
Facing = Doing

How can we have fun saving the earth?
Developing Strategies for Engaging People.

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Abstract

This proposal for the workshop "About Face: Interface Creative Engagement in New Media Arts and HCI" reflects on how we can engage people to participate in questions concerning their environments and communities. How can we use here the opportunities that communication technology provides us with, and find design solutions for products and services that are vital for our future?

Keywords

Interaction Design, play, participation, environment and community

ACM Classification Keywords

H5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (Interaction Design, play, participation, environment and community): Miscellaneous: J5 Arts and Humanities.

Introduction

The way we learn today about our world often happens through a range of mediated sources, rather than through our direct experience and own observations. This creates a divide between the world we conceptually know about, and the world we live in every day. When confronted with social or environmental problems, we tend to feel distanced from the source and powerless concerning solutions.

What can we as practitioners of different fields do to create enjoyable and exciting experiences for people so they participate more in communal and environmental matters, to motivate a more reflective behaviour and make "saving the earth" an engaging, and integral part of our everyday activities?

How can communication technologies help to make our role in the complex whole of communal or environmental processes more tangible, interesting to explore and invite us to take action?

For the workshop, I want to present some of my projects that relate to the questions above to initiate a dialogue, and hope that these discussions will be stimulating and beneficial for the participants. Personally in my work, I aim for a friendly visual language, using elements of story telling, playfulness, and interactions that invite for participation. With the experimental approach, I believe we can find design solutions for products and services that will have an imminent value.

Three project examples:

1. Neighbourhood Satellites - Environment Sensing Adventures in the City [1]

My Masters thesis project at Interaction Design Institute Ivrea, completed in June 2005.

For making the exploration of environmental conditions in one's city an engaging and meaningful activity, this thesis combines mobile game play with the detection of local air pollution levels.



Figure 1. The Neighbourhood Satellites equipment. The small satellite inside the hand functions not only as sensor but also as the game controller.

The portable equipment allows the player to sense different levels of air quality, which influence the visuals and behaviours of a screen based game world. Instead of presenting an abstract read out from the sensor, the value of air pollution is translated into a language that is easy to understand and fun to read.



Figure 2 and 3. The level of air pollution is translated into a digital game world where it affects the game's parameters.

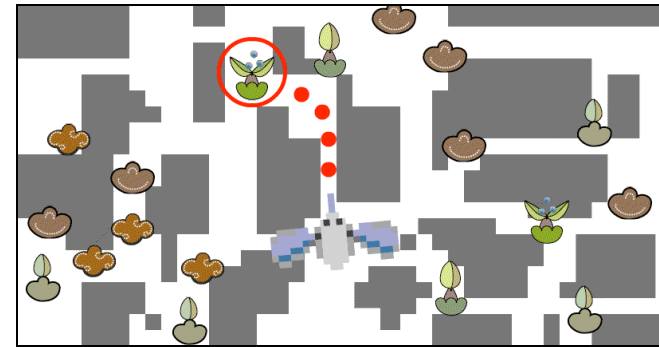


Figure 4. Players could map air pollution levels together.

Theoretically, if larger groups of networked people were undertaking such grassroots measuring, they could form real-time maps of their neighbourhoods by sharing their readings.

Advisors: Ralph Ammer, Yaniv Steiner

Presented at

Exit, Torino, June 2005

PerGames2005, Munich, May 2005

The Greenhouse Effect, Stadio San Siro Milan, May 2005

2. F.R.U.I.T. [2]

In collaboration with Amy Franceschini and Nis Roemer, Free Soil.

For "Beyond Green - Towards a Sustainable Art", Smart Museum Chicago, October 2005 [3]

As our food travels ever further to our cities, the environmental effects of food miles increase, together with a loss of knowledge about how our food is grown. F.R.U.I.T. explores these issues and presents them together with reports about local food movements, and proposals for food cultivation in cities in an online documentation.



Figure 5. Following the transport of oranges through Italy.

People are encouraged to participate in the online demonstration for their "Right to know where your food comes from". This demonstration is also an opportunity for cultivating communities, where people who want to grow and share fruit together can find gardening partners and meet in their respective cities.

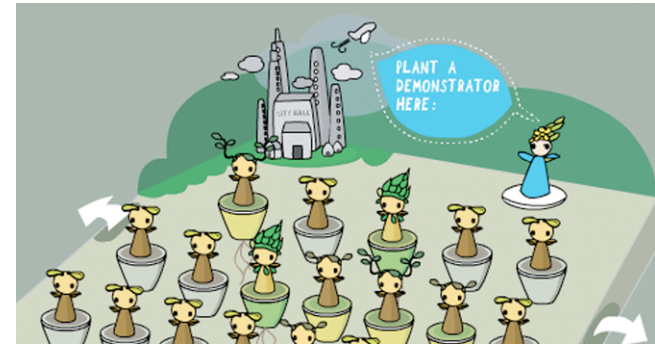


Figure 6. People can plant a protestor in the online demonstration "The Right to Know".

At the museum, visitors find also a fruit stand installation with take away fruit wrappers and posters.

The exhibition will be touring through different museums in the United States until the end of 2007.

3. Global Warming Tracking Network

For Telecom Italia's Future Centre, November 2004

This is a concept where people can offer the idle time of their cell phones to compute changes in global climate. With an additional service of information and the posting of wishes, they can stay in loose but constant touch with events that relate to global warming.

Links

[1] <http://www.neighbourhoodsatellites.com>

[2] <http://www.free-soil.org/fruit>

[3] <http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu>