Performance and Play
Exploring Interactive Narratives and Design Methods in Story-Driven Games and Immersive Performance

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Dear Esther (2012) The Chinese Room

Everybody's gone to the rapture (2015) The Chinese Room

Gone Home (2013) Fullbright

Proteus (2013) Ed Key, David Kanaga

Fernanda Prata, Jesse Kovarsky. Punchdrunk. The Drowned Man A Hollywood Fable. Photo Birgit & Ralf

Introduction

This project is an Applied Collaborative Research doctoral studentship, based at Abertay University in collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Scottish Graduate School for Arts & Humanities. The collaborative nature of the PhD is vital in developing a cross-disciplinary study of performance and play, and for emphasizing the common features between them in order to understand the experimental nature of performance and game design.

Aims

- To explore and analyse the current debates regarding interactive narratives in games studies and performance theory in order to establish connections between the two fields and to develop critical and analytical arguments that engage with games and performance as experiential cultural processes.
- To establish a range of experimental approaches for the generation, implementation and presentation of concepts namely a theatrical gaming experience or a game-like performance experience.
- To interrogate the importance and potential functions of alternative storytelling and interaction, narrative and exploration as equal contributors to an immersive experience, be it theatrical or gaming.
- To open up new ways of designing experiences, telling stories, and stimulating the imagination of new and existing audiences.

Methodology

I will be developing a framework that is applicable to both digital games and immersive performance by adapting Josephine Machon's scale of immersion, Gordon Calleja's player involvement model, and Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä's SCI model (sensory-based, challenge-based, imaginative immersion) therefore looking at spatial, kinesthetic, ludic, affective, narrative and shared involvement as starting points for bridging between the two fields. The resulting framework will be applied to games and performance and combined with interviews with performance makers/game designers, and audience surveys to analyse how various immersive experiences are designed, presented and perceived (the process of development, intention and reception are equally important). Finally the findings will inform my artistic practice in that I will develop a digital game and an immersive performance to serve as case studies that illustrate how the interdisciplinary study of the two fields can benefit both.

Methodology Cont.

Mixed methods:
- open interviews (developers and practitioners) and observing various NTS productions throughout all development stages
- critical play and game analysis
- audience surveys

Practice as Research
Can I port/adapt the specificities of games to performance and from performance to games? What can I learn as a playwright from studying games? Can we develop a new, hybrid form of storytelling?

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