The Forking Paths: An Interactive Cinema Experience

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ABSTRACT

The project The Forking Paths aims to create a set of interactive cinematographic narratives, within an applied research that seeks to transfer the spectator from an extradiegetic level to an intradiegetic level, creating a metalepsis. The intention is, above all, to analyze the possibilities of the spectator’s identification as the main character, by the manipulation of the idea of time in Cinema. We aim to reach this proposal through the use of specific narrative resources, as well as through the possibility of choice between alternative image flows. The project The forking paths is intended to be available in different media and supports such as the Internet, touch sensitive screen devices and conventional cinemas.

Keywords: Cinema, Digital Art, Interactivity, Narrative, Time

INTRODUCTION

The forking paths is intended to continue the investigation started in PhD thesis Eterno Presente, o tempo na contemporaneidade (Eternal Present, time in contemporaneity), resulting in the publication of the book A máquina Encravada: a questão do tempo nas relações entre cinema, banda desenhada e contemporaneidade (The jammed machine, the issue of time in relations between cinema, comics and contemporary), (Silva, 2010). This primary research is the starting point for the present project that aims to cross applied investigation and experimental development. In this new phase, we are trying a new approach, more practical, more iterative and more reflexive on the issue of time in cinema.

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and in cyberspace. Through the exhaustive repetition of the images along the narrative, the intention is to reach different levels of filmic interpretation, where the spectator’s identification with the main character could be complete.

Through the immersion in the interactive narrative, we look forward to creating a mirror effect, where the spectator and the protagonist share the same identity, becoming the spectator-protagonist. The narrative is pre-defined, because its structure can’t be changed, however the way it is experienced depends directly on the spectator-protagonist choices. The exhaustive repetition of the images tries to interfere with the temporal perception of the spectator-protagonist, which may result in three kinds of understanding or reactions:

1. The emptying of the image meaning, by losing the seduction of the first look;
2. The image valorization, through the discovery of details that have not been perceived in the early screenings;
3. The addition of details that didn’t exist in the first views, by image manipulation.

This last hypothesis plays with the spectator’s memory that will be tested by the impossibility to check the previous existence of the added details in the image repetition. The repetition of the images will run until the third generation, meaning that only the last three images will be able to be repeated. Thus, as the new images appear, those which were already repeated three times will no longer be shown, as we will demonstrate below.

**IMPLEMENTATION**

In the context of the project, an application, available online, is being created to split the visualization of the narrative in three different image flows (see storyboard in Figure 1, 2 and 3). Therefore, we offer the spectator the possibility of choosing a specific interpretation inside each story, so that a higher identification with the protagonist can be achieved. The image flows will be exposed and available in a horizontal perspective. This way the user will be able to choose between the central flow and the alternative flows (on the right and on the left of the central flow). This choice can be made with the cursor control, if the visualization is made in a conventional computer, or by touch, in the specific case of sensitive screens, like tablets or smartphones. However, we are also previewing the visualization of the project in cinemas. In this case the alternative flows can be seen with the assistance of touch-sensitive devices. The online application will offer three different narratives (discussed below) that can be seen independently or in a continuous way. Given the need of a higher immersion level in the narrative, the voice-over is introduced as a morphologic resource. Aside from speaking directly with the spectator-protagonist, giving advice, hints and opinions, the voice-over also