CIFellows 2020-2021

Computing Innovation Fellows

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Using digital media to *activate* archival material and to *augment* urban space

Question

How can digital technology (interactive, immersive, and locative media) be used to draw attention to and celebrate community histories in situ?
• How can these tools be used to activate material otherwise held in archives/museums?
• How can these tools be used in historically under-represented or maligned communities?

Aims

• Apply techniques of urban informatics and interaction design to discover novel modes of presenting information to urban residents and observe the responses of residents to media installations
• Discover potential ways that new technologies can improve the urban living experience by creating affective, embodied, and meditative experiences.

Case study: LaBranche Pharmacy

Background

• LaBranche pharmacy was a black family-owned pharmacy operating on Claiborne Ave in New Orleans from 1907 to 1968 when the construction of the I-10 interstate along the formerly tree-lined boulevard forced the pharmacy to close.
• After being converted into a bar and operating as an urban music venue, the building fell into disrepair. It was recently renovated and returned to a retail space on the ground level and apartments on the second floor.

Challenges

• The initial plan for gesture-based interaction was set aside due to inconsistencies in the interface.
• There was less foot traffic than expected over the two weekend evenings. While the projections were scheduled during an active season in New Orleans, the bars and music venues still frequented on N. Claiborne are further down the street.
• The background noise of the interstate overwhelmed the audio. The gain had to be increased significantly for the audio to be heard.
• Centering community narratives requires community buy-in to the project. The community is hesitant to work with outsiders.

Installation/Observation

Installation (Open Frameworks)
• Archival Images are animated with a zoom effect and paired with interview audio describing the pharmacy
• A game controller allows users to scroll through images, as if physically moving through the space.
• Reaching certain areas result in an animation of the bridge being built, which ultimately shuts the system down.

Observation Method
• Participants were observed using and responding to the interface and the content.

Outcomes

Approximately 20 individuals engaged with the installation over two evenings. Most of the participants were LaBranche family members and Claiborne Avenue History Project researchers.

Interaction
Observation
• Children were more comfortable with/interested in the controller-based interface than adults
• Pedestrians generally overlooked the potential for interaction and avoided the interaction area.
• Many participants naturally moved toward the projection and were drawn to interact with the projection directly
• Controller does not allow multiple users to engage simultaneously or collaboratively.
Conclusion
• Gesture-based interaction will likely be more effective to draw in new users.
• Gesture-based interaction will be more intuitive for all users.
• Gesture-based interaction will be more collaborative

Community Engagement
Observation
• Community members did come out to see the work, even though not all engaged with it directly.
• Family members were excited and thankful about the work and wanted to build on it further.
Conclusion
• As a community event, this was a good first effort, but alternative interaction techniques should be used to generate more activity in future iterations

What's Next?

Iterations
LaBranche study
• Implement a gesture-based interface (most likely, using MediaPipe).
• Integrate further content provided by the family as well as higher quality interview audio.
Other content/location studies
• Bruce Brice protest mural, *The Destruction of Tremé* at Louis Armstrong park.
• Black Masking Indian suits for the Donald Harrison memorial museum and Backstreet Cultural Museum.
• …find and begin others (multi-year projects)

Project Expansion/Continuation
• Locative media and Augmented reality. Using mobile technology to situate content (similar to the videos), but registered on the actual buildings,

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