GPS Comics: *Seeing thru Walls*

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1 Introduction

In the digital era, the comics medium is transported from print to computer screen. Current digital comics (web comics or online comics) are confined to computer screen and use the affordances of digital medium in a limited way. GPS Comics: *Seeing thru Walls* is a GPS based comics story that expands the comic canvas and explores the idea of location-based comics. In *Seeing thru Walls*, in order to receive the meaning in a comic frame the player must experience a sensory detail (a smell, sound, breeze or an object) in her surroundings in the physical world. The concept of location-based comics is an unexplored idea and gives artists new meaning making strategies.

2 Related Work

Unlike the print medium, the digital medium offers a vast amount of canvas. [McCloud 2000] imagines the computer monitor as a window that can be scrolled across an infinite canvas in *Reinventing Comics*. The current geotagging technology points to the possibility of using the entire surface of the world as a canvas for digital comics. Although there is no example of an infinite canvas comic that uses geotagging or GPS technology, existing photograph posting and spatial navigation applications, GPS based creative projects such as Robin Hewlet's and Ben Kinsley's *Street with a View*, Jeremy Wood's drawing projects with GPS, and Blast Theory's and Mixed Reality Lab's *Uncle Roy All Around You*, GPS games such as Perblue Software Company's *Parallel Kingdom* and Mapion's *Keitai Kunitori Gassen* are helpful in providing ideas for similar uses for comics narration. GPS Comics: *Seeing thru Walls* is the first GPS based comics story exploring the idea of location-based comics.

3 Interactions

A player can explore the comics story, *Seeing thru Walls,* with an iPhone or an iPad by walking in the 4 mile square area around University of California, Berkeley campus. The comics story develops by referring to the details of the physical world. The rectangular shaped street blocks of the map are the comic panels. Contents of the comics panels can be activated and viewed by physically walking around the Downtown Berkeley area and by reaching hot spots. The player can have a conversation with the virtual comics characters in the neighborhood and take a walk with them. During an hour-long interaction the system captures the snapshots of the player's experience and compiles a comic strip. This experience provides an improvisational play space for narrative interaction and acts as a comics generator regardless of a participant's ability to draw or design a comic strip of their own.

4 Story Concept

The story concept of *Seeing thru Walls* aims to create awareness about the impact of prejudices in human connection while using humor as a tool. In *Seeing thru Walls,* the player is one of the characters of the comics story. The player tries to learn about the personalities of virtual characters without knowing their gender, race, social status, age, and physical appearance. Player's objective is to gain access to a drawn image of a virtual character's apartment. In order to gain access to an apartment, the player walks to a hot spot while simultaneously avoiding obstacles put in player's path. If the contents of the apartment indicate an interesting character, player can physically meet with the character who lives there by walking toward that character. The selected virtual character takes a walk with the player. The character shows his or her three favorite destinations in the Downtown Berkeley Area. Examples could be a building façade decorated with a gecko sculpture or a corner that smells of bleach because of a near by swimming pool. Reaching a virtual profile's favorite location reveals a comics frame. This comic frame refers to a detail in that physical location and gives further information about the virtual character (see Figure 1). At the end of this walk, if the player likes the personality of the profile, player can pick this person to connect as friend or a lover and finally learn about the age, race, gender, and physical appearance of the virtual character. Player can see her comic strip compiled by the system.
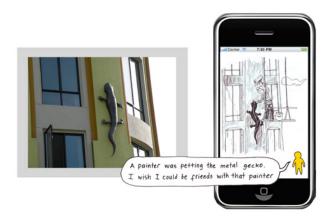

Figure 1: *In physical reality, player sees a gecko sculpture on the façade of the building. On the iPhone screen a location-based comic portrays a previous moment witnessed by one of the virtual characters.*

5 Implementation

We are in the implementation process of *Seeing thru Walls*. We aim to complete the implementation and make the first play tests in July 2010.

References

MCCLOUD, S. 2006. *Reinventing Comics*. New York: HarperCollins Books, 222.