

Just a Bit of Spin

Contributed by Deborah Turnbull
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General Information

Artist: Brigid Costello

Exhibition Dates:

29 October - 2 February 2008

Location:

Beta_space, Cyberworlds Gallery,

the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Cost:

Free with Entry to the Powerhouse Museum

Background

Just a Bit of Spin is part of a practice-based PHD research project being conducted at the Creativity and Cognition Studios (CCS) in the

University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). This research project is focused on interaction design and is investigating the use of play and exploration as a design tool for stimulating audience engagement. The Beta_space Play exhibition in 2005 was also part of this project.

Just a Bit of Spin is an expression of the dismay the artist feels at the lack of real debate occurring in much political discourse. In the era of the sound bite, the blog post and the YouTube grab we have more access than ever to the present and past words of our politicians. Paradoxically as more and more of these words are able to be recorded and recalled there seems to be less and less value in what is being said. When careless words might ruin a career, careful words often become bland, meaningless and repetitive. By interacting with Just a bit of Spin the audience is able to play with and transform a collection of phrases from such political speeches. The audience's creations will certainly be less bland and might even be more meaningful than the original spin.

The interaction design philosophy in Just a bit of Spin reworks the design of the early animation device, the phenakistoscope. Spinning the disc in this work also triggers animation but this animation is now driven by a computer and is accompanied by sound. Costello's work asks its audience to play with words taken from the speeches of Australian politicians. By spinning the disc back and forth the audience is able to mix new meanings from hackneyed political phrases.

This piece invites its audience to reflect on the "spin" politicians put on simple words, particularly those that politicians use to characterise themselves and, often by extension, Australia as a nation. The visuals in Just a bit of Spin are inspired partly by poker (pokey) machines. Poker machines are used here as a symbol of a political climate that values economic returns much more highly than social returns. Their iconography may also suggest an analogy between the poker machine's false promise of "winnings" and politician's promises of a "better life" for Australians if they are elected.

Research Queries

This is the first public showing of Just a bit of Spin. A prototype of this work was first evaluated in the CCS laboratory in December 2006. This new version of the work will now be evaluated in the public context of Beta-space. Costello is particularly interested in evaluating the changes that were made between prototype and finished work. A particular focus of this public evaluation will be whether the prototype and the finished work have had any influence on the ability of the work to stimulate play and exploration.

Press Coverage

UNSW Localised Press Release

Southern Courier News - Just a Bit of Spin article, by Nick Montcrieff-Hill

Artist's Biography

Brigid Costello is lecturer in interaction design at the University of New South Wales. She is also a practising multimedia artist with expertise in interaction design, programming and visual design. Brigid is currently researching a PHD in Computer Science at the University of Technology, Sydney Creativity and Cognition Studios.

Acknowledgements

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