

Rock Stars & Plastic Guitars: Designing & Playing with Captured Experiences in Music Videogames

Kelly Boudreau

Harrisburg University of Science and Technology
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA
kboudreau@harrisburgu.edu

Cindy Poremba

OCAD University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
cporemba@faculty.ocadu.ca

Keywords

Indexicality, Hauntology, Captured Media, Motion Capture, New Materialism, Networked Play, Music Games, Rhythm Games

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Few videogame genres are as dependent on captured media in the creation of player experience as music and rhythm games. Through the use of “instrument” peripherals, live performance recordings, motion and performance capture, and even dynamic video, the connections between gameplay and real music performance have long been packaged as part of the play experience. Significantly, player experience commonly sits within the same entanglement of desires, expectations, and material affordances as the design context in relation to captured media. How is the design and play of these games haunted by our active and ongoing negotiation of what it means to “capture” and re- present the real? What might this mean for games designed to engage and immerse players in real rock music performance?

This paper explores the interrelation of design intent and played experience, in co-constituting “real” (including both authentic and actual) experience in immersive music and rhythm games. This will be illustrated through the most recent incarnations of the Rock Band (Harmonix) and Guitar Hero (FreeStyle) franchises, as both designers and players strive to construct encounters with real music performance. We argue in such an entanglement both designers and players co-constitute experiences of “real” music engagement, drawing, in particular, on understandings, expectations and desires involving captured or recorded media.

Combining a network analysis (Belliger and Krieger 2014) of the use of capture in the construction of “real” experience in immersive music performance games, with a new materialist rhetorical analysis (Gries 2015) of how captured media is mobilized for reality effects, this work aims to unpack the differences between claims of authentic and actual player experiences as assembled through design and play. In doing so, we make visible the ways in which concepts such as indexicality are mobilized within networks, not as a semiotic property of media but as a spectral entanglement drawn from the interrelation of technology, material performance, and re-presented experience. This framework draws upon Derrida’s concept of hauntology (Derrida

Proceedings of DiGRA 2019

© 2019 Authors & Digital Games Research Association DiGRA. Personal and educational classroom use of this paper is allowed, commercial use requires specific permission from the author.

1993) to re-interpret indexicality as an agent within media entanglements in a postmedia context.

While this work builds upon prior work exploring player experience (Miller 2012), immersion (Collins 2013), music game peripherals (Tanenbaum and Bizzocchi 2009; Jenson and de Castell 2014), and authenticity (Dozal 2016; Allison forthcoming) in music and rhythm videogames, it differs in our aim to address the interdependent relationship between design intent, materialities of play and production, and player experience within the network of digital gameplay. Through understanding the ways in which modes of capture are used by designers, re-experienced by players, and haunted by desires and expectations surrounding indexicality, we can begin to address broader questions surrounding the use of captured media within videogames, including the ethical implications surrounding indexicality as an agent in meaningful player experiences with material music performance.

As created and captured modes of media are converging, and as the development of virtual reality games increasingly work to connect the captured environment with the player through the physical body, we increasingly negotiate the relationship between those environments and the materiality in terms of questions of presence, reality and authenticity of context and experience. By exploring capture technologies in a way that makes visible the range of experiences being constructed from a conceptual level, this work can present new ways of understanding the interrelation of capture, indexicality and experience, that both suggests new ways to engage players in rock music experience, and extends to our other designed and played experiences with captured media.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allison, Tanine. forthcoming. "Capturing Motion: Digital Performance in Contemporary Film, Television, Animation, and Video Games." Tanine Allison. <http://www.tanineallison.com/capturing-motion-digital-performance-in-contemporary-film-television-animation-and-video-games.html>.
- Belliger, Andréa, and David Krieger. 2014. *Interpreting Networks: Hermeneutics, Actor-Network Theory, and New Media*. Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag.
- Cheng, Willam. 2014. *Sound Play: Video Games and the Musical Imagination*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Collins, Karen. 2013. *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1993. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. 1 edition. New York: Routledge.
- Dozal, Mario A. 2016. "Consumerism Hero: The 'Selling Out' of Guitar Hero and Rock Band." In *Music Video Games: Performance, Politics, and Play*, edited by Michael Austin, 127–52. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Gries, Laurie. 2015. *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*. 1 edition. Logan: Utah State University Press.
- Jenson, Jennifer, and Suzanne de Castell. 2014. "From Simulation to Imitation: New Controllers, New Forms of Play," 7.
- Miller, Kiri. 2012. *Playing Along: Digital Games, YouTube, and Virtual Performance*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tanenbaum, Joshua, and Jim Bizzocchi. 2009. "Rock Band: A Case Study in the Design of Embodied Interface Experience." In *Proceedings of the 2009 ACM*

SIGGRAPH Symposium on Video Games, 127–134. Sandbox '09. New York, NY, USA: ACM.