

Streets+Play=Fun

Author #1

Name: Subalekha Udayasankar
Org: Parsons the new school for Design
Country: United States
Email: subalekha@gmail.com

Author #2

Name: LeAnne Wagner
Org: Parsons the new school for Design
Country: United States
Email: leanne_wagner@hotmail.com

Abstract

"Big Games are human-powered software for cities, life-size collaborative hallucinations, and serious fun" - Frank Lantz.

"Play" was once a word that used to be associated with games such as Hide and Seek and Tag. It is now widely used to represent sedentary activities. To quote a fourth-grader in San Diego, "I like to play indoors 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are", (Last Child in the Woods). The Wii has brought back the physical nature of play, but still restricts the player to the indoors. As game designers and theorists, we are left with the responsibility of answering the question "Have video games put an end to the era of outdoor play?" As well as "Can a solution be found in the emerging technology that is being used to enhance outdoor play?"

A Big Game is defined as any that is played using the city and streets as a game board. Big games, over the last few years, have mostly been part of organized events. The author of "Big Games and Smart Mobs", written on 17 May 2004 says "Big Games have the potential to get game players out of their seats and into the streets. While current versions require a great deal of preparation and are scheduled events, I can imagine a time in the very near future when a smart mob might self-organize a pickup game of Street Pac-Man on a Friday night." It is a surprise that in 2009, Big games have not progressed much further. Why have big games not left the realm of art projects and scheduled events? Is it because of the lack of research in the area of Big Game?

This workshop will give participants an introduction to Big Games, demonstrate their potential and kick-start them into making one:

1. Introduce participants to the Big Game genre, show examples
2. Collaborative assessment one of the games from the examples, and classification of the interaction occurring in the games into 4 categories, people, objects, city/streets and technology
3. Quick overview of the available open-source tools that could be used.
4. Hands-on activity on how to quickly prototype for a Big Game (Participants choose one from the examples in Step 1) - In the end of the session, they would have paper-prototyped a playable game experience and scoped out the next steps needed to implement it (technological requirements). This will be the main activity.

Current List for Step 3

MOBILE

SMS - open source bulk sms tools | rss & twitter
MMS - Flickr and geo tag

ADVANCED MOBILE

GPS Capabilities - iPhone & Nokoscope (Nokia)
Google Maps API

NON-DIGITAL

Paper Maps - Google Maps (My maps)

Resources in the city - people, subway, fire hydrants, telephone booths, grocery stores, etc.

The organizers of the workshop, Subalekha Udayasankar and LeAnne Wagner, are graduate students in the MFA Design and Technology program at Parsons The New School for Design. They are researchers for PETLab (petlab.parsons.edu) a game-based exploratory learning lab funded by MacArthur Foundation and Wakatta! (<http://wakkata.parsons.edu>), an initiative that conducts collaborative workshops between educational institutions that encourage digital media literacy. They have worked closely with area/code (areacodeinc.com), an industry leader in the Big Game genre, to create Budgetball (budgetball.parsons.edu.) They were also part of the creative team that designed Re:Activism (petlab.parsons.edu/reactivism) which was played in Come Out & Play in New York City 2008. They are currently working on designing a Big Game as a part of their thesis process.

Subalekha organized a demonstration on "Prototyping Play" at the Fun n' Games 2008 conference at Eindhoven, the Netherlands (<http://www.fng2008.org/>) and a workshop for teenage kids at ds4si (<http://www.ds4si.org/>) on "Mobile Media in Big Games". LeAnne presented to the audience at the Cumulus conference at St. Etienne, France 2008 on "Design Through Play: A Case-Study for How the Iterative Game-Design Process Promotes Learning"