

The *House Of Affects* Project

Correlating Digitally Distributed Narrative to Adaptable spaces

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The *House of Affects* project is comprised of the construction of an interactive audiovisual environment, and its objective is to use several video projections in a dark room. The concept was developed with a consideration for cinematic narrative space, and so allows the user to navigate a virtual space constructed specifically by film, by means of projections. What is under analysis is the traditions of thought, both in terms of space and drama, that might help us to understand better the processes at hand in the conception of spatial narrative and henceforth guide and inspire new forms of moulding game, story and people in space.

A proof-of-concept work in progress, the interactive cinematic narrative installation projected inside a responsive architectural space designed with the aid of the computer, *House of Affects* is a conceptual framework for human-computer interaction on narrative expressive spaces is presented. It offers some grounds for both discussion and practice of cinematic installations in structured exhibition spaces.

The installation is attached to the exhibition environment (host) as an epiphyte,¹ and by doing so it correlates to the field of behaviour framing it as a field of performance. Epiphytes adapt their structural organization, and therefore their form, to their hosts. The flows of pedestrian movements on the exhibition floor are interpreted as guiding forces for responsive organization of the spatially correlated narrative experience and as dynamic patterns with performative potential that the structure of the installation seeks to engage with.²

The hereby proposed structure, which acts as a space delimiter — for the site of installation is meant to be a gallery space, usually characterized by its emptiness — is developed with a consideration to its self-referential narrative content. This is achieved by a design adapted to the performative qualities of the space and its programmatic attributes, by means of the formation of niches to accommodate the interaction between visitor and the narration.

The installation, developed with a consideration for

cinematic narrative space, will allow the user to navigate a virtual space constructed specifically by film, by means of projections. These projections, rather than dividing the space into real and virtual (i.e., rather than consisting of frames projected onto walls), will be fused into it.³

The choice of projecting film onto real spaces engages that synergy which emerges between the virtual and the real. Users are able to navigate between several of the places presented by the story, and to search for narrative content which is in turn triggered by users' movements.

When users of the *House of Affects* (who become participant actors as they view and construct the narrative), revisit the times and spaces of a past existence, the narrative is liberated to make full use of the spatialised time of the installation. The audiovisual space itself is created as an easily adaptable architecture which transforms the experience of visiting the *House of Affects* into a matrix where spaces for filmic interactive experience are generated to support the development of the relationship between movie time, the duration of the movie, visiting time, the duration of the visit, and the time-image of the given narrative. It is important to emphasise again that the interactive presentation of audiovisual narrative presupposes a subjective (and in that sense Bergsonian) perception of narrative cues, making the time of exploration or visit of the installation a personal time-image and thus actualizing a personal time-narrative.

The position of the visitor in the room, in the present, becomes the centre of the experience, which is realised in the audiovisual performance. The spectator's relationship to time, space and the performance is transformed through a new approach to emotional affect, enabled by digital technology's creation of the responsive 'theatre' and viewing-frame.

The imaginative game-play of children inspires *House of Affects*' concepts for simulation and narrative experience. For a child, play as game, play as story, and play as acting may be seen as a continuum of imaginative experience.

It is this *subjectivation* of story and its inherent seizure of a personal time that the *House of Affects* seeks to celebrate. During imaginative play, the Stanislavskian “what if?” — that is the presentation of a given dramatic situation (Stanislavsky, 1963, 1980) — gains different dimensions. In these circumstance, “What if” can be translated as the given set of circumstances that place a character, and hence the ‘actor’ playing the game, in a particular situation. “What if...” sets up the dramatic, given rise several “And now..”, here understood as the subset of objectives that each projection proposes to the visitor. This then translates a sense of temporality that is part of the narrative experience.

This engagement with the moment is described by Ryan (Ryan, 2001: 141) as ‘Temporal Immersion’, and it includes not only discursive techniques, but also the phenomenological situation of the reader/viewer/user in the creation of a “personal” time.

The projected image is a sparkle of individual imagination; but as Bachelard (Bachelard, 1987) argues, imagination is not about forming images, but rather about de-forming them. By deforming the image of the dream, one shapes the dream; by deforming moving images, one shapes cinematic spaces. Cinematic time becomes hence not only the time in the images, it becomes the time of the player/actor immersed in narrative space.

The employment of digitally-generated environments to be inhabited by a “player” raises the issue of human presence in the space-less environment of the computer. Such environments are designated as hosts for narration, by rendering time and space through the sustainability of the gameplay (see Ryan 2001). The *House of Affects* experiments with the fusion of the digital and the physical, from which emerges the embodiment of a

personal space, developed by the synergy of digital worlds in physical spaces. It is important, hence, to emphasise that this project follows a directorial approach to audiovisual narration, in the sense that the visitor/user, as Murray would put it (Murray 1997: 152, 153) is an agent in an authored environment that implies that, like in cinema emotional cues are given to make the narrative progress. Though the space and time choices of the users affect the presentation, it is not their emotions that the system responds to in anyway, rather their movement through both physical and virtual space and the duration of sojourning in given scenes.

We aimed as well at using Stanislavskian operative categories of “given action”, “objectives” and “dramatic units” as a frame of building narrative blocks of game that bring narrative and dramatic (and hence emotional) added value to the process of immersion. By merging physical and virtual space, narrative and game we aim at resolving partially the contradiction between narrative and ludology. In this sense game-play becomes indeed a merging of personal and affective experience within a spatial narrative.

The selection of paper tubes as the structural component grants us the flexibility of using a cheap, lightweight, replaceable element for construction.

By creating an easily adaptable model of architecture for audiovisual space we aim at taking the experience of the *House of Affects* and transforming it into a matrix of construction of spaces for filmic interactive experience. These are not to be dependent on the specific narrative content that we created for this experience, but rather be able to introduce whatever entertainment or information the designers and communicators want to present to the visiting public.

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Notes

- 1 An epiphyte is any plant which grows upon another living organism — they are not parasitic upon their hosts, but derive physical support from them. (Oxford English Dictionary Online)
- 2 For previous experiments on similar issues see (Roudavski, Artopoulos with Penz 2006).
- 3 All of his work can be understood as a rejection of the frame, insofar as the frame functions to delimit the different orders of representation, in favour of an environmental co-presence, which Kiesler dubbed “Correalism”. (Hubert 1995) Furthermore, Juhani Pallasmaa (2006) talks of the role of cinema as a new way of experiencing place and time and of the blurring of the borders between real and imagined worlds that occurs in cinema by means of lived images.