

Interactive eBooks as a Promising Digital Field in Artistic Education. The Example of the eBook “Real Life Superheroes”.

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Abstract

Interactive eBooks are a quite new phenomenon in a digital world. However, they seem to be a very promising field in an artistic education because they are based on several key factors related both to traditional fine arts and new technologies.

Firstly, a book has been a very important part of artistic practice since the beginning of the 1900s. This area is extremely wide and includes many diverse fields such as a picture book, art book or the artist’s book etc. Therefore, either artists or viewers being used to this form of artistic expression willingly explore this phenomenon.

Secondly, the development of new technologies also affected the fine arts leading for example to digital or web art but what more importantly in this context, it has made almost everyone gain access to mobile digital devices - phones and tablets, whose total accessibility has revolutionized modern communication and education. Mobile phones have already created social but foremost visual phenomena which in turn influence other aspects of today’s life.

The eBook entitled “Real life superheroes. Polish Inventors” was created by a group of artists connected with the Polish Committee of InSEA and it is an attempt to combine new forms of informal education including different disciplines whose content is linked to highly artistic illustrations, animations and interactions. The eBook can be freely downloaded from Google Play Store enabling children from all over the world to use it.

Although this form of artistic education cannot replace traditional art class but it may contribute to easy access to fine arts and show positive visual patterns to follow.

Keywords

Interactive books, e-books, mobile digital devices, mobile phones, artist’s book, informal art education.

Introduction

There is no doubt that the mass usage of mobile devices such as smartphones or tablets has affected not only communication among society but also the way people spend their time. These mobile devices provide the space for work but mainly for entertainment. People communicate with their friends, search for some information, shop, and are also involved in different kinds of entertainment such as playing games and watching videos. “According to comScore’s 2017 Cross Platform Future in Focus report, the average American adult (18+) spends 2 hours, 51 minutes on their smartphone every day” (internet source no 1). As we may expect this data is very similar in Europe. What is more, the research shows that teenagers and young adults spend even more time on mobile phones than older people. This phenomenon has been widely discussed by scientists from various scientific disciplines such as sociology, psychology or even

medicine. But what should concern art educators the most is the poor quality of visual content that bombards people through the screens of mobile devices.

Many visuals that people encounter while playing, watching or searching on their smartphones are made by other “ordinary” people whose visual competences are not high.

Therefore, the only solution seems to be raising awareness of the role and importance of visual content in new media and this is a must for contemporary art and visual education.

An attempt to turn theory into practice

At the beginning of 2017 the Polish Committee of InSEA applied for a grant in the field of creative industry in order to finance the works on the interactive artistic ebook entitled Real-life Superheroes. Polish Inventors. The project was supported by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and at the end of the same year it became a free application which could be downloaded from the Google Play Store.

The intention of the creators of this project was to produce a wise but also interesting story supported by a beautiful layout and fine pictures that would make a great educational tool.

The artist’s book

One of the most important point of reference related to this project was and still is the artist’s book. Although, our eBook does not even pretend to be an art book but it emphasizes the importance of visual part of the book as well as the easy access to it. Both of those factors are an important part of the idea of the artist’s book.

It is worth mentioning that the artist’s book has been a part of the art world from at least 100 years (not to mention some earlier attempts such as William Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience. However, it became a tool of the contemporary artistic expression in the 1960s and 70s and was created by young artists as part of a radical alternative to the art presented

in museums and galleries. The artist's books were supposed to reach people who do not visit art museums and galleries and became a part of a real life in contrary to art object gathered by "experts" and diverse art institutions.

The subsequent generation of artists of the 1990s was still interested in the artist's book, however, they turned to a new form of artistic expression that reflected a new era in communication technologies – the Internet. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that Internet art is rooted in disparate artistic traditions and movements, ranging from Dada to Situationism, conceptual art, Fluxus, video art, kinetic art, happenings and performance art. The artist's book which can be seen as physically existing hypertext experimenting with a non-linear narrative mechanisms for the joining associations and the complex relationship between text and image is an ideal form of expression that can be presented in the digital form.

The Real-life Superheroes

The ebook presents three stories of the Polish inventors who lived at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Jan Szczepanik, Karol Pollak and Jan Czochralski came from diverse social backgrounds and had different educational experiences but what made them similar was the creativity and the will to solve problems in a usual manner. All of them succeeded despite diverse hardships and proved that every man is the architect of his own fortune. The ebook shows characters worth following, whose actions may not be spectacular but as a result they change the world for the better, helping people in their daily lives.

What is more, their inventions such as the efficient method of producing photographic color, an electrolytic catalyst and developing a new process of silicon crystallization allowed further development of the photographic, electrical and electronic industries contributing to progress in modern technologies crucial for production of smartphones or tablets.

The ebook in an interesting easy way teaches children the rules of action of the described

inventions, awakens the curiosity of the world and creativity.

Artistic dimension of the ebook

The ebook Real-life Superheroes. Polish Inventors draws attention to beautiful illustrations, unconventional animations and a fine layout. Children can watch but also touch and hear high quality pictures, which prove that an interactive play may be either artistic or educational. We may expect that children who are surrounded by high class visuals will tend to use them in future. Therefore, providing good example and showing great role models to follow is a challenge for today's art and visual education.

Consequently, the visual layer of the ebook *Real-life Superheroes* was one of the most important factors from the very beginning. In the perspective of a new media communication it was also significant to create a visual-verbal narration which is based either on words or on the pictures. In this case pictures are not just illustrations which make text more attractive as it used to be in traditional books. But they convey meaning which is crucial to understand a story as a whole.

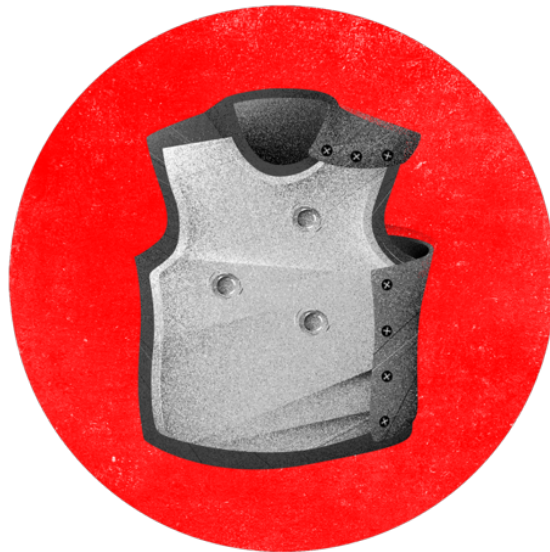
Illustrations

Since it is very difficult to discuss visuals not showing them. I would like to present a few of them.

Each story (chapter) devoted to one inventor has a similar visual structure but they differ in colors. Colors reflect the nature of the invention for example discoveries related to electricity are presented on the blue background. The main character is presented in an oval portrait based on an old photograph. His appearance resembles his real look however adjusted to a characteristic drawing style (illustration no 1).



Then there are a few small pictures depicting some of his inventions (illustration no 2)



and one big showing his main discovery (illustration no 3).



All three characters are also portrayed on the last illustration which emphasizes the importance of described inventions for our contemporary life style (illustration no 4). All pictures are interactive, it means they show animations and provide sounds after touching.

Future ebooks

Great reception of the ebook *Real-life Superheroes. Polish Inventors* confirmed validity of our previous beliefs. High visual quality is a distinguishing feature among other new media product. What is more, children enjoy fine illustration and they would chose them if they are supported by interesting narration and attractive interactions. Therefore, ebooks may become an additional tool to global art and visual education.

Following this example we decided to create a consecutive eBook entitled *The magic of Poznan. The mystery of the opera*. We are just beginning to work on it and we hope that this kind of visual creation will become a hallmark of the Polish Committee of InSEA.

References

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