Between the Sacred and the Profane in the S. João d'Arga's Festivities: A Digital Art Installation

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the concept, creative process and development decisions regarding an interactive art installation that materializes a point of view on the conflict between the notions of 'sacred' and 'profane' in a particular Portuguese religious festival. The initiative, besides constituting an experiment on the usage of a physical pendulum as control method, aimed to combine three main domains: digital art (in particular generative art), documentary value and game-like challenge. Each user undertakes a personal experience as interaction occurs with a poetic symbolic simulation of the real pilgrimage. As the user intervenes indirectly in the main struggle, the profane and sacred pilgrims, in the shape of digital autonomous agents, uncover a generated art piece that is both a product of the artist vision and the inevitable result of the users conscious and unconscious decisions.

Keywords: Art Installation, Cultural Heritage, Digital Art, Documentary, Generative Art

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper focus in a specific digital art installation developed to integrate an exhibition at the *Interior Design Centre* located in the medieval village of Óbidos, Portugal (Dominguez, 2013). The academic assignment that resulted in the project established the technological conditions, leaving not only the expressive and creative value, as well as the object of study to myself but also the fields to explore around that concept. Regarding this, a possibility of working in sequence of a research project on anthropology came to light. The object of study of that project was focused on a specific geographical location and its culture in Minho (Portugal) designated *Serra d'Arga* (meaning Arga mountain range). After being seduced by this rich and fertile theme, the main goal for my work was settled: approach a particular Serra d'Arga cultural aspect by mean of a digital art installation.

DIGITAL ART INSTALLATIONS

Digital art installations are depicted as a result of aggregated digital media communication technologies, working as environment inducers in the sense of immersion-making artistic manifestations (Paul, 2008, p. 71). They potentially explore the space through digital art as they stimulate an experience through the audience multiple senses. As with the field they are inserted in (digital art) this type of installations must incorporate, at

any phase of development, the computer medium in its creation, therefore “embracing all types of computer-supported art” (Marcos, Branco, & Zagalo, 2009, pp. 606–607). In consequence, this particular installation makes use of a specific type of digital art: digital generative art.

According to Galanter, the generative art definition can be associated to any artwork or artistic procedure resulted from the interaction of the artist on a partially autonomous system (Galanter, 2003, p. 4). This system, being computerized or not, often rely on random parameters that guarantee a constant degree of uniqueness to each product that the artefact outputs. Generative art borrows the unpredictableness, the arbitrary and the expressive potential of the artistic process; merging it to the logical, strict and instructed aspects that are associated with computer programming (Pearson, 2011, p. xviii). And even though generative art isn't exactly dependent from the existing of computer technologies, it must be based on some sort of machine or set of rules (Galanter, 2003, p. 13), when the computation resources and capabilities meet generative art, then one may consider configuring it as a branch of digital art.

My work can be configured in these categories as it aims to explore technology in favour of an artistic, aesthetic and symbolic expression based on documentary material that encompasses the result of my vision on a specific object of study.

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