Abstract

Ontario College of Art and Design University

Master of Design

Digital Futures

Mechanism: An artist-led, feminist design pattern for open technology tools.

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This thesis examines what it means for technology to open, and how that open technology may be commodified in support of the arts. Drawing on Hélène Cixous' "Laugh of the Medusa", I propose a feminist, inclusive design method that subverts imposter syndrome by involving community engagement in the software development process, then uses that method to develop software that powers narrative-focused FMV video games using Node.JS internet technologies.

The sample software described allows artists to assemble and install branched video narratives for exhibition using web technologies served over Linux on the not-for-profit Raspberry Pi platform. It was developed through the twin working practices of open software design and artistic collaboration, and tested with a community user base via a type of voluntary design charette known as a game jam. The system can potentially be expanded using a Dropbox-like capability to update new media art projects remotely from a studio when an external internet connection is available, while not requiring that internet connection to serve a web application to a user's phone over a local wireless access point. This permits artists control over the context of their work, while allowing use of contemporary software capabilities in developing what the future of such work might be.