

Wearing Conversations

Åsa Ståhl

Interactive Institute

Framtidsvägen 10 b, 251 96 VÄXJÖ

asa.stahl@tii.se

Kristina Lindström

Interactive Institute

Framtidsvägen 10 b, 251 96 VÄXJÖ

kristina.lindstrom@tii.se

ABSTRACT

This interactive workshop is part of a participatory art project that deals with methods on participation and communication. The participants will be introduced to some projects that cross boundaries between art and design, between exhibition space and other rooms, between artist and audience, designer and user, producer and consumer. The participants will then make and appropriate their own contemporary wearable conversation pieces and will be encouraged to wear them during the participatory design conference 2006. The main question for the participants is to convey the project to another audience (to those who weren't there while it was happening) but avoiding preservation and representation? What happens when the narration of the art project isn't linear - when it's perishable scattered over time and space, closely connected to the participants' bodies?

Author Keywords

Participatory art projects, new media curation, presentation, preservation, storytelling, documentation, conversation pieces, locative media

ACM Classification Keywords

Miscellaneous

INTRODUCTION

Participatory art is expanding the boundaries of the traditional art and blurs borders between art and design, between exhibition space and other rooms, between artist and audience, designer and user, and producer and consumer. Participatory art has a practice of its own at the same time as most artists working with participation try to fit in to the traditional art's sphere by documenting their work and put the documentation in the white cube (the traditional exhibition space).

During a full day workshop we will discuss the issue of how to convey and communicate participatory art projects while avoiding preservation and representation.

To make the participants reflect in action [3] on these issues we will start the art project "Wearing Conversations". It's an interactive, participatory art project that deals with the historical conversation pieces but in a contemporary setting.

Conversation pieces were used in the mid 19th century at dinner parties among the bourgeoisie for the emerging class to have something to talk about, avoid silence and confirm social codes. The term was extended to any object that stimulates conversations. [1]

In this workshop the participants will appropriate their everyday objects into wearables that can spark conversations. Contemporary conversation pieces like accessories, clothes, key rings, gadgets, pods, mobile phone signals, pins and badges.

The project will continue during the rest of the conference, since the workshop participants are encouraged to use the conversation pieces. At the end of the conference we will, depending on what conclusions the participants draw concerning how to communicate this art project to another audience than the involved, have a set time and location where we can meet up for optional public reflection.

Starting off in a participatory process we want to mobilise and invite participants in reflecting on methods and strategies on participation that can be applied in digital as well as physical spaces. This is an idea that can be carried out almost anywhere since there are hardly any costs involved, very little previous knowledge is needed and there is hardly any pressure to perform. The workshop can offer a design audience experiences from participatory art practices as well as methods for participation.

BACKGROUND

Kristina Lindström and Åsa Ståhl have worked with several combined research and art projects at the Interactive Institute - [visklek] [5], [ljudstråk] [6], and [glasrörd] [7]- that deal with storytelling combined with digital technologies (phone connections, mp3-players, and web interactions) and other channels of communication (posters, flyers, and mouth to mouth.) The essence of the projects is based on collaboration, where the participants' actions are crucial since in this type of art there is no work of art unless

there are participants in action. This interactive workshop proposal is based on a culture of participation and a culture of social activity. In this new form of culture described by Bourriaud in his text Postproduction [1], the work of art functions as a temporary ending in a network of elements brought together, like a narrative that prolongs and reinterpret earlier narratives.

[visklek] is a game of Chinese Whispers on answering machines based on everyday stories told by young people in Växjö. We were curious to see how an open-ended, unfinished and non-anxious communication system could attract people to participate in this collaborative storytelling. The project was exhibited at Växjö Art gallery during the summer of 2004. [ljudstråk] is a library of audio walks available to the public – either by borrowing them at the Museum of Legends in Ljungby or by downloading them from a webpage. These audio walks are a result of several workshops carried out with young people to invite them to reflect on their everyday surroundings, resulting in dull, mysterious, exciting and horrifying stories. The listener is encouraged to participate in the storytelling by engaging in the public life, using SMS and the webpage. [glasrörd] is an interactive exhibition on three platforms (the museum, the public place and a webpage) in collaboration with the Swedish Glass Museum that was exhibited during the autumn of 2005. In [glasrörd] we started off, like in the other two projects, with a method that includes participation and the playful act of telling stories – in this case stories and memories connected to glass objects that have been given to them as gifts. We challenge and explore the personal value of the objects by inviting the participants to exchange objects and stories.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

We will pose questions like: What is the outcome of a participatory art project? How do we convey this to another audience (to those who weren't there while it was happening) but avoiding preservation and representation? What matter does it make if the participatory process generates material or if it doesn't? What happens when the narration of the art project isn't linear - when it's perishable scattered over time and space, closely connected to the participants' bodies? How do we make the participants invest their own time and energy into the project?

AIM AND STRUCTURE OF WORKSHOP

Introduction to different participatory art projects – our own and others'. (Approximately 45 minutes)

Participants in the workshop will be introduced to some art projects that will shed some light on our issues of concern. The projects will show different ways of working with presentation, documentation and participation, i.e strategies for communication.

Hands-on workshop where we work with conversation pieces. (The rest of the time until lunch.) Each participant will make his/her own wearable conversation piece. They will also be able to decide if they want to document the process of wearing the piece in any way and if and how they what to present it. As shown during other workshops that we have done previously, reflection comes in action. "Playing with Games" a workshop about creating new games made it obvious that it's when you play, the rules of the games are negotiated. That's also when the game can develop. [3] To be able to reflect on the participation in art we want to make an actual project.

Reflections on how to convey/communicate the participatory art project -blends in with previous section (The rest of the day). In relation to the introduction of other participatory art project the participants will try out different ways to communicate and convey the project.

Participatory art project. The participants will be encouraged to wear the pieces during the conference. They will also decide if they want to show anything at the museum or if the participation is enough in itself.

Reflection when the conversation pieces have been in use. At the end of the conference there will be an optional public reflection as an opportunity to share possible documentation or other thoughts. This art project is to some extent a process of making us conscious about the conversation pieces that we wear in our every day life - things that can trigger social interaction.

PARTICIPATION

We would like there to be maximum 20 participants who make wearable conversation pieces. There is an unlimited amount of people who can participate in conversations triggered by the pieces. The participants are asked to bring whatever they have that they would like to use for possible communication – audio or visual recorder, camera or other. We will provide some material to use in the creation of the conversation pieces, but the participants are welcome to bring other more personal things.

REFERENCES

1. Ammer, C. The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, Houghton Mifflin Company. USA. (1997)
2. Bourriaud, N. Postproduction, Lukas & Sternberg. New York. (2001)
3. Lindström. K., Ståhl, Å., Playing with Games, In Proceedings. In the Making, www.nordes.org (2005)
4. Schön, D. A. The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action. England: Ashgate. (1991)
5. www.visklek.se
6. www.ljudstrak.se
7. www.tii.se/studio_1221/glasrord