
New Narrative frontiers: Alternate Reality Games

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Abstract

Since 2000 ludologists and game designers have been talking about a new kind of game, that cannot be confined into a video game console later defined as Pervasive games. Since then, Alternate Reality Games (ARGs) have emerged phenomena in the domain of Pervasive games. ARGs are interactive stories in which the audience is also a crucial character, and its decisions drives the narrative [1]. Through this workshop we aim at opening up

the discussion between academics, artists (game designers, writers, filmmakers and industry (entertainment and production companies) regarding design principles and aesthetics of this growing genres.

Keywords

Pervasive games, Alternate reality Games, Magic circle as a membrane, Life as a game board

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Introduction

Narrative media and interactive games are today merging into a new form of multi-channel, participatory entertainment known as Alternate Reality Games (ARG). Such artifacts use a range of old and new media technologies to combine communication, interaction, viewing and aesthetics into prolonged and engaging interactive media experiences. These games exist in many forms and variety, but they have in common these few design principles: Get into the players lives, make it interactive, embrace community [1].

Specifically, ARGs can be defined as interactive narratives in which the stories told are influenced and

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affected by participants' actions and which combine significant real world elements alongside more traditional media and game elements. Typically, participants perform activities such as solving information-based puzzles relating to the plot of the narrative (e.g. finding or decoding information in real or virtual spaces) and often work collaboratively in large groups using Internet technologies to spontaneously discuss the game, organize their activities, manage their members and communicate their results. Stories evolve in real time in response to audience actions (in the form of progress, responses and updates to the story) and are typically controlled manually by the writers or designers of the ARGs.

ARGs are now an established, but still highly experimental media form. They have been used to promote more traditional media products such as games (e.g. the Microsoft Halo 2 launch was supported by the 2004 ARG "I Love Bees" [1]) and TV shows (e.g. the Lost series and 2006's "Lost Experience" [2]). This workshop will catalogue and explore the current state of the art regarding this new form of entertainment. It aims to bring together designers and researchers interested in designing, developing and producing ARGs both as research artifacts as well as at a commercial level. To achieve these objectives, it will publish a call for descriptive papers and posters regarding current practice in ARG and host a presentation and discussion on the workshop day.

Research Themes / Questions

Producing ARGs

How do you compose the team to work on an ARG entertainment project? What are the key roles and the expertise required?

Tools for ARG Development

How to design for this kind of ARG entertainment? What are the existing tools, and what are the requirements for future tools to aid and support development?

ARG Entertainment as both an aesthetic and functional practice

What is the interplay between the aesthetic and functional aspects of ARGs. How is an Alternative Reality aesthetic pleasure narrative different and how is it similar to traditional forms of narrative? How does technology already play a role in these different practices? What technologies manage to be integrated in both the more aesthetic and the more functional forms of ARGs?

Interaction through temporally, socially and spatially expanded entertainment

How does the structure of multi-channel narratives shape synchronous and asynchronous interactions among players, between players and the spaces in which the action is set, and between players and the media shown? Can the media employed and the form of the physical space where the evidences of the story are embodied influence this experience?

Broader Implications

This workshop will be the first international workshop on this topic. This workshop aims to open a broad discussion about the nature of the new kind of mixed media narrative and entertainment and outline the scope for future research activities on this topic. By not focusing on any specific aspect of ARG experiences it will delimit the boundaries of this research area and its scope for future research practice. We firmly believe

that industry and ARG game studios will soon rely on research contributions to continue to innovate and surprise their audience. This workshop will collect the state of the art on this topic, providing a starting point for coherent future work. It will also outline the work needed by industry to make progress in the design and production of rich, immersive and novel ARG experiences.

Workshop Goals

Elaborate on and generate new approaches for design of ARGs.

Explore the challenges of designing for this new form of multi-channel narrative and elaborate on the specific aspects and qualities of the different media forms involved.

Create a forum for a multi-disciplinary group of practitioners to discuss approaches to the study and design of ARGs.

Discuss culturally specific aspects of the ARGs experiences in order to deepen our understanding of this kind of entertainment.

Plan for the Workshop

Authors present their paper and the workshop organised lead a 10/15 minute discussion following our research themes and main questions.

References

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