

Talk2Me: Engaging Interactive Installation Environments

Ann Morrison

The Australasian CRC for
Interaction Design Pty Ltd
School of ITEE
University of Queensland
+61 424 249 797
morrison@itee.uq.edu.au

Dr Margot Brereton

The Australasian CRC for
Interaction Design Pty Ltd
School of ITEE
University of Queensland
+61 411 745 488
margot@itee.uq.edu.au

Dr Peta Mitchell

The Australasian CRC for
Interaction Design Pty Ltd
School of EMSAH,
University of Queensland
+61+7+33653246
peta.mitchell@uq.edu.au

ABSTRACT

In this research I explore what elements there may be in common between tangible interactive-technology works that successfully engage their participants. An exploration of existing methods for obtaining useful evaluations for non-use and ambiguous environments forms a part of the discussion.

Keywords

Interactive installation, engagement, co-authored, locative, Interaction Design, Reflective Critical Technical Practices, Reflective Design, Reflective Evaluation Methods.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.1 [Information Interfaces and Presentation]: Multimedia Information Systems—artificial, augmented, and virtual realities; Audio input/output.

THE CASE STUDY/IES

In my PhD research I am examining the relationship between engagement and physical interactive art installations. To do this, I have been working primarily with a case study environment named *Talk2Me*—an interactive installation work set in a large dome space. *Talk2Me* is an audio and physical re-rendition of an online interactive writing work. This re-rendition retains the online interaction, but also places the interaction within a physical space, where the main ‘conversation’ takes place by the participant-audience speaking through microphones and listening through headphones. By adding SMS input, speech-to-text and text-to-speech conversion technologies, the participant-audience co-authors the work while they participate in audible conversation with keyword-triggering characters (bots).

Talk2Me was first exhibited at *ReActive* exhibition, The Block, QUT, Brisbane, in February 2006. Participants were observed and interviewed. In a second iteration in October 2006, participants were again observed and interviewed. In order to place *Talk2Me* within a broader range of interactive art installations, I then interviewed informed attendees at the Interactive Arts Exhibition Program that was held as part of ACM Multimedia Conference, Santa Barbara October 2006. The research includes a discussion of the evolution of methods to evaluate playful and often uncertain environments.

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THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The effectiveness of screen-based interactive technologies—such as games and moos—is often measured in terms of the level and duration of engagement they provoke in their users, often to the extent that players forget or neglect external commitments. By contrast, audiences in physical interactive installations or physical computing environments may often be perplexed, detached and disengaged. Despite this, there are some examples of interactive installations and physical computing environments that do successfully engage their participants, perhaps not as competitively in terms of the duration of engagement, but certainly comparable in terms of the intensity. By examining participant responses to case study interactive art installations, I intend to map patterns of engagement, developing a reflective framework discussing enhanced engagement within physical interactive environments. I wish to identify a set of components and contexts that consistently elicit strong and deep engagement from participant audiences. My aim is to discover what an informed audience—one that is professionally involved within the field of interactive technologies—finds engaging about interacting with these technologies in specifically physical environments. In future research the findings of this research might be usefully extended to a broader audience, as well as to a wider set of conditions.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ann Morrison is a lecturer with The Information Environments Program, School of ITEE, at The University of Queensland, and an installation and new media artist. Morrison is involved with iRoom project at Stanford University, Braccetto augmented collaboration project, and with the Australasian CRC for Interaction Design.

Publications relating directly to the thesis include:
Morrison, A & Mitchell, Peta *Artefact and Iteration: circular entanglements*, Human Dimensions M Workshop, OZCHI November 2006, UTS, Sydney, Australia.
Morrison, Ann, Mitchell, P & Muhlberger, M. (2006) *Talk2Me: The Art of Augmenting Conversation* ACM Multimedia (ACM2006) Interactive Arts Program, Conference Track, October 2006, Santa Barbara, USA.
Morrison, A, MacDonald, L, MacColl, I, & Simpson, M. *The Pedagogical Practice of Locative Experiences*, LEA Locative Media Special Issue, Vol 14, Issue 03 July 2006.