Essay Have Fun and Play

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The course “Have Fun and Play” was the successor for the “Living and Working” project. Where LnW had to be socially relevant HFaP was more based on experimenting with systems and technologies we learned the past year. We had soon been told that the “higher cause” for the project would be to show our installations on the Gogbot festival.

In order to succeed in making interactive installations that would be fun or fascinating to use we got several guest speakers invited by A. Eliens. Although not every speaker was very relevant for the project each and every one of them was very inspiring and were very influential in the many brainstorming sessions we had. In my opinion we should have started way earlier to come up with some proofs of concept, or storyboard of some kind. Writing this I have to add that we were to blame for this lack of motivation to start. The past 4 weeks we started realizing our installations.

The installations had to be compatible with the Gogbot theme: “Singularity”. Since this is quite a broad theme we choose to narrow it down, and involve our personal working and living area. We all have ever-growing digital shadows of our personal life, and in the course of technology these shadows grow bigger and bigger. Is it good or bad? It can be used in all sorts of ways. Our idea is to make the visitors at the SmartXP event and the Gogbot festival aware of their digital trail. From the millions of ways to show this to the audience the decision fell on a digital canvas in Unity3D. We were already familiar with this technology so we didn’t have to reinvent the wheel. The Canvas is the main stage with preferably multiple screens, for the SmartXP event we could get 3. On the client side the open source java platform Processing was used. Processing was also a familiar programming platform for the most of us.

How did we get it all to work? The Unity Canvas could easily be talked to by a little processing library Jan K. wrote for us. Commands like: “Drop Cube; Texture http://link.jpg” are used for in this case dropping a cube or spawning a texture on the canvas.

Around this technology we all tried to represent singularity in an interactive installation. I would like to shortly summarize the installations that were build.

Random profile generator:

This device was capable of creating a cube with a randomized profile on it. Some information could be given like: sex, age and hacker/user. This information was then pasted on the canvas.

Digital shadow visualizer:

The installation projected the shapes of people moving around in front of the camera. In colorful shapes and sized you could see your digital shadow move around. Every several seconds the screen was sent to the canvas and made your shadow immortal.

QR-Code scanner:

On all the drinks we put QR-codes. One group worked on an installation for a QR-code scanner. This scanner can be used to spawn several objects on the canvas. If you for example hold a bottle of beer in front of this scanner, a bottle will be dropped onto the canvas.

Information destroyer:

One of the installations was very deconstructive. With a green object, let's say a green towel you can move around in front of the screen and it will track the objects location. The game was to stay on a point at the target for longer than 3 seconds. If you manage to do so, dynamite will be spawned and it will blow away the information on the canvas for a part.

Program or be programmed console:

The installation was just a simple console, but with a lot of possibilities and puzzling fun. By typing some commands into the console, the users are able to have complete power over the system. Erasing all the information on the canvas, blowing up the entire screen all that kinds of fun is possible.

Photo booth:

I built an installation representing the data you willingly put online yourself. You step into a photo booth to make a picture, but before you know it you can find your picture everywhere on the canvas screens. If you're in luck it is only a cube that only temporary exists, if not your photo will keep rolling on the screen forever.

I used several technologies for this. The program was written in processing. The lights/flash for the photo booth were two dmx controlled lights and for detection if the user was in the booth I used an arduino armed with a distance sensor.

All this together made quite a nice show the first of July, but we are certainly planning on coming back bigger, better and more spectacular for Gogbot!