

ISEA2019 Panel: Out of sight, out of mind

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Abstract

This panel will present the outcomes of a two-week residency by a research team from the University of Brighton, School of Art and the University for the Creative Arts in September 2018 on the Mar Menor, a 170 km² saltwater lagoon on the south east coast of Spain. The team were invited to undertake practice-based research on the changing ecosystem of this unique natural landscape, resulting from damages caused by intensive agriculture, increased tourism and rising sea levels. The project and panel has been developed by a team of three artists, each bringing specific experience and knowledge of 360° video to undertake the research and create a unique understanding and manifestation of the changing ecosystem of the Mar Menor. This includes Paul Sermon who is currently working on collocated telematic experiences in 360° live video environments, Charlotte Gould's work on developing immersive 360° animated augmented reality and Jeremiah Ambrose who is working on gaze controlled navigation through 360° video narratives. The overarching aim of this project is to create a unique interactive 360° video experience of the Mar Menor that manifests the anthropocene effects on this natural landscape as augmented surreal and metaphysical interpretations of the artist's experiences during the residency. Through environmental, social, economic and cultural observations and encounters the team are creating an immersive 360° installation environment that incorporates both video and audio recordings with augmented imaginary and predicted realities transformed from scientific data in obscure and profound guises.

Keywords

Augmented, reality, telematic, 360°, video, anthropocene, narratology, experience, installation, telepresent.

Out of sight, out of mind

Project Description

This collaborative project and panel discussion is born out of a 10 day residency on the Mar Menor, a 170 km² saltwater lagoon on the south east coast of Spain in September 2018, where the majority of the primary research took place by gathering 360° video material from observations, experiences and interviews. The project has been devel-

oped by a team of three artists from Brighton, UK, each bringing specific experience and knowledge of 360° video to undertake the research and create a unique understanding and manifestation of the changing ecosystem of the Mar Menor. This includes Paul Sermon who is currently working on collocated telematic experiences in 360° live video environments, Charlotte Gould's work on developing immersive 360° animated augmented reality and Jeremiah Ambrose who is working on gaze controlled navigation through 360° video narratives. This practice-based team of artists are currently undertaking research using a range of video and gaming software and advanced hardware devices, including Insta360 Pro 8K video cameras and Oculus Rift head-mounted-displays in conjunction with live video switchers. This has produced a range of ultra HD 360° outputs involving stereo 8K and real-time 4K environments with augmented live 360° video and animation sequences through live chroma-keying effects.

The overarching aim of this project is to create a unique interactive 360° video experience of the Mar Menor that manifests the anthropocene effects on this natural landscape as augmented surreal and metaphysical interpretations of the artist's experiences during the residency and available scientific data of the Mar Menor ecosystem. Through environmental, social, economic and cultural observations and encounters the team are currently creating an immersive 360° environment that incorporates both video and audio recordings with augmented imaginary and predicted realities transformed from scientific data in obscure and profound guises. This 360° telematic installation incorporating live audience interaction within the original 360° video experience will be presented in Murcia in March 2019.

The material has been generated through an intensive stage of data gathering using the aforementioned 360° video techniques, as well as spatial audio recordings, generated through both interviews/conversations and observation/reflexive methods of research. The aim is to build a unique picture of Mar Menor's memories, histories, tragedies, myths, aspirations, regrets and possible futures. Available data on the lagoon's water quality has also contributed to how the team manifest and communicate a unique experience of the Mar Menor as a bizarre uncanny encounter of a landscape proliferated by familiar animated objects representing this data. For example, a mountain made of bags of salt indicating the salinity level in the lagoon, green clouds in the sky representing its chlorophyll

level and a tower of suitcases signifying the increase of tourism. This technique of augmenting animated elements in 360° video has been developed by Charlotte Gould and is illustrated in Figure 1 below, exemplifying augmented data that causes the user to question the very environment they inhabit by aiming to offer alternative experiences to our pervasive anthropocentric perspectives.



Figure 1. Mock-up of equirectangular 360° environment with augmented animation elements. © Charlotte Gould

The scientific analysis and interviews/conversations are explored through the team’s own observations and experiences of the Mar Menor, captured through a range of unique approaches to 360° video recording. This has included underwater filming in the lagoon and drone controlled aerial recordings. Using a technique of gaze-controlled interaction the 360° video shots are linked together to explore a non-linear narrative of the entire Mar Menor area to create movement between and interaction with the 360° film content and embedded overlays. In a 360° recorded conversation a participant on the shoreline of the lagoon points across the water, at which point it is possible to look in the same direction and enter another 360° video sequence that travels over the lagoon to the location they are pointing at. This 360° navigation technique, developed by Jeremiah Ambrose has been successfully used in previous projects and is further explained in Figure 2 below.

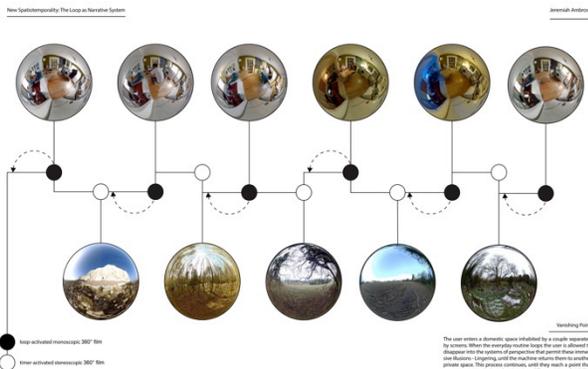


Figure 2. Virtual gaze interaction to create movement and interaction with 360° film content. © Jeremiah Ambrose

Following the residency on the Mar Menor the team have been reviewing the gathered data and editing the material to construct the non-linear interactive 360° video experience, complete with augmented animated elements. This will also incorporate the development of the immersive 360° telematic environment allowing public participants the opportunity to observe their own presence within the interactive 360° video experience of Mar Menor. Using a system of live 360° chroma-keying between two separate locations in Murcia and the Mar Menor, the participants will be able to encounter each other in this obscured landscape of recorded and imagined realities by standing within a constructed 4 x 4 metre blue box space installation. This 360° telematic technique is currently being developed by Paul Sermon and is further explained in the installation workflow diagram Figure 3. The intention is to provide the participant with a greater sense of presence and objective responsibility for the environment they exist within and are connected to. The final installation will seek to present the consequence of the anthropocene as a direct result of our own interventions, rather than being an ‘out of sight, out of mind’ experience of the Mar Menor.

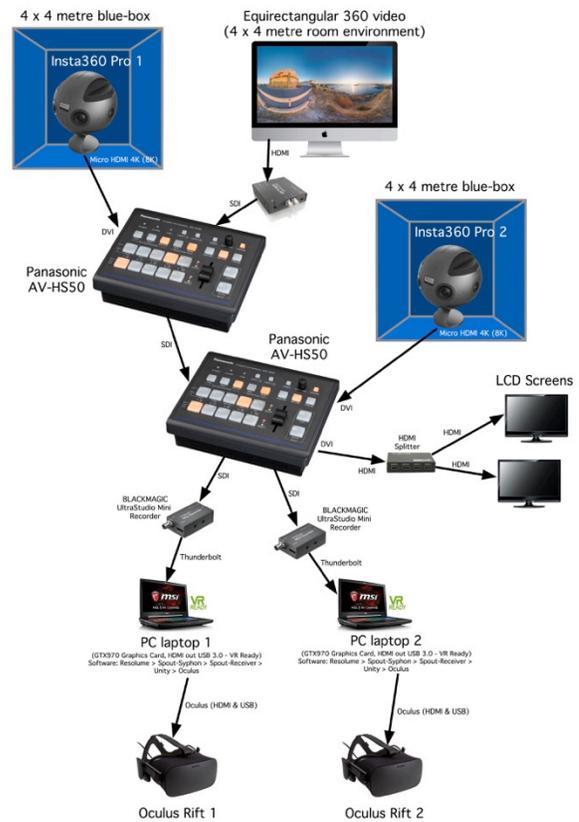


Figure 3. Installation workflow diagram for exhibition in Murcia. © Paul Sermon

Panel Presentations

Each member of this project team and panel bring a unique practice-based research method and theoretical direction on the subject of immersive 360° video to the fore of this project. The aims and objectives of the panel are to both present a concise and detailed account of the project, whilst identifying a distinctive approach to the anthropocene questions it raises by bringing their particular ideas into dialogue with the other panellists and the aims of the overarching Mar Menor project.

Paul Sermon: Since the early nineteen-nineties my work in the field of telematic arts explores the emergence of user-determined narratives between remote participants who are brought together within shared telepresent environments. Through the use of live chroma-keying, video projection and videoconference technology these geographically divided audience participants are composited live in intimate social spaces. This is essentially how all my installation projects function, where the public participant plays an integral part within these telematic experiments, whose engagement within them makes the 'Work' and their shared experiences of them creates the 'Art'. As an artist I am both designer of the environment and instigator of the narrative, which I determine through the social and political context that I choose to play out these telematic encounters. My recent research looks to identify a juncture between empathy and presence amongst remote participants in a converged 360° telepresent video installation. The research charts the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive capabilities of these shared telepresent encounters and identifies the empathetic nature of the participant's interactions and experiences - attained through observations, conversations and encounters during the realisation of installations and performances throughout the project. This reflective practice draws on a phenomenological framework, from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's extension of the bodily synthesis (Merleau-Ponty 2012 [1945] p.154) to Jean-Paul Sartre's awareness of self when confronted with the gaze of the other (Sartre 2003 [1943] pp.245-326); where the objectification of gaze is confronted on equal empathetic terms through a process of sharing our presence in a 360° third-space environment from a single viewpoint.

Charlotte Gould: Through my practice I explore the potential for intervention through open interactive installations in digitally mediated public spaces. I have developed a number of mixed reality systems to prompt play and interaction across social and cultural boundaries. I examine the notion of audience agency, testing the possibilities of open interactive systems, to offer opportunity for diverse participants to co-create artworks through the development of unique narratives, promoting public engagement, looking at how this can impact on culture, changing the way we engage in the urban environment and contributing to a collective memory and sense of place. I develop 360° mixed reality environments for immersive non-linear storytelling. Roland Barthes identified the "Death of the Author" (Barthes, 1967), where writer and reader co-produce and in this way, through public interventions, participants are

invited to take a dynamic role in storytelling, working with the artists to develop narrative, creating content that forms a contemporary folklore as identified by Henry Jenkins (Jenkins, 2008). Through "Out of sight, out of mind" I aim to capture public memory merged with future imaginings to engage participants with issues of sustainability and the changing eco-system of the Mar Menor. The playful interface uses "phantasmagoric" elements (Sutton Smith 2009) to create a playful and surprising immersive environment to trigger interest and surprise in the audience. This work explores the potential for non-linear narrative and formats to inspire curiosity. Jeremy Bailenson advocates immersive 360° environments as a format which leaves a lasting impression on users due to its immersive properties (Bailenson 2018). Through this site-specific research I explore the potential for immersive 360° story telling as a public intervention to raise public awareness and effect change.

Jeremiah Ambrose: Over the last few years my practice has evolved from initial experiments looking at non-haptic interactions with moving images to becoming a more focused research framework that looks at interactive 360° film practice. Throughout my research I refer to the term *Cynematics*, which is a portmanteau of cybernetics and cinematics. I have developed this term to explicate an approach to cinematic practice/theory that is conducive to new artistic potentials for interactive film. To this end, *Cynematics* can be interpreted as a node of Katherine Hayles' (Hayles 1999 pp.2-5) understanding of the posthuman discourse, meaning that it stands as a practice-based exploration into how interactive immersive media discourses propagate new kinds of human experience. As we continue to develop and expand the languages of moving image it becomes increasingly more important to locate and contextualise discourses that allow us to explore the impact of our synthesis with filmic forms. Although the state of being posthuman is a difficult subject to quantify if we are to align with Gene Youngblood's ideation that media networks operate as "the nervous system of mankind" (Youngblood 1970 p.41) then is it fair to consider interactive immersive media networks as the nervous system of the posthuman? Embedded in such a query is the need to develop approaches that allow us to understand the perceptual networks that we are now embroiled with. Such systems promote new degrees of anthropocentrism at the same time as offering a way to dissolve human-centric perspectives and create new environmental relationships.

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Factual Storytelling on the MA Ethnographic and Documentary Film at University College London and was previously a lecturer on the University of Brighton's MA in Digital Media Arts course.

Author(s) Biography(ies)

Paul Sermon was awarded the Prix Ars Electronica Golden Nica, in the category of interactive art, for the hyper media installation 'Think about the People now' in Linz, Austria, 1991. Produced the ISDN videoconference installation 'Telematic Vision' as an Artist in Residence at the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany in 1993. Received the Sparky Award from the Interactive Media Festival in Los Angeles for the telepresent installation 'Telematic Dreaming', June 1994. From 1993 to 1999 worked as Dozent for Media Art at the HGB Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, Germany. From 2000 to 2013 Professor of Creative Technology at the University of Salford, School of Arts & Media. From 1997 to 2001 Guest Professor for Performance and Environment at The University of Art and Design in Linz, Austria. Since September 2013 Professor of Visual Communication in the School of Art at the University of Brighton, United Kingdom.

Charlotte Gould has exhibited her work internationally including in China, Australia with "Urban Picnic" and "Peoples Screen" and in Europe at MACBA (Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona) with "All the World's a Screen" (2011). Charlotte is Deputy Head of School in the School of Art at the University of Brighton responsible for learning and teaching. She teaches in Visual Communication and has taught across all levels from undergraduate to PhD supervision. She received her PhD in Interactive Works for Urban Screens: A practice based study into building new ways of engaging communities in urban space through interactive artworks for urban screens from the School of Arts & Media, University of Salford in 2015. She graduated with a BA Honours Degree in Graphic Design from Chelsea School of Art in 1990 and was awarded an MA in Creative Technology from the University of Salford (2003).

Jeremiah Ambrose works in the areas of digital art, media futures and experimental practice – his current research explores the creation of interactive 360° environments. He undertook a practice-based PhD at the University of Brighton, looking at emergent narratives and interaction aesthetics in VR and interactive 360° film. He graduated with a BA (Hons) in English, Media and Cultural Studies from Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology in 2009. After this he was awarded an M.Phil in Film Theory and History and an M.Sc in Interactive Digital Media from Trinity College Dublin in 2011 and 2014. Jeremiah Ambrose was recently appointed as a Lecturer in Film and Digital Art in the School of Fine Art and Photography at the University for the Creative Arts Farnham. He is also a tutor in Immersive