ABSTRACT

Title: Interactive Digital Narratives: Bringing Meaningful Interaction Into Public Spaces

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This dissertation analyses the potential of digital interactive narratives in bringing back meaningful interaction to public spaces. In the context of this research, a definition of meaningful interaction is given and used as a reference to analyse the decline of public spaces in modern society. In parallel to the movement away from meaningful interaction in public spaces, the rise of mass media and eventually the Internet are shown to have increasingly collapsed the distance between people, creating what Marshall Mc Luhan called a 'global village.'

An analysis of the virtual communities emerging from the rise of this networking society are shown to be reflective of modernist urban planning in being fragmented, privatized and lacking any true sense of equality. Procedurally generated interactive digital narratives are shown to be similarly closed and limited. To oppose this, Umberto Eco's concept of 'open work,' and Ranciére's 'emancipated spectator' are examined and shown to provide the possibility of providing emergent social interactions through a narrative with an open structure. Pervasive games are highlighted as a means of bringing such experiences as Eco's 'open work' out into the public space.

Finally, Blast Theory's 'A Machine To See With' is examined using the principles embodied in Umberto Eco's 'open work,' James Bohman's prerequisites for meaningful discourse, and Ranciére's 'emancipated spectator.' This revealed how such narratives set in a public space, even with a relatively rigid narrative structure, have the possibility to generate engagement of strangers through playacting and disruption of the everyday experience in public spaces.