Experimenting on Film: Technology Meets Arts

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ABSTRACT

Interactive films depend on the participation of viewers. This participation usually translates into making decisions that determine the sequence of the narrative. Many interactive films make use of an interaction design that reduces the viewer’s immersiveness by interrupting the narrative to allow choices and the use of graphics to alert about decision points. This article describes how “Dialectical Polyptych” focuses on the possibility of creating an interactive aesthetic experience of filmic visualization without the interference of visual elements, allowing immersive participation with a transparent interface.

KEYWORDS

Art Installation, Audiovisual, Interactive Film, Mobile Devices, Multinarrative

1. INTRODUCTION

After a century of film materialized in frames, we see today through the digital cinema the images and sounds in computer binary storage. This change is the end of something, nostalgic for some and a new opportunity for others. Digital media have contributed to new media and new practices, expanding the boundaries and aesthetic possibilities. The digital capabilities let us explore multiple languages incorporated simultaneously in one technological support and meet an increasing willingness to participate by the user. Digital image allows manipulation flexibility inaccessible to analog technology. Its binary nature allows a non-linear reading and handling. The digital provides new ways of looking, questioning and feeling.

In this paper, it is presented “Dialectical Polyptych: an interactive movie installation” consisting of an interactive movie artefact with two parallel narratives. Each narrative has five different shooting angles/shot. The spectator can choose the narrative and the angle/shot at every moment, through interaction, with no interruption in the narrative flow. The interaction is made through simple or multi-touch gestures on a mobile device screen. Thus, it is the spectator that plays the role of the movie editing in real time.

The main contribution of the paper is the artefact itself, i.e., the real-time movie editing by the spectator with no interruption in the narrative flow. To the best of the authors knowledge, there is no similar work in the literature available. Other contributions are: 1) use of film aesthetic without graphic elements to achieve interactivity and 2) transparent and intuitive interfaces.
The next Section presents the contextualization of the work as well as the state of the art. The third Section detailed all the steps for the development of the “Dialectical Polyptych” artefact. Section four presents some preliminary evaluation as user feedback, finally, in the last Section, conclusions and future work are presented.

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

“Dialectical Polyptych: an interactive movie installation” seeks to explore new possibilities of interaction in the film view in an immersive and intuitive way, offering the viewer the role of film editing in real time through transparent interfaces.

2.1. The Film Narrative and the Editing

The editing is one of two basic components in audio-visual production (Bedoya, 2003), the other component in the audio-visual language is the framing or selection unit. According to Deleuze (Deleuze, 2014), the evolution of cinema grows up with the editing, the mobile camera and the emancipation of taking views. Griffith had contributed to the editing by giving emotional impact through the long shot, medium shot, close-up, subjective camera (point of view of the character) and travelling (moving camera) (Gosciola, 2003). Thus, Griffith wanted to involve the spectator emotionally through scale changes in the shot, giving the public a progressive emotion. Porter expanded the idea of linear narrative with the use of parallel-editing to depict two simultaneous events or points of view (Musser, 2012; Jenkins, 2013). This technique alternates two or more scenes that often happen simultaneously but in different locations. Like Porter’s technique, “Dialectical Polyptych” prototype also invokes parallel editing but from the result of spectator interaction.

For interactive cinema, technological advances are not enough. It is also necessary to point out new solutions to the narratives. In the beginning of the XX century, Kuleshov (1994) argues that “the essence of cinema, the medium that allows obtaining an artistic impression, is the editing”. For Eisenstein (2002) editing is “the primary means for a really important creative transformation of nature” and “cinematography is, first of all, editing”. Pudovkin said: “the editing builds scenes from the separate pieces” (Pudovkin, 1929). The combination of these pieces forms different meanings depending on the chosen sequence. Thus, if given the user the possibility, there will be a similar editing to what happens on the Internet with hypertext, where the user also chooses the “pieces” of text to be read.

2.2. The Film Narrative and the Interactivity

Interactivity represents a way to free the user/spectator. He is no longer a simple passive spectator. In non-interactive narratives the user/spectator is subjugated to the author’s decisions, it’s the author that has the power to make decisions about the course of history and its sequel. With the use of interactivity the user/spectator wins options, he is allowed to make choices. Interactivity applied to narratives, provides a set of possibilities and options, able to build a sequence of events that will make up a story.

However, Manovich (2002) considers the interaction an illusion, to the extent that the spectator does not have the power of option and selection, as these are preset and limited by the author at the outset. Cameron (1995) goes further by saying that interaction is synonymous with lack of choice and interactivity, since most of the time it is just an offer of some alternative linear paths, different endings or characters points of view with a different linear structure. “On Totalitarian Interactivity” Manovich (1996) speaks of geographical differentiation of the concept of interactivity. For Westerners,
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