Stepping into the story for good? Exploring the opportunities and challenges of immersive storytelling.

A workshop hosted by the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds 8 – 12th April 2019

Key contacts:

Dr Kate Nash, Associate Professor in Media and Communication K.Nash@leeds.ac.uk

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This workshop will bring together academics and immersive media practitioners to explore how we might develop immersive storytelling practices to foster forms of positive change for individuals and society. We aim to explore storytelling strategies and challenges with a view to finding areas of common interest for future research development.

All sessions will be held in Clothworkers North Building at the University of Leeds (details of the venue to follow). Tea, coffee and lunch will be provided (please do let Sarah Hall (S.A.Hall@leeds.ac.uk) know which days you will be attending and if you have any dietary or access requirements). There will also be some loosely organised social events in the evenings for anyone staying in Leeds.

Monday 8th April

9.30 – 10am	**Tea, Coffee and Registration**
10 – 10.30	**Welcome from the organising team**
10.30 – 12.30pm	**Workshop - Immersive stories in and through** Archives (Chair: Alison Peirse) **Dr Guy Schofield Lecturer in Interactive Media, University of York** Dr Schofield worked as a member of a University of York digital media team to create 'Virtual Reality Vikings' as part of a major exhibition, Viking: Rediscover the Legend, at the Yorkshire Museum in partnership with the British Museum (https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2017/research/virtual-reality-vikings/). Dr Schofield will reflect on the process of undertaking this project with a specific focus on storytelling and generating emotion for audiences. What is distinctive about immersive media in terms of storytelling? **Rachel Moaby, Sunnybank Mills Archive, Leeds** The Archive represents a unique look at 180 years of cloth produced at the mill. It is housed within 4000sq ft of the historic Sunny Bank Mills mill founded in 1829. This nationally important Archive consists of; Fabric records including over 300 guard books containing thousands of textile cuttings; Over 60,000 lengths of fabric; Over 8,000 fabric designs; 5,000

	wool dyeing recipe cards; 100 leather bound ledgers and cash books; Weaving Looms; Photographs and memorabilia and a library of mill related books. Rachael will speak on the Mill's public engagement work and the potential for immersive stories to facilitate a deeper engagement with archival materials.
	Jen Povey and Louise Piffero, Textile Archives, University of Leeds Special Collections
	The University of Leeds Special Collections hold a range of textile archives that tell many stories about the textile histories of the city and the University. Jen and Louise will speak about the archives and the ways in which the textile collection might lend itself to immersive stories.
	Kelly Zarins, International Research Centre for Interactive Storytelling
	Kelly will share her experiences of practice-based research and imperfect DIY methods in relation to immersive storytelling. She will consider how the archives objectives discussed so far might be put into practice into practice in terms of immersive storytelling, thinking about her own production method for co-creation, which is very much 'process over end product'.
**VR Works Display 12.30 – 2pm There will be a curated selection of VR works available to view throughout the week in the New Media Lab**
**Lunch 12.30 – 2pm**
2 – 4.30pm	**Roundtable & Respondents: 'Where Next for Interactive Stories?' (Chair Alison Peirse)**
	BBC Future Experiences Technologies Story Projects
	Mike Armstrong (Senior R&D Engineer, BBC), Nick Hanson (Development Producer, BBC), David Johnston (Senior Produce Manager, VR / AR, BBC)
	Reflecting on BBC R&D projects including 'The Story Explorer' and 'Narrative Structures for Responsive Media'. How can we make stories that work respond to audience in the way that a human storyteller can adapt their story to their audience and respond to questions? How might we make use of what we know about storytelling in a linear environment and apply this to non-linear experience in a visually immersive environment?
	Respondents:
	Professor Catherine Johnson, Professor of Media and Communications, University of Huddersfield
	Johnson will respond to the BBC roundtable in terms of the broader industrial landscape (particularly as it pertains to changes to the TV industry) and the ways in which this might affect the more mainstream production and distribution of forms of interactive storytelling.

	Dr Jenna Ng, Head of Interactive Media, University of York Immersive media, subjectivity and empathy: thinking about immersive media as experiential – the proprioceptive, 360-degree surround sound and the central perspective of the user – has been widely seen to open up spaces for new forms of empathetically oriented and affective storytelling.
	Close: Reflections and Reception at the Terrace

Tuesday 9ᵗʰ April

9.30 – 10am	**Arrival, networking and VR works on display**
10am – 11.30am	**Further Explorations in Storytelling (Chair: Kate Nash)** **Dan Tucker Sheffield Doc Fest** Dan will consider some of the ways in which immersive storytelling is developing, linking issues to the works he has selected for viewing. **Dr Scott Palmer, University of Leeds Performance and Cultural Industries** **Immersive Theatre Practice and Designing for Audience Experience** Using Estate 360° as a Case study - the session will explore issues arising from the making of an experimental interactive 360-degree video that emerged from a relational 'immersive' site- specific theatre project for a public audience, staged in historic grounds in South Florida, USA in April 2017. The specific nature of the performance event, the filming of aspects of this experience and the post-production processes each raise significant questions relating to the development of methods of 'interactive' digital storytelling for 'immersive' audience experience. The role of theatre practice and performance design in developing these mediated experiences seems to be an important element that has largely been ignored in thinking about how digital immersive experiences might be created. The video Estate 360° was first published online in January 2018 and is freely available to download: https://interactive.miami.edu/estate/ **Dr Julia Scott-Stevenson, Research Fellow in Interactive Factual Media, UWE.** **Towards a preferred future? A manifesto for immersive media** How might we rethink the potentials of immersion in light of social, environmental and political challenge?

11.30 – 11.45	Morning Tea
11.45 – 1pm	**Immersive humanitarianism? Exploring opportunities and challenges (Chair Kate Nash)** **Tom Perry, World Bank** Tom Perry is the World Bank's Team Leader for Pacific Communications. He has worked on a number of VR projects for the World Bank including the *Price of Conflict* and *Our Home, Our People*. He is currently working on a project on ocean pollution. He is particularly interested in developing thinking about immersive storytelling and its implications for questions of representation and ethics. He will talk about his own experience of production and some of the challenges that he has faced. **Dr Kate Wright, University of Edinburgh** Dr Wright has been working at the intersection of humanitarian communication, global justice and emerging technologies. She is currently Co-Investigator on an AHRC project on Humanitarian Journalism (with Mel Bunce and Martin Scott who may also attend). She will discuss some of her findings in relation to the changing practices of humanitarian communication and the impacts of technology. She will outline what she sees as the key issues to be explored in relation to immersive humanitarian communication **Dr Al Baker, University of Leeds** **Empathy, Ethics and Immersive Media: A Philosophical Perspective** How should we think about the way immersive storytelling uses, improves or otherwise interacts with empathy? And what are the potential ethical benefits and pitfalls of an empathy-focused approach to immersive works?
1-2pm Lunch and VR Works on display	
2 – 3pm	**Dr Katy Roelich and Catherine Graves** **VR and decision-making in contexts of uncertainty** This presentation/workshop will explore uses of VR to stimulate creativity and change behaviour in relation to complex issues as well as the ethical issues associated with its use.
3 – 3.15	Break
3.15 – 3.45	**Ben Stubbs University of South Australia** Teaching immersive storytelling – what can we learn about storytelling from the perspective of teaching? The University of South Australia has recently won an award from the Guardian for its Immerse programme. Ben will demonstrate Immerse and reflect on its significance for thinking about immersive storytelling
Close (with optional social activity for those staying in Leeds)	

Wednesday 10th April

9 – 10am	Arrival, networking and VR works on display
10 – 10.30	**Dr Faisal Mushtaq, University of Leeds Centre for Immersive Technologies** An introduction to the University of Leeds' new Centre for Immersive Technologies. An overview of the research agenda and working with the Centre.
10.30 – 11am	**Research Directions in immersive media Professor Andrew Prescott, University of Glasgow**, Theme Leader 'Digital Transformations' AHRC
11 – 12.30	**Workshop: Telling Stories Using 360° Video with Peter North, School of Media and Communication** In this exploratory workshop you will have the chance to get your hands on some 360-degree video recording equipment to give a new perspective on the challenges of immersive storytelling.
**12.30 – 1.30 Lunch + VR works on display**
1.30 – 2pm	**Academic Industry partnerships: Finding funding and making them work Steve Manthorp and Nichola Casse, The Leeds Cultural Institute**
From 2pm	**Brainstorming questions and research possibilities based on discussions so far**
**Close**

Thursday 11th April

10.30am-3:30pm	Arrival, networking and VR works on display
Day-long event	**Workshop: The Shape of Games to Come** **Sandboxing Augmented and Mixed Reality Games and Interactives** **(Chair, Steve Manthorp University of Leeds Cultural Institute)** As tech companies compete to develop wireless augmented & mixed reality (A&MR) headsets for the mass market, it is inevitable that there will soon be demand for creative digital content experienced in, and integrated with, real world places and situations. This ideas sandbox will playfully explore the unique creative and academic potential that A&MR platforms will offer to storytellers, artists, researchers and the games & interactive sector. In mixed group work, we will invent, design and rapidly iterate several 'paper pilots' of A&MR games and interactives. In so doing, we will explore what the A&MR cultural content of the future might look & feel like and what stories it could tell. The paper pilots will be recorded and shared with participating delegates by email.
**Spaces will be made available for those wishing to work on project development**

Friday 12th April

9 – 10am	Arrival, networking and VR works on display
10 – 12.30	**Disrupting the Authorship of Immersive Stories (Chair Andrew Prescott)** This session will evaluate the potential for recently released 'consumer-level' technologies to disrupt the authorship of immersive stories and provide the opportunity for an open discussion regarding the significance this might have for our research. Drawing upon recent projects in which two different communities engaged with these technologies (a rural community of schoolchildren near Santiago, Chile and a community of adults with learning difficulties in York), the session will address issues of embodiment, voice and place-making. *Blueberry Academy—Self voicing and place making* – Simon Popple *Chile- schools project* – Andrea Vargas Velasquez and Tom Jackson *Digital natives -re self-representation through technology*- Thea Pitman
Lunch 12.30 – 1.30	
1.30 – 3pm	**The Ethics of Virtual Memorialisation (Chair Kate Nash)** This afternoon will be dedicated to exploring the ethics of virtual memorialisation and the growing development of virtual and sensory approaches to representing the experience of trauma and difficult histories. **Virtual Holocaust Memoryscapes – Tom Jackson** The AHRC/EPSRC funded project Virtual Holocaust Memoryscapes investigated the potential for immersive technologies to facilitate new ways for visitors and researchers to access, engage with and understand Holocaust memorial sites. Following consultations and workshops at the memorial sites, a number of prototype immersive technology projects were implemented and evaluated. These included multisensory 'virtual archives' of parts of the Neuengamme and Bergen-Belsen sites, embodied, location-specific auditory experiences and, most ambitiously, a 'virtual interface' intended to bring together a vast array of different types of testimony into a single, unified experience, accessed through VR headsets. This session will involve a brief demonstration of these prototype projects, followed by an open discussion of the ethical issues they present.

	Kate Marrison, PhD Student University of Leeds The Last Goodbye, Witness and Mediated Presence.
	Due to the inevitable and imminent passing of the Holocaust survivor generation, our cultural obsession with recording and documenting Holocaust memory has reached its peak, and as a result, several digital projects have emerged hoping to preserve survivor testimony in what Amanda Lagerkvist (2017) terms the 'digital afterlife'. This presentation will consider Holocaust memory and virtual reality through the lens of witness.
3.30	**Workshop close and next steps**