Looking
Beyond the Screen

Transient self–portrait

Dr Maria Mencia
**Senior Lecturer in Digital Media
Practice-Theory in the School of
Performance and Screen Studies
Kingston University
m.mencia@freeuk.com**

**YOUR ARE PART OF THIS POEM

AS YOU READ THE POEM

THIS POEM READS YOU

IT SPEAKS TO YOU

IT NEEDS TO BE CARESSED

IT NEEDS LIGHT

YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO IT

YOU ARE ITS INK, ITS COLOUR, ITS
SURFACE

PLAY WITH IT**

Abstract

**Transient self–portrait is a practice-
based research project questioning
notions of reading and the electronic
medium, while exploring concepts
of the digital self through coding for
interaction aesthetics and poetics.**

Keywords

Introduction

I have taken as the point of departure two pivotal
sonnets in Spanish literature that are normally
studied alongside each other. One by Garcilaso,
a 16th Century Spanish poet, using Italian
Renaissance verse forms, poetic techniques and
themes and the other by Gongora, a 17th Century
Spanish poet from the Baroque period. Gongora's
sonnet is a homage to Garcilaso's, dedicating this
sonnet to him around 60 years later in 1582.

Although both sonnets deal with the same themes;

youth, nature, beauty, time and death with references to the fragility and ephemerality of life, transient entities, time and consummation through the use of metaphors, their styles and cultural aspects are very different reflecting the attitudes from each of these periods. Being the Renaissance more optimist than the Baroque, Garcilaso refers to 'the pass of time', while Gongora talks about 'the unavoidable event', producing two very different endings.

My aim has been, following Gongora's response to Garcilaso's sonnet, to respond to the cultural aspects of the sonnets, by questioning how these are reflected in the attitudes of a 21st Century mediated society and the digital medium we inhabit.

The paper will discuss the development of these enquires through the production of the interactive work-a fluid portrait encapsulated inside the medium, with the use of a webcam, generative text and sound- to bring up notions of the digital/data self, the fragility of technology, new media tools and coding.

There are three stages to the piece. To interact with the work, we are given a choice of natural languages: Spanish, English or French. Once we have selected the language, we need to mouse over to reveal the text and trigger the voice of the poet reading Garcilaso's sonnet. In the second stage, we need to perform reading to keep Gongora's sonnet appearing, and finally disappearing to give part to the third stage, where the invisible code that creates the piece becomes visible to shape our portraits. Thus, the piece follows a lineage, passing from different

stages of written, visual, aural, natural languages and code.

We are faced with ourselves. We are inside the poem. The poet reads to us and we read to the poet. We perform the poem. We become data behind the camera, behind the screens, this is part of our identity and cultural aesthetics.

An interesting conceptual challenge was to use code to create a fragile piece as a metaphor for both; the fragility of life and the digital medium. This involved questioning about code as a sculptural material, for interactive aesthetics and poetics, timing, light, colour and illusion of 3D, while exploring notions of reading, multimodal text, remediation of forms through the concepts of the sonnets.

1. Gravitron, 2010. Video Still.

Homeless in the Digital Age through the lens of the Banoptikon Videogame Project

Aikaterini Antonopoulou
School of Architecture,
Planning and Landscape
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
United Kingdom
NE1 7RU
Aikaterini.Antonopoulou
@newcastle.ac.uk

Abstract

The digital age has introduced on the one hand the digital construction of grounds on which we can build new connections and attachments and, on the other, a certain "groundlessness", as groundedness and rootedness are gradually dwindling and as a new sense of place based on mobility and connectivity emerges. The human body becomes in this context an open-ended construction that connects to its environment in multiple and complex ways, representing a dynamically conceptualised world. The creation of the many digital profiles that become extensions of one's physical self today require – to various extents – the detachment of this single, established self and body and its re-construction and re-placement into a different context and an on an artificial ground.

Keywords

Avatars/ Banoptikon/ digitization/ homelessness/ place

This theoretical disembodiment – theoretical because during both the construction of this avatar-body and the experience of artificial environments through this there is always a physical body attached to the subject – and re-embodiment into something different raises the question: are we moving from a single place, ground, home to a series of places, grounds, homes, or instead to a new form of homelessness?

The aim of this paper is to bring together this symbolic homelessness introduced by the digital culture and the actual homelessness of an immigrant, by looking into the "Banoptikon" [1]

videogame project, a virtual reality game that puts the "player" into the [avatar] body of a migrant who has to traverse cities and countries and to confront locals, authorities, and migration politics. Here, the player detaches from his own reality of mobility and connectivity and is placed in this condition of absolute homelessness, in the body of a wo/man of no home and no place struggling to define their own way of being in the world. The paper will reflect on Vilém Flusser's essay "Taking Up Residence in Homelessness" [2], in which it is argued that the migrant becomes something disturbing for the native and "a man of a coming future without homes", into the context of digitisation. In this essay, Flusser challenges the concept of home as the single point of departure and return of the everyday life by using the status of the migrant as a symbol for the multiplicity of "homes" – places to depart from and to return to. Freedom in this case does not have to do with cutting off all the relationships with others, but is instead about weaving the connections that really matter. Through the lens of the Banoptikon, the immigrant stands as both a metaphor for the digital age and as a literal body of homelessness. Therefore breaking up the ties with home, as discussed by Flusser, and constructing new connections and relationships is seen as an opportunity to negotiate one's identity, to construct one's place(s) in the world anew and, finally, to set up a new order, against anything predetermined and fixed.

References

1. Banoptikon: http://banoptikon. mignetproject.eu

2. Flusser, Vilém (ed. Andreas Ströhl). 2002. Writings. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

'Sustaining Lived Practices through Serious Play'

Dr Misha Myers
Principle Investigator/ Senior
Lecturer in Theatre
Penryn Campus
Falmouth University
Cornwall, TR11 4RH, UK
misha.myers@falmouth.ac.uk

Dave Griffiths
Game Developer
Kernow FoAM Falmouth,Cornwall
dave@fo.am

Nina Sabnani
Associate Professor IDC, IIT
Bombay Powai, Mumbai, India
400076 ninamsabnani@iitb.ac.in

Anirudha Joshi
Professor IDC, IIT Bombay Powai,
Mumbai, India 400076
anirudha@iitb.ac.in

Saswat Mahapatra
Visual Content Consultant
Deviprasad Goenka Media
College Mumbai, India
mahapatra.saswat@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper suggests a framework and proposal for an open source game design tool as a platform for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing. In particular, this tool is proposed to respond to social challenges within a specific socio-cultural context, that is, for the sharing of locally-relevant and sustainable agricultural practices and cultural knowledge in India. To define this framework, the paper considers and draws upon the findings of the Arts Humanities Research Council practice-based research project, Play to Grow, which created 'Bumper Crop', a board game for both physical and digital platforms based on the experiences and challenges of being a small-holding farmer in India

Keywords

Serious games; Social impact games; Storytelling tools; Peer-to-peer knowledge platforms; Open source platforms; Participatory design; Game-based learning; Appropriate technology

Introduction

Existing research has suggested that digital games provide tools and platforms to leverage the power of empathy, identification, self-connection, engagement and imagination. In doing so, social impact games promote outreach, fundraising, civic engagement and awareness for social change agendas such as poverty alleviation, racism or even the impact of global environmental change on community dynamics. However, serious games can also do more than just represent or advocate issues and the results of the playtests of the game Bumper Crop created as part of the Play to Grow research project indicate the potential of the opportunities serious games can offer as platforms for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing.

One of the twelve targets identified to address United Nations Millennium Development Goals to eradicate poverty and hunger whilst ensuring environmental sustainability is to make the benefits of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) available. However, the gap between farmers and India's web-connected and technologically savvy elite is widening as obstacles hinder the take up of new technologies and digitally mediated modes of learning that could potentially enable social and economic resilience. This disparity is particularly evident in the specific geographical setting of the Play to Grow research in the region of Madhya Pradesh, which is one of India's least developed states, has the lowest nutrition and health indicators, and is the most food insecure with literacy rates below the national average (UNDP Millennium Development Goals).

This paper considers how novel applications of gaming might respond to this challenge by creating engaging opportunities for learning and sharing lived practices within fields of play.

Play to Grow: Games as storytelling tools

Working in partnership with the Delhi-based non-profit organisation Digital Green, the Play to Grow project created 'Bumper Crop', a board game for both physical and digital platforms based on the experiences and challenges of being an Indian farmer to explore and test the use of computer games as a method of storytelling and learning to promote young urban adults' awareness of issues facing small farmers in India. However, initial results of playtests with both focus groups of young urban adults in Mumbai and farmers in the region of Madhya Pradesh revealed that the game might be more effective for a different purpose and audience than originally intended. The farmers taking part in the evaluations saw potential value in playing the game themselves within their communities and with their children to learn and pass on locally-relevant and sustainable agricultural practices and cultural knowledge, indicating the opportunities games and games thinking offer as new methods of peer-to-peer training for the development sector as a whole

Conclusion

Findings from the evaluations of Bumper Crop suggest that games may not only be useful as a part of Digital Green's core business of creating platforms for capacity building and peer-to-peer exchange of expert knowledge, but may be advantageous for the development sector as a whole. To this end, we will present our proposed framework for an open source platform that will allow customization and modding of existing game artefacts to share localised agricultural knowledge and practices.

Death is Interdisciplinary: Digital Death and its Community

Stacey Pitsillides
University of Greenwich
Old Royal Naval College.
30 Park Row. London, SE10 9LS
S.O.Pitsillides@greenwich.ac.uk
stacey.pitsillides@gmail.com

Selina Ellis-Gray
HighWire DTC
Lancaster University
UK, LA1 4WA
s.ellis@lancaster.ac.uk

Damien McCallig
School of Law,
National University of Ireland
University Road, Galway
Ireland
d.mccallig1@nuigalway.ie

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the range of interdisciplinary research being conducted on death and digitality, including observations on the nature of the community forming and development of bespoke methodologies and ethics being applied within this sensitive space.

Introduction

Across our hybrid digital-material lives we have created an entangled identity, a range of personas (avatars), passwords, communities, legalities and media online. This identity becomes problematized after someone dies. As people are increasingly leaving behind a vast body of data across different servers and institutions online, whose fragments allow the bereaved to catch glimpses and partial views of loved ones identities existing within their largely distributed legacies. The bereaved are often left to navigate this complex territory as best they can, in a sensitive time when they are still coming to terms with the deep rupture of a loss. Although online communities have been known to be helpful during the initial phases of death e.g. planning the funeral, grief support and informing more distant friends of the loss, the broader issue of digital legacy becomes increasingly complex when the bereaved begin to face problematic issues such as ownership or privacy. Further to this, these issues are encountered from vastly different cultural perspectives, value systems and social norms of how the bereaved wish to approach the management of a loved ones digital remains.

Developing the Community

Since the mid 1990's, academic research has begun to consider some of these problematic issues and develop research strands within a growing interdisciplinary community of academics, industry leaders and public stakeholders. As a diaspora of inquiry, it has particularly expanded within the last 5 years and emerged out of a number of different disciplinary fields such as Legal studies, Sociology, Linguistics, Psychology, Anthropology, Human-computer interaction, Art, Design, Media & Science and Technology Studies. Increasingly unified under a number of developing research communities such as 'Digital Death', 'Technologies for End of Life' or 'Death Online.' It is a unique and cutting edge interdisciplinary community focused on developing innovative knowledge within the many intersections between death, bereavement and technology studies.

Digital Research for Digital Death

Therefore, we believe now is the opportune moment to be self-reflexive and consider deeply the distinct role of interdisciplinarity in this field, including the way its highly emotional and ethical underpinning can lead to very diverse forms of digital research. This paper highlights the challenges in developing and communicating the appropriate interdisciplinary research methodologies, best practices and ethics for Digital Death. To consider a unique field where

highly specialised knowledge intersects in complex but rewarding ways, which reveal multifaceted values, tensions and conventions at work. The commitment to interdisciplinarity itself, to openness and inquiry is the only way of understanding and keeping track of this constantly shifting landscape. Finally, Interdisciplinarity allows us the opportunity to creatively rethink our research patterns and consider wider goals in which shared knowledge can have a direct feedback to our current understanding of death and bereavement.

References

1. Nordic journal Thanatos (2014), Vol 3:1 is a special issue on Death, mourning and the Internet: death cultures in web environments.

2. McCallig, D (2014), Facebook after death: an evolving policy in a social network, International Journal of Law and Information Technology.

3. Cristiano, M & Pereira, V (eds). (2013). Digital Legacy and Interaction: Post-Mortem Issues. Human–Computer Interaction. Springer

4. The Information Society: An International Journal. (2013) Vol 29: 3, is a special isssue on Death, Afterlife, and Immortality of Bodies and Data

5. Kasket, E (2012)Continuing bonds in the age of social networking: Facebook as a modern-day medium. Bereavement Care, 31(2), 62–69

6. Walter, T., Hourizi, R., Moncur, W. & Pitsillides, S., (2011). Does the internet change how we die and mourn? Overview and analysis. Omega: Journal of Death & Dying, 64 (4), pp. 275-302.

7. Sofka, C (1997) Social support "internetworks", caskets for sale, and more: Thanatology and the information superhighway. Death Studies, 21(6), 553-574

Academic papers