Paul Woidke

Artist Statement

My piece, *Exchange of Knowledge*, explores the influence and connections between the past and present through non-linear interaction. I was influenced heavily by an idea in *Oxford American Magazine*, which asked why students are required to read great writers like Blake, Dickinson, Freud, and Dickens. The article suggested that we consume and explore these works not to impress others at a cocktail party, but to search for our own voice in the works. The article states:

The best reason to read them is to see if they may know you better than you know yourself. You may find your own suppressed and rejected thoughts flowing back to you with an “alienated majesty.” Reading the great writers, you may have the experience that Longinus associated with the sublime: You feel that you have actually created the text yourself. For somehow your predecessors are more yourself than you are.

In the writings of Jorge Luis Borges I occasionally found my own thoughts. Interaction with the past is presented in Borges’ short story *August 25, 1983*. The author recounts a story of a meeting between his present self and his future self, just before death. The elder Borges tells his younger self that he “will have utterly forgotten this curious prophetic dialogue that is taking place in two times and two places. When you next dream it, you shall be who I am, and you shall be my dream." My work explores this idea by presenting the wisdom of previous users, and by absorbing the ideas of the current user to present later on.

My piece exists as an application on a tablet computer. Through touch, the user is able to explore the idea of our predecessors sharing and challenging ideas. The user is prompted throughout the work to enter their ideas, experiences, and wisdom, and, in turn, is presented with the knowledge of those who came before them. Through this interaction, the piece exposes the viewer to new ideas that they may have never realized were their own. These ideas could be about identity, the nature of thought, or the user’s interaction with the universe. The piece asks the user to provide some item of knowledge, experience, or wisdom, and returns an element of knowledge from someone who came before them. By physically taking a printout of this idea with them, the viewer makes this idea their own.