

Chapter 7

The Forking Paths Revisited: Experimenting on Interactive Film

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ABSTRACT

Based on the triad, film-interactivity-experimentation, the applied research project, The Forking Paths, developed at the Centre for Research in Arts and Communication (CIAC) endeavors to find alternative narrative forms in the field of cinema and, more specifically, in the subfield of interactive cinema. The films in the project invest in the interconnectivity between the film narrative and the viewer, who is given the possibility to be more active and engaged. At same time, the films undertake a research on the development of audio-visual language. The project is available at an online platform, which aims to foster the creation and web hosting of other interactive cinema projects in its different variables. This chapter focuses on the three films completed up to the moment: Haze, The Book of the Dead, and Waltz.

INTRODUCTION

The Forking Paths project began in January 2013 and is available at an online platform (oscaminhosque-sebifurcam.ciac.pt) dedicated to interactive film experiences. In addition to other productions, all the films included in the project can be found at the platform: Waltz (2016), The Book of the Dead (2015) and Haze (2014). Seeking to align applied research with experimental development, this project comprised the following purposes at an early stage: the production of interactive film narratives that aim to take the viewer from an extradiegetic level to an intradiegetic level through a process of immersion;

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the reflection and the experimentation on the concept of time in cinema; the creation of a platform for hosting films and interactive film projects.

This chapter begins with a visit to the most significant moments in the history of interactive cinema, both at a purely technological level and at an aesthetic level, which is the result of a balanced combination between creative content and technology. Then, the central issue of this project, time in cinema, is developed, relating it to the theme and form of the tales chosen for adaptation. The methodology used and the interactive films produced or invited within the scope of the project will also be given special attention. Finally, the platform, the virtual place to where all content related to the project (from news to scientific articles) converges, will also be analysed in this article.

INTERACTIVE CINEMA

Several filmmakers and artists have ventured upon film productions which rely on multiple narratives, such as *Glimpses of the USA*, a 1959 film by Charles and Ray Eames (*Glimpses of the USA*, 1959).

This film consists of seven images projected simultaneously, giving the viewer the freedom to combine the images as he/she so chooses. Multiple narratives usually consist of several closed narratives and use multiple events that may intersect and complement each other, giving meaning to the story as a whole. These characteristics bear some resemblance to the aesthetics of hypertext on the internet.

Back in 1927, film director Abel Gance released *Napoleon*, an epic film with multiple projection on three adjacent screens, building an enormous triptych, a technique which became known as Polyvision. Filming with three cameras, Gance intended to create widescreen panoramas and, in this way, enhance realism (see picture 2.17). While editing, Gance realized that the use of different images, side by side, had as great an impact as the panoramas, and, for that reason, he ended up using both the widescreen panoramas and the triptych montages in the film *Napoleon*. The initial intention of achieving an increase in realism eventually led to an increase in abstraction.

In 1961, the horror film *Mr. Sardonicus* was rereleased in movie theatres. Near the end of the film, there was a poll to punish the bad guy (*Mr. Sardonicus*, 1961). Using glow-in-the-dark cards, the audience would choose if this character would die at the end of the film. Luckily, the audience always voted for Sardonicus's death, as producer William Castle never shot the scene where Sardonicus did not die (Waters, 2007).

The first interactive film narrative installed in a custom-built projection room was released in 1967: the *Kinoautomat: One man and his House* by the Czech filmmaker Radúz Činčera (*Kinoautomat*, 1967).

The movie stopped at certain points to give the audience the possibility to interact with the narrative, using buttons installed on their seats. Given the two options, the audience voted by pressing one of the buttons, either red or green, and, according to their choice, the most voted option would dictate the scene to be played. Seeing that the possibility of choice given to the audience resulted in a certain form of empowerment regarding the unfolding of the narrative made this film a success at the International and Universal Exhibition held in the city of Montreal, Canada.

In the 80s and 90s, an interactive program called *Agora Escolha* [*Now You Choose*] was broadcasted on Portuguese television. The audience was given the opportunity to choose the program to be broadcast at a certain time, between two possible options, through real-time voting and by telephone. There was a similar program in Brazil broadcasted by Rede Globo, in the 90s, named *Você decide* [*You Decide*]. The

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