Chapter X

Digital Songlines :
Digitising the Arts, Culture and Heritage Landscape of Aboriginal Australia

Brett Leavy, CyberDreaming, Australia

Abstract

Digital Songlines is a software toolkit being developed by the Australasian Cooperative Research Centre for Interaction Design. It consists of an applied set of protocols, methodologies and a software program for the collection and sharing of indigenous cultural heritage knowledge. Regular consultation with indigenous traditional owners and representative groups is an essential component of the development process. This article provides an overview of the components of the Digital Songlines toolkit, and illustrates the development of the cultural heritage system in its current prototype. The system employs virtual reality tools to enable aboriginal communities to digitally preserve, protect and promote their arts, culture and heritage. The 3-D visualisation will allow users to appreciate the land as central to the culture, stories and lives of indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Australian aboriginal culture is one of the oldest surviving in the world. Aboriginal communities have occupied Australia for over sixty thousand years, with some estimates from research arguing that this timeframe could be extended.

Before 1788, when English settlement commenced in Australia, there were approximately 600 languages spoken, with an estimated indigenous population over 750,000 people. Today indigenous peoples comprise only 2% of the entire Australian population (about 410,000 people). Most knowledge about aboriginal culture is derived from the research of anthropologists, historians, researchers and interpretative centres, but also from Aborigines who survived the impact of European colonisation.

Digital Songlines is a software toolkit which is being developed by the Australasian Cooperative Research Centre for Interaction Design (ACID) to aid in the protection, preservation and promotion of Australian indigenous culture, its practices, myths and legends. It aims to assist the re-vitalization of the aboriginal culture through the visualization of its most prized asset — the land. The software will allow for the creation of a virtual landscape, containing oral histories, mythological stories and the eternal sense of land and spirituality, so that it can be understood and experienced by the broader community.

The software will encompass a toolset for recording aboriginal heritage, including a content management system. It will utilise virtual reality software in a multi-user virtual heritage environment (MUVHE) for the presentation of cultural knowledge of indigenous custodians, leaders and communities from throughout Australia. Digital Songlines includes a set of protocols and methodologies in addition to the software prototype. A service will put the content creation development toolkit into the hands of the communities and empower them to add to the body of knowledge.

Background:
Indigenous Cultural Heritage

Aboriginal culture was passed on through oral traditions, art, dance and rituals. Aboriginal legends served an important purpose for teaching, understanding and interpreting the connection of aboriginal people to the land they relied upon to survive in the world they lived.

These oral traditions are vivid, dramatic, educative and informative yarns that served multiple purposes, including educating the receiver about social, environ-

Related Content

Interactive Self-Assessment Questions within a Virtual Environment
Chris Evans and Luis Palacios (2011). *International Journal of E-Adoption (pp. 1-10).*
www.irma-international.org/article/interactive-self-assessment-questions-within/54721/

Empowering and Disempowering Aspects of New Media Networking and Digital Democracy
Kenneth L. Hacker and Eric L. Morgan (2013). *International Journal of Technology Diffusion (pp. 84-94).*
www.irma-international.org/article/empowering-and-disempowering-aspects-of-new-media-networking-and-digital-democracy/97138/

Evolution, Development and Growth of Electronic Money
A. Seetharaman and John Rudolph Raj (2009). *International Journal of E-Adoption (pp. 76-94).*
www.irma-international.org/article/evolution-development-growth-electronic-money/1832/

U3A Online and Successful Aging: A Smart Way to Help Bridge the Grey Digital Divide
Rick Swindell, Peter Grimbeek and Jan Heffernan (2011). *Intelligent Technologies for Bridging the Grey Digital Divide (pp. 122-140).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/u3a-online-successful-aging/46731/

Splicing Modern Knowledge and Ancestral Wisdom
John S.C. Afele (2003). *Digital Bridges: Developing Countries in the Knowledge Economy (pp. 56-84).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/splicing-modern-knowledge-ancestral-wisdom/8341/