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Title of Study

Recomposing the Archive: remediating memories of Iraqi diaspora with archive photography, oral history, and Virtual Reality.

Introduction

This practice-led research project utilises a participatory design approach which aims to produce a series of immersive visual artworks. Collaborating with Iraqi diaspora across the world, specifically 1st generation Iraqis who emigrated since the 1950s and their descendants, the researcher is curating an online archive of personal photographs (www.iraqphotoarchive.com) and audio-visual recordings of memories surrounding those photographic moments. This archive seeks photographs taken in Iraq generally before 1980. They can be images of landscapes, monuments, buildings, or people. This archive is interested in images of daily life, both on the street and in the home. The audio-visual recordings are concerned with the stories and memories surrounding these images. These interviews will help to reconstruct the past through capturing the voices that are normally left out of historical accounts. The project is designed for Iraqi diaspora to share and narrate their experiences; to be the authors of their own stories.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research study is to explore the re-composition of historical photographs and stories from Iraqi diaspora into Virtual Reality simulations. The simulations will aim to convey the memories of Iraqi diaspora surrounding their photographs through immersive technology, as well as provide representations of Iraqi people and places in digital environments that are led by Iraqis themselves. The outcomes intend to demonstrate innovative ways to combine archive photography and audio-visual oral history within VR. This research seeks to enhance Virtual Reality experiences of the past to create a rich emotional connection, and foster broader understanding of Iraqi narratives across communities. The works aim to set a methodological and technological framework to empower artists, researchers, and historians to creatively explore and represent the past in order to add new historical perspectives and raise awareness of issues among wider audiences. This project aims to build wider understanding and knowledge of Iraqi stories beyond media representations of conflict. Furthermore, recording these stories contributes to building wider collective histories within the Iraqi diaspora community as well as works towards decolonisation of historic narratives.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been contacted as you took part in the first stage of this research by submitting a photograph to www.iraqphotoarchive.com and consented to be contacted about this oral history stage of the research. I am asking you to take part in the research because of your participation in the Iraq Photo Archive project and I believe that recording your memories and stories surrounding the photograph(s) is an important aspect of preserving intangible Iraqi heritage. Your contributions will form a valuable archive of hitherto unrecorded narratives, and will hopefully have the potential to attract further interest amongst Iraqi diaspora internationally to grow the archive further.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. I would like you to consent to participate in this study as I believe that you can make an important contribution to the research. I believe the research will also be of benefit to you, to help share stories and new perspectives on Iraq. If you do not wish to participate, you do not have to do anything in response to this request.

Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

What will happen if I take part?

If you are happy to participate in the research, you are asked to read this information sheet and sign and submit the consent form. When I receive this, I will contact you to discuss and arrange your participation in a filmed oral history interview. At that point I can confirm your participation and make arrangements to conduct the filming at a suitable time and location. Filming should take no longer than 60 minutes. You will be free to stop the interview at any time you wish. Some of the audio from the recording may be used as part of a narration in a Virtual Reality experience, and the recorded film may be presented during public presentations of this project. You will be contacted for your consent prior to any public presentation of the material, in part or in whole.

What are the possible benefits and risks of taking part?

Whilst there may be no specific personal benefits to your participation in this study, the interview you provide will help to contribute narratives and memories about Iraq (in the context of your photograph), to this research, and to the wider community.

I do not anticipate any risks or discomforts to you from participating in this research. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

The oral history interviews however do involve discussion of personal photographs, descriptions of the photographs, and memories surrounding the context of the image, which could depict deceased relatives or friends, or places of displacement or exile, and as such, have the potential to be triggering or distressing.

Should you become distressed during an interview, I will stop the interview immediately.

Will my taking part be kept confidential?

Your name will be kept anonymous in any report I publish. I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or any individual participant by name. Participants will be able to pick their own synonym names for protection of their identity, if they wish. Only the researcher will have access to the real identities, and it will not be shared to anyone else. As the oral history interviews are filmed, your image will be recorded and can be displayed in the publication of the research, as well as in the exhibition of the project.

How is the project being funded?

This PhD research is funded by scholarship from The Glasgow School of Art.

What will happen to the results of the study?

This research will manifest in a public exhibition of artworks, including a curated selection of archive photographs, oral history films, and immersive VR experiences. An online digital archive, www.iraqphotoarchive.com, will be a repository for photographs submitted by

contributors. A detailed written thesis will introduce and contextualise the aims and objectives, describe and evaluate the methodology and analyse the final results.

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this study, please contact me using the following contact details:

Basil Al-Rawi, PhD Student Researcher, School of Simulation and Visualisation, The Glasgow School of Art, The Hub, Pacific Quay, Glasgow, G51 1EA

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What if I have further questions, or if something goes wrong?

If this study has harmed you in any way or if you wish to make a complaint about the conduct of the study you can contact GSA using the details below for further advice and information:

Dr Matthieu Poyade, Research Fellow and MSc Pathway Leader, School of Simulation and Visualisation, The Glasgow School of Art

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Thank you for reading this information sheet and for considering taking part in this research.

Please keep this document for future reference.

Basil Al-Rawi

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