Hopstory II
(Valentina Nisi, Sean Flanagan, Glorianna Davenport, Mads Haahr)

The innovation

Hopstory II is novel in the way it distributes narrative content in the same building where the story took place, applying narrative theory and new technologies to the practice of mobile distributed cinema.
Multiple Point Of View story structure is used to represent the same events lived from different characters perspectives; the story time is mapped to real time and different locations of the building yield different media segments to the wandering audience. Bluetooth technology is used to retrieve multimedia content; a mobile device guides the audience through their exploration of the space, time and characters P.O.V. by providing them with clues to help orient them selves in the experience. An interactive map of the building on the portable device highlight where the story fragments are located and when the audience members are in range with them; a Meow sound signals when the device can see a story node in the form of a cat sculpture, and text cues appear on the device screen, of where the encountered characters are going next to allow the audience to chose if and who to follow (See Pic.1).

Background

The Hopstory II is based on the previous Hopstory I project, a location based cinematic narrative, distributed in space and time.
See MLE Publications: Nisi, V., Woods, A., Davenport, G., Oakley, I., full paper "Hopstory: an Interactive, Location Based Narrative Distributed in Space and Time, 2nd International Conference on Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment (TISDE), p. 131-141, June 24-26, 2004 ZGDV e.V, Darmstadt, Germany.

Related research areas

Interactive narrative, interactive cinema, distributed stories, new media, narrative theory, spatial navigation of content, location based content, expression of atmosphere, history and personality of a place, building as containers of stories.

Concept

Developed for demonstrating the power of location based stories using classical narrative elements as the story building blocks: arched plot structure, character, settings and point of view . The space is augmented with hidden ghosts that inhabit the place and reveal their stories linked to the building. Wireless mobile Technology enables the wandering audience to uncover or discover layers of stories and history of the building.

Clues help the user follow specific characters as well as give them feedback concering the story.
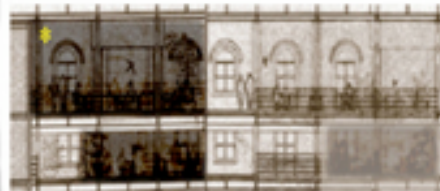
A map shows the user his general location in the building and the location of different stations throughout the building.

Icons appear when a user collects a new story bit. They reveal the main character of the piece of the story they just collected.

Pic. 1. Mobile device interface

Research method

Building on the experience of the first Hopstory project and on studies of narrative and interactive narrative theory (character, point of view and audience emotional immersion as empathy with story characters; settings and spatial immersion, plot and temporal immersion in the narrative) we started working on the second improved version of the project. From these studies we decided to redesign the story experience enhancing the audience feeling of immersion in the story. We choose to assist the audience with some clues helping in collecting tighter story sequences, following the story characters if desired, orienting themselves in the building space. The use of wireless mobile technologies as Bluetooth enabled iPaqs and subsequently mobile phones seemed the most appropriate to attain out goals.

Implementation: system and media

The technical implementation of the Hopstory II was realized by Sean Flanagan, TCD undergraduate student as his final year project. Based on the decisions that were made in the selection and design of the narrative and hardware, three different pieces of software were designed. Firstly. a piece of software was made for the station. It allowed the to distribute the proper piece of the narrative to a user who came closer to the station. Secondly, a program was created to allow a user to move around and collect different pieces of the narrative from different stations. After collecting the pieces, the user would then give this information to a playback station. The third program, allowed the playback station to interpret this information and piece together a narrative in the form of a movie based on what pieces the user had collected. Due to the multiplatform nature of the project and availability of Microsoft devices for use in the project, VB.Net was chosen to program in. This program language allowed for quick deploying of programs onto both pc and iPaq.
For more details see: "Distributed Location-Aware Multimedia Narrative" Sean Flanagan, visiting student, Final Year project 2004, Trinity College Dublin.

The Media comprise the 48 digital video scenes filmed in location for Hopstory I. Each scene progresses the plot towards its climax point from the different character p.o.v. The editing pay special attention to blending the video style of the story (set in the Hosptore building in the Nineteen forties) with the real place where it is experienced (the Hop store building now a days).

Pic. 2. Video frames from the boy's character point of view on the story.

Time line and future work

The technical implementation and redesign of the story experience is now completed. We have planned an evaluation strategy to find how a distributed story can enhance a sense of place and history in a building and how the audience react to the story experience. Is the audience spatial immersion enhanced by being in the same location where the story is set? Can the audience empathize with more than one character at the time, due to the multiple point of view structure of the story? Is the technology appropriate and the does it serve our purposes?

The evaluation will be carried out on a sample of Hopstore/MLE staff (since they are familiar with the building and also with the idea of interactive distributed stories, to receive some critical feedback) and tourists (the one directed towards the Guinness storehouse that are not necessarily familiar with the building nor interactive story experiences) to find out weather the experience works as an interactive story and as a possible application to enhance buildings histories and particular atmospheres.

This evaluation can take place in a week during the month of October, leading to the collection of data and material that would feed in a paper extending on the previous Hopstory project.

Scope for further work has been identified in the playback part of the cinematic narrative, enabling the system to play the story fragments on the mobile device in the location where they are collected, challenging the distribution of the story as well as the wireless mobile aspects of the technology.

Publications

Nisi, V., Woods, A., Davenport, G., Hopstory to feature in the Networked Experience Cruise, ISEA 2004, Finland, August 15-21 2004

Nisi, V., Woods, A., Davenport, G., Oakley, I., full paper "Hopstory: an Interactive, Location Based Narrative Distributed in Space and Time, 2nd International Conference on Technologies for Interactive Digital Storytelling and Entertainment (TISDE), p. 131-141, June 24-26, 2004 ZGDV e.V, Darmstadt, Germany.