Interactive Sound Environments - Project brief

1 Context

- Non-linearity
- Articulating spaces
- Communicating narrative
- Open form and configurable experiences
- Multiplicity
- Repeatable but different

2 Aims of the course

- This course will create a range of interactive audio-visual interpretations of Italo Calvino’s ‘Invisible Cities’ (1972)
- The first submission will require participants to produce an archive of sounds, materials, scripts and other assets for developing virtual environments.
- The second submission will push its participants to develop skills in non-linear situations such as computer games.
- Participation in this course is intended to lead to a deep understanding of the issues encountered in designing for non-linear situations, in particular, detailed structuring of computer-game interactions.
- Participants will expand their own approaches to understanding and interpreting narrative by developing character studies in reactive / non-linear environments in response to given texts.
- The course will expect its participants to keep a record of their design methods and to submit information about their approach along with their practical design work.
- The course also aims to push designers to develop their creative and expressive voice and challenges them to apply concepts introduced in lecture and tutorial sessions in order to develop works that may end up in their professional portfolio. It also expects its participants to push themselves technically, to attempt to grasp the concepts behind design in non-linear contexts and by developing a unique response to the brief.
- Participants will apply a professional approach to the development of original assets used in the project and should not fall back on commercial libraries or resources that they have not designed themselves.
- Finally, the course aims to provide a well defined brief that participants are expected to explore and respond to in imaginative ways.
3 Submission 1 - Asset Archive - 30%

The first submission requires individual participants to produce an archive of sounds, materials, scripts and other assets for developing interactive virtual environments.

This archive should be based on Marco Polo’s accounts of the cities visited on his expeditions as presented in Calvino’s Invisible Cities. The accounts present descriptions of sights, sounds and situations, environments and encounters.

Here are some suggestions as to what you could prepare for this submission;

- An FMOD project containing event definitions for ambiences, dialogue, music and SFX.
- A collection of 3D models of objects and structures, and supporting environmental textures.
- Scripts for animating and interacting with objects and environments.
- Prototype Unity scenes showing aesthetics and/or mechanics.

The deadline for this is in the course calendar:
http://digital.eca.ed.ac.uk/interactivesoundenvironments/

This submission is designed to explore your sonic and visual imagination; how might different narrative elements be represented? There are a range of sonic and visual approaches that might be investigated, from more realistic representations (e.g. Myst, Dear Esther) to abstract design (e.g. Journey, Unfinished Swan). What kinds of interactions and mechanisms might be useful in communicating and/or connecting narrative?

This submission is also designed to keep you busy as designers, recording and editing sounds on demand, producing 3D assets and animations, and developing interactive scripts as part of structured libraries to fit with your design interpretation. Are your assets site specific, or could they be made to work elsewhere?

It may be useful for you to collaborate with other disciplines to help develop your understanding of how different elements might work together, but note that this is an individual submission.

Working Method

- Read the script selections. Pay very close attention to your first impressions and ideas, you’ll never have these again.
- Make notes after you’ve read the script, then read again more meticulously and make more detailed notes. Make sure you do this in one go, do not break your concentration here, make sure you have at least 20 clear minutes to do this.
- Make a list of sounds/models/scripts you think you’ll need.
- How will you style and design them?
- Do you have time to realise your vision or should you re-style/re-imagine things to fit in with the deadline?
- It might be worth keeping hold of these plans for use in your submission.
Submission 1 - Details

Submit the following (as appropriate) zipped up to the online submission system by midnight on the day of submission

- Compiled versions of work (Unity scenes, model renders, screencasts, audio recordings etc)
- Uncompiled versions of work (FMOD projects, Blender projects, Unity projects)
- A pdf text (500 words) that explains what you were trying to achieve in the design and interpretation of the scene. This file should also explain and illustrate your working methods. Please also make sure that work has full credits and that and books, magazines, films, sounds are cited correctly.

4 Submission 2 - Interactive Environments - 70%

The second submission requires participants to create interpretations of the described Invisible Cities as a navigable and interactive Unity environment.

This is a group submission although marks will be individuated by participant contribution and peer group assessment.

The submission should encourage intuitive exploration and depth of engagement through game-like mechanics and narrative devices.

The deadline for this is in the course calendar: http://digital.eca.ed.ac.uk/interactivesoundenvironments/

This submission is designed to challenge your skills in interpretation, and is a test for your structural design skills too; how will you make a compelling shape from seemingly disparate, disconnected and off-hand descriptions that will work as discrete episodes but also as part of a larger whole. There will be additional challenges in working as part of a group, careful time management and planning are essential.

Realise your sound design in the FMOD Studio Environment and link it to a Unity scene. We’d like you to make a rich and multilayered experience. Place sound emitters that are sensitive to the point of audition of the person navigating the space, and tell your story through sound and space.

You are permitted to make voice recordings of extracts of the text if you wish but please bear in mind that these should be used sparingly and be linked closely to the sound design elements of the piece. We will spend around 5 minutes in your space so make sure that the scene communicates all it needs to in that duration, acknowledging that much more time could be spent in this multidimensional world.

We’d also like you to submit a screen-grab-video made with iShowU or other screen grabbing video app. This should show your ideal walk-through of the space.

Working Method

- Read the script selections. Pay very close attention to your first impressions and ideas, you’ll never have these again.
• Make notes after you’ve read the script, then read again more meticulously and make more detailed notes. Make sure you do this in one go, do not break your concentration here, make sure you have at least 20 clear minutes to do this.

• Interpretation, how will FMODStudio and a 3D non-linear environment be best used to realise your idea?

• Make a list of sounds/models/scripts you think you’ll need. What have you already got? How will you manage assets?

• How will you style and design the environment as a group? Is there an aesthetic and experiential direction?

• Plan structures, storyboards, responsibilities and deadlines.

• What is unique about being able to move around a story, rather than experience the story linearly?

• Do you have time to realise your vision or should you re-style/re-imagine things to fit in with the deadline?

• It might be worth keeping hold of these plans for use in your submission.

**Submission 2 - Details**

Submit the following (as appropriate) zipped up to the online submission system by midnight on the day of submission

• Compiled versions of work (Unity scenes)

• Uncompiled versions of work (FMOD projects, Blender projects, Unity projects)

• Your ideal walk through as a video grab with good quality audio

• A pdf file of instructions, contextual information and working methods (1000 words max)

Written text should be structured as follows and be no longer than 800 words plus references, examples, images etc.:

• Title

• Description – the section of the story you’ve chosen, explained in your own words (250 words max). The page numbers of where the scene is to be found in the edition we’ve provided for you.

• Description – your response to the story including any influences (400 words max)

• Instructions – How to open the environment and guarantee the system works. These would be the kind of instructions you might give a game designer about the parameters you’ve defined and how to manipulate them within FMOD.

• Credits – Any people you’ve collaborated with and what they’ve done

• Bibliography / Listening list
5 Criteria for assessment

Work will be assessed in line with the University’s common marking scheme (http://digital.eca.ed.ac.uk/sdhandbook/marking-scheme/) and on the basis of:

- Skills in creatively deploying and creating your own resources.
- Imaginatively responding to open-ended design challenges.
- Demonstrated competence with appropriate production tools and skills (e.g. FMOD, Blender, Unity, mixing, modelling, scripting).
- Precision and competence in presentation, including well formatted documentation of the work.
- Ability to meet the requirements of the project brief and deal creatively with its open-ended aspects.
- Design quality of the work in terms of meeting functional requirements, legibility, usability, interactivity, and appropriate use of media.
- High quality design whilst being faced with other creative challenges, especially limits of time.
- Account will be taken of the risks taken and degree to which the design deviates from standard solutions.

Please note that assessment will take account of tradeoffs between the above criteria, particularly in light of the diverse backgrounds of students in the class. You are encouraged to seek feedback during the development of your work, but please note that adhering to feedback does not guarantee a high assessment of the completed work. Note also that the assessment of the work is not necessarily commensurate with the amount of time spent on the project work.

We will offer constructive feedback on the submissions but cannot give detailed FB on every detail of the work submitted. Within four weeks of the first submission you will have received short written feedback on your work and a provisional mark, to be confirmed after the exam board in May/June of the year of study. Tutors may refer to the risks taken in response to the brief, the sound quality, the approach you’ve taken with your system-based sound design, the clarity of the written components, the style and clarity of the sound design and the conceptual approach taken or technical issues that may help you in future.

6 References