

Putting Theory and Inquiry into Practice:
Mobile Media, Narrative and *Tracking Agama*

Can a non-sequential, locative media, database structure be combined with a narrative structure soundly rooted in the principles of cause-and-effect, along with character growth and development, and thus represent an equal hybrid of database and traditional narrative structure, one delivered to the audience participant via mobile phone? This combination lies at the heart of the student project *Tracking Agama*, an alternative reality fiction¹ in which participants access pieces of the story by mobile phone, using both voice and text message capabilities while exploring various downtown Los Angeles locations. The participant obtains codes by solving puzzles embedded within the story and physical location, which successively give access to more and more “story nuggets”.

While this project may seem intriguing to some and banal to others, why might it be important to the fields of media studies and the humanities? I propose that *Tracking Agama* illustrates, embodies, and came into being as a result of a nexus of questions at the heart the humanities and new media technologies, and represents a method for interrogating these questions. First, how do traditional frameworks for patterning data and understanding experiences, such as narrative, accommodate new media technologies and how do these new media accommodate time-honored methods of information exchange, again, like narrative? Also, as narratives carve out space, whether mental, physical or social, how does that function operate in relation to a social and technological landscape in which private and the public space merge along with the physical and the virtual? And, to what extent can we understand new media technologies unless we experience them as audience members, users, and most importantly producers?

In engaging with these questions in this paper, I will attempt to do two things: illustrate how *Tracking Agama* addresses key humanities questions involving narrative structure, medium specificity, immersion, interactivity and agency; and, propose Agama as a design model informed by humanities theory beyond the technology focus of much design discourse. Of interest, as well, to the “Thinking Through New Media” community will also be the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of *Agama*, especially as we envision a future migrating away from exclusionary focus on the single-author monograph and embark on scholarly enterprises created with these new media technologies and depending on collaboration and a breadth of skill sets.

¹ This term is adapted from “alternative reality game”, which describes games that blur the line between game events and real world events, such as “The Beast”, *I Love Bees* and the game depicted in the film *The Game* (David Fincher, 1997), starring Michael Douglas.