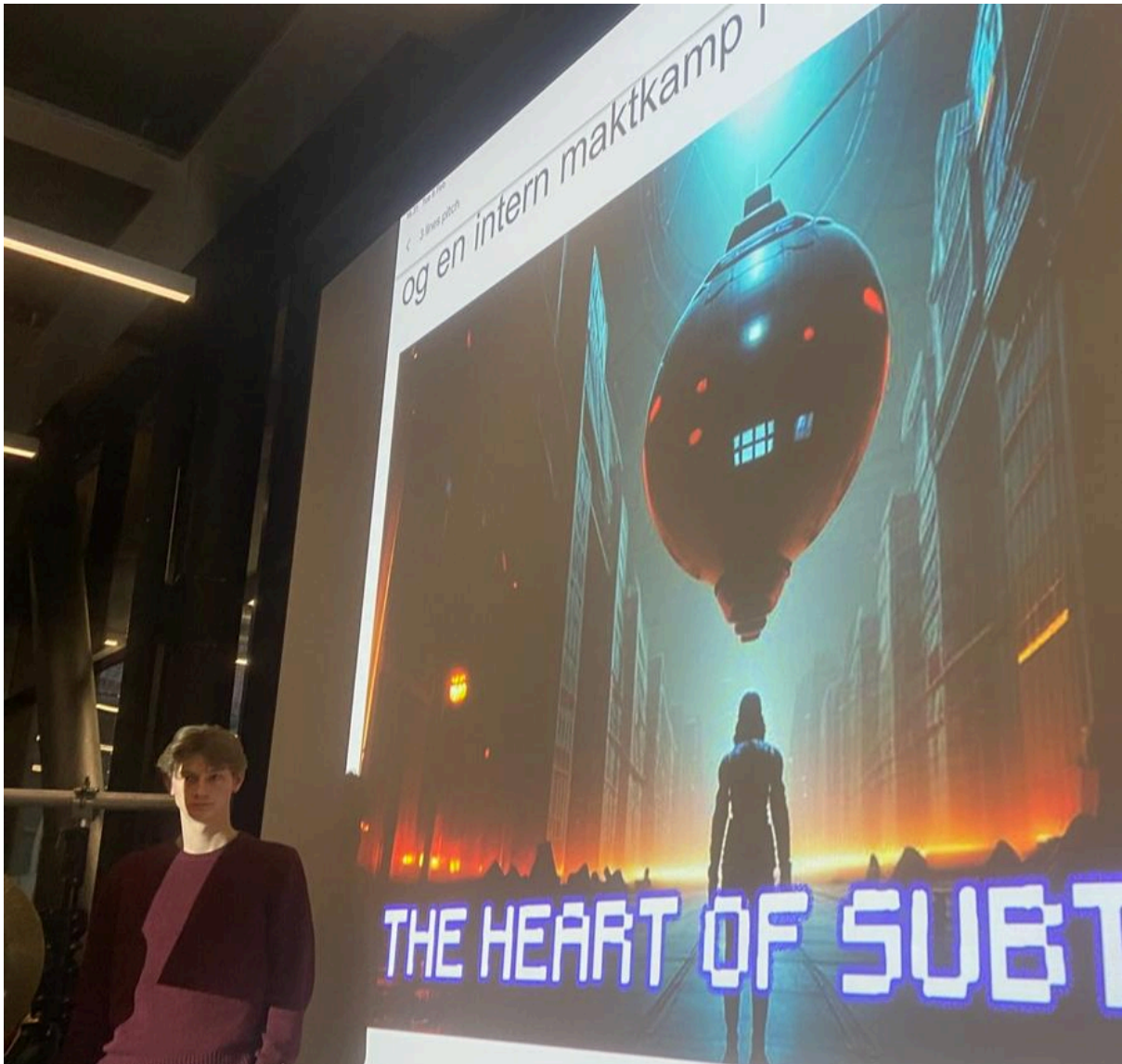




At the end of every day the students share their work in short pitches. also here I dont experience more confusion than in workshops I have performed before with smaller groups. But more importantly, the students projects are on par with earlier workshops, where I have spend much more time on lecturing. Leading me to believe that I in general can communicate the storyworld research and method in a simpler way, not wasting precious time.







This experience gives me hope for my future “academic” writing about my research. As described in the diary last week I have an issue with long and difficult texts (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1x0c0rq-gjH0qq7AttMpgyl4Fpr_4LfePzUo9wxhPNDQ/edit). I totally aim to write as precise about my articles as the game researcher Jesper Juul did in his earlier research, such as this beautiful article about stories and games (<https://www.gamestudies.org/0101/juul-gts/>).

Working with the staff at Westerdals and seeing the 130 students share their creative work so generously has been a great and inspiring experience. This is a video summary of the workshop:

<https://app.frame.io/presentations/1ab71b57-bae5-40d6-9a0f-3c288e1da20a>



Staff from Westerdals



Teachers and heads of education making waffles for the students monday evening.



Students working.

Ideas: if you have ideas, comments or reflections please write to me (gamlehest@me.com) or share them here. Thank you♥

Comments: