Finding Ways of Being: Psychogeography in Urban Codemaking

Troy Innocent

Swinburne University of Technology
John St, Hawthorn, Australia
GaRaG ::: Game Research Group
+613 9214 4514
tinnocent@swin.edu.au

Steven Conway

Swinburne University of Technology
John St, Hawthorn, Australia
GaRaG ::: Game Research Group
+613 9214 4407
sconway@swin.edu.au

ABSTRACT

The practice of 'urban codemaking' as central to a series of pervasive games is articulated in this paper. Its role as a kind of freeform wayfinding is explored, informed by psychogeography and other urban mapping strategies. In the analysis and reflection of this pervasive game design practice three main concepts are explored: urban codemaking as wayfinding strategy, phenomenology of the player experience, and articulation of the design methodologies used. In this sense, urban codemaking is seen as 'readymade' urban game level design, as combination of treasure hunt and urban adventure, and to re-engage players with the city.

Keywords

play, pervasive games, urban codemaking, public space, phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

This paper articulates a form of hybrid wayfinding described as 'urban codemaking' to explore a multilayered approach to pervasive game design. An urban code is a marker typically placed in a city that has multiple meanings: signifier of an alternate world, collectable game token, wayfinding marker, and others. The design of urban codes draw upon the pictographic language of travelling hobos, the psychogeography of the situationists, the play community of the new games movement, the world building politics of micronations, and the technology of mixed and augmented realities. Three main areas are covered: an exploration of urban codemaking as a wayfinding strategy in contemporary cities, a

phenomenological analysis of the player, and an articulation of the design methodologies used in five iterations of the urban codemaking game.

Over the past four years, urban codemaking games have been played in Melbourne, Ogaki, Istanbul, Sydney, and Adelaide. In each case, the character of the game has been shaped equally by the rules of engagement and the urban planning of the host city, particularly the neighbourhoods that provide the game level. The relationship between wayfinding and placemaking is explored, and the ways in which being 'in-game' has a significant impact upon the players' sense of being-in-the-world. Typically, wayfinding assumes a specific destination – what happens when play allows for freeform wayfinding? This approach encourages players to develop their own psychogeography within the design of the game where 'destination' is left open, taking on a phenomenological accent: the player reaches a destination that *feels* right rather than achieving any goal set by the designer.

In fact, the games invite reflection on the nature of each city, how it came to be, and what it is becoming. Wayfinding is used not to get from one place to the next, but to engage in a particular way of being. The urban codes key players into another mode of being in which the narrative of the game takes place. Given their nature, and the emphasis on movement and cooperation, pervasive games can be used to encourage social interaction and increase physical activity. In comparison with the use of mobile devices to track or encourage physical activity, pervasive game play suggests a higher and more sustained level of activity through increased engagement. The most recent iteration of the urban codemaking game tests this hypothesis and assesses whether kinaesthetic play and aesthetic experience have an impact on wellbeing and physical health. It evaluates players via a musical game of tag through the collection of biometric, mood, and well-being data to measure the impact of play on their physical health and sense of wellbeing. In this game, the urban codes play the additional role of musical motifs in a spatially arranged sound design, exploring a sonic layer that builds on the freeform wayfinding of earlier designs. This mode of engagement again explores alternate ways of being in urban space enabled by play.

These ways of being are articulated and explored via a phenomenological approach that draws upon early games studies and recent texts that explore opportunities of play that engage with reality, and also the expanded nature of that reality. The main methodology used is interpretative phenomenological analysis in determining the ways players find meaning in the game. Each player experiences a different sense of being-in-the-world within the framework for exploration designed by the urban codemakers.

In this particular paper, the ongoing nature of this practice is explored comparing competitive versus collaborative modes of play, designs that highlight the paidiac to the ludic, and those that utilise augmented reality as a form of mapmaking for the player. The aims of this approach are threefold: firstly, to activate urban spaces in a form of 'readymade' level design transforming them into an alternate reality; secondly, to explore strategies for pervasive game design that combine aspects of treasure hunt and urban adventure; and thirdly, to humanise urban spaces and engender a sense of community and connection in opposition to feelings of alienation commonly associated with big urban spaces.

BIO

Troy Innocent explores connections and multiplicity in his works of design, sculpture, animation, sound and installation. His methods of multiplatform storytelling and relationships between objects and their

surroundings create their own world, a game that viewers can play. His works explore the connections between language and reality, interacting within the contemporary media-scape utilising his own unique aesthetic language. His most recent works are urban art environments: an interactive sculpture garden in the Docklands and Urban Codemakers, a game that reinvents the history of Melbourne. Innocent is currently Course Director of Games and Interactivity at Swinburne University; and is represented by Anna Pappas Gallery.

Steven Conway is a convenor and lecturer in the Games & Interactivity program at Swinburne University of Technology. He has presented on many aspects of□play, philosophy, aesthetics and culture, and has had a variety of articles published on these subjects in journals such as Convergence, Eludamos, Game Studies, the Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds and Westminster Papers in Communication & Culture. Steven is also co-editor of the first collection in academia on Video Game Policy - http://www.amazon.com/Video-Game-Policy-Distribution-Consumption-ebook/dp/B016MUE2FA/ref=mt_kindle?_encoding=UTF8&me=

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Callois, R. Man, Play and Games. The Free Press of Glencoe, USA, 1961.□

Debord, G. Theory of the Dérive. In K. Knabb (Ed.), Situationist International Anthology. Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, CA, 1958.

Dekoven, B. The Well-Played Game, The MIT Press, MA, 2013.

□Fluegelman, A. (Ed.). The New Games Book. Dolphin Books, Garden City, NY, 1976.□

Heidegger, Martin. Being and Time. New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008.□

Huizinga, J. Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing. Indiana University Press, Bloomington IN, 1995.□

Innocent, T. "*Code switching in mixed realities,* Proceedings of the 19th International Symposium of Electronic Art (ISEA2013)", Sydney, 11-13 June 2013 / Kathy Cleland, Laura Fisher and Ross Harley (eds.), pp. 1-5

□McGonigal, J. Reality is Broken. The Penguin Press, New York, NY, 2011.□Montola, M., Stenros, J., Waern, A. Pervasive Games Theory and Design. Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, Burlington, USA, 2009.