The Third Woman

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Abstract. The Third Woman is an interactive mobile film-game, performance, and installation, which gradually reveals the layers of a contemporary film drama on mobile phones and screens.

Keywords: Planning, narrative generation, narrative control.

1 Introduction

In May 2008, at the first e-MobilArt project’s workshop in Athens, thirty-three digital media artists from a Euro-centric, but worldwide selection, to elaborate the theme “Passage” into new digital artworks. The Vienna Underground group was formed around the Austrian artist Nita Tandon’s idea to create a cinematic project for the Viennese U-Bahn spaces. Anna Dumitriu (UK), Cliona Harmey (Eire), Margarete Jahrmann (Switzerland), Martin Rieser (UK), Barry Roshto (US/Germany), Pia Tikka (Finland), and Nina Yankowitz (USA) joined Tandon’s proposal. Inspired by the Vienna-based film noir The Third Man (dir. Carol Reed 1949), the Vienna Underground project soon evolved under the conceptual guidance of the English media artist Martin Rieser into a multi-faceted interactive mobile film-game The Third Woman\textsuperscript{1}. The Vienna Underground group launched the mobile film-game project The Third Woman in the Vienna Kunsthalle Project Space in February 2009. The piece was subsequently shown in the e-MobiLArt Exhibitions in the State Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece; Carpenter House, Bath as Part of the Cityware Research Project; and the Academy of Fine Arts - Gallery, Katowice, Poland, 2009.

2 Thematic

The initial e-MobiLArt theme “Passage” theme was liberally interpreted using The Third Man as a “template” for common work around multiple components including: a game, installation, text mutation, “readable” garment codes, “Hertzian” space detection, sound-works, bio-art and performance. Vienna was interpreted as a place of transmission, which, in the particular context of The Third Man referred to illegal underground activities. The city of Vienna that Graham Green’s

\textsuperscript{1} See: http://www.ioct.dmu.ac.uk/Third_Woman (last accessed: 2009-09-23).
script once assigned as a totemic post-war space between the East and West, now reflected the tensions of globalisation. As in the *The Third Man*, where the “underground” trade in penicillin by the Harry Lime character caused the death of innocent people, so did the practice of the modern healer Lara Line in *The Third Woman*, when she accidentally releases the smuggled contagious biomaterial called *Miasma*. The word ‘Miasma’ refers to the mythic phenomenon of ‘bad air’, which in the historical city of Vienna was blamed for causing the plague. Along with *Miasma*, ubiquitous microbiological *Code* and its cultural parallels became a key theme, woven into *The Third Woman* film-game and its viewer participation. This was also reflected at the project launch venue, as the Vienna Kunsthalle happened to be located on top of the world’s first modern sewer system, the site of the original *Third Man*, as well as *The Third Woman* film. Embedded in an era of multi-cultural communities, conflict, and fear of terrorism, the project relates to issues such as illegal migration and the black economy, familiar to the “underground” worlds of modern cities. In the *Third Woman* film-game, the Viennese underground system symbolises these invisible worlds, and is similarly “mapped” as a conceptual layer onto each future exhibition location, determining the spatial distribution of the game elements in any city.

3 The Film Plot and Production

A young woman healer, Holly Matins (Maria Järvenhelmi), arrives in Vienna, and invites the audience to join her search for possible answers to the mysterious death of her friend, the healer Lara Line (Catherine Adams). Along with the gradually evolving love story between Holly and the late Lara’s lover, a young Pakistani actor Shalo (Valmike Rampersad), Holly finds out about Lara’s obscure business with the criminal figure Roscov (Ranj Nagra). When the corrupted police detective Kurt (Martin Rieser) reveals that Lara has smuggled bio-materials to fund her spiritual activities and has accidentally released the deadly contagious distribution of *Miasma*, Holly decides to leave Vienna; yet Lara has one more surprise waiting for Holly.

The film script, filming, and postproduction was completed as a joint effort by the Finnish filmmaker Pia Tikka and Martin Rieser, in collaboration with a number of film professionals from Finland, UK, and Austria. Film locations included the Viennese Sewage System, the Flak tower, and the U-Bahn, echoing the *film noir* spirit of *The Third Man*. All scenes were filmed so as to combine the on-site actress Maria Järvenhelmi and virtually matted actors. Digital technology enabled the team to virtually matte English actors onto the Vienna film scenes in the green-screen studio at De Montfort University, UK. Although the actors never met during the production, the “filmic chemistry” between Holly and Shalo on the screens proved this experimental method successful. The three differently nuanced versions of each scene (‘Reason’, ‘Intuition’, ‘Emotion’) were filmed, allowing many narrative variations.

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