

Ambient Urban Interludes: Passing Glances

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INTRODUCTION

This paper describes a system in which transient audience participants co-create emergent narratives that are revealed in public space. *Passing Glances* enables users to create these ambient urban interludes through the use of SMS text messages. The *Passing Glances* system contains a wealth of keyword-associated imagery that is stored ‘in the city’. Images are revealed to the transient audiences when SMS message keywords trigger the system. The mobile phone therefore acts as an expressive device revealing hidden layers of the city to construct short-lived stories.

RELATED WORK

While phone-related waiting games [3] and collaborative SMS image annotation systems [1] have been explored, our system is focused on encouraging *emergent narratives* which are comprised of aggregating participants’ contributions of visual imagery and SMS messages. Previous work on mobile and context-aware stories [2] and improvisational database-generated movies [4] has shown that co-created stories elicit dialogue between users, encouraging them to both observe and revisit collected stories

IMPLEMENTATION AND REACTION

At the core of the *Passing Glances* system is an annotated image database that can be triggered by SMS message. The system retrieves picture segments from the database based on an analysis of the SMS input. It loads and plays the images in real time at a public site. Successive images thus begin to form an emerging story. The language of the ‘texter’ is key to the system. The SMS world has developed its own modes of conversation and the database is appropriately annotated.

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Early feedback of *Passing Glances*, during informal demonstration sessions at an open house at Media Lab Europe in Dublin has elicited positive response. The direct and instant relationship between the entered SMS text and recalled pictures appears quite entertaining. The resulting interaction between strangers triggering the same embedded system is also of interest

ONGOING & FUTURE WORK

The current focus is on creating different scales of *Passing Glances* sites. The transient audience is encouraged to seek out and look at very small and tiny images scarcely visible in the city landscape as well as to interact with large billboard structures.

The next stage of the development focuses on turning audience in to author by allowing annotated images to be placed in the system by the passer by.

The third stage of the work moves away from the single *Passing Glances* site and networks several sites within the city. In this scenario images can move between *Passing Glances* sites either in a centrally controlled manner or by ‘hitching lifts’ from passers by. The city now contains a network of lurking images ready to be revealed when the correct keyword is ‘texted’ in the correct place. Users may input images, never to emerge again while other images may float to the surface on a regular basis.

Passing Glances system offers a myriad of opportunities for exploring how people relate to their environment.

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