

Kathleen Fox

THE SPIRIT PHONE 2.0

<https://www.thespiritphone.com/>

Artist Statement:

Kathleen Fox is a multimedia designer who works in video, animation, game design, and live performance.

Her art focuses on the idea of interaction and creating environments of empathy that allow people to learn from and understand each other. Kathleen recently worked on a project for CalArts Expo called "The Table Game." This project is both a board game and a live performance that brings together communities from different parts of the world. In this game, the members of one community work together to solve the problem of another community and then perform the solution in a live tele-performance. Kathleen also developed a virtual reality work called "Behind These Hazel Eyes" where she uses virtual reality to allow audiences to connect to a character by interacting with items scattered across her room. Each object plays back one of Hazel's memories allowing the audience to put together the pieces of Hazel's life.

Other themes Kathleen likes to explore are recovery from and the processing of trauma, as seen in her undergraduate thesis project, *The Other Play*. This project was a live performance that integrated video and animation into theatre. *The Other Play* tells the story of Geena Gallagher, a young woman who decides to undergo a new age therapy treatment that grants her a level of control over her subconscious. Geena has to try to confront different aspects of her life to find a way to cope and heal from the loss of her best friend.

As a Video Designer, Kathleen's most recent production was a western-noir *King Lear* directed by Brittney Brady in the Walt Disney Modular Theatre. A massive dust storm approaches, threatening to consume a whole world in darkness. In a heartbreaking showdown between good and evil, loyalty and deception, knowing and not knowing, *King Lear* takes us on the tragic journey of a father whose act of division shakes the bedrock of his kingdom. Kathleen's video design was centered around live-feed, and video of classic silent films that worked to bring the outsider in and to create tension in the rising action of the story.

Kathleen has worked on and off-Broadway with the Richard Frankel Group, Audible, and most recently the HERE Art Center. She successfully developed and executed a series of videos for marketing campaigns to advertise productions. She also recently assisted in HERE's production of *Looking At You*, a techno-noir opera that explores surveillance capitalism and the erosion of individual privacy in a digitized world. Kathleen created video content for the show, specifically singing Virtual Assistants that were placed on every audience table.

Kathleen is currently pursuing her MFA in Interactive Media for Performance at the California Institute of the Arts with a specialization in Integrated Media.

Project Abstract:

The Spirit Phone 2.0 is an Augmented Reality experience that immerses the user in the realm of the dearly departed. Using the Spirit Phone 2.0, users collect memory particles of the dead to uncover stories of several different ghosts.

Each narrative experience is broken down into three different memories that the user can explore. With each progressing memory, the user becomes more immersed in the narrative and the physical space they are occupying. At the end of the experience, they receive a phone call from the ghost who has been trying to reach them.

Team:

Kathleen Fox
Sofia Klass
Ry Burke
Elliot Yokum
Genevieve Fowler
Leslie Crapster-Pregont
Camilo Rameriz Molina

Project Description:

The Spirit Phone 2.0 was born out of CalArts in the Integrated Media program. The project has been funded by an Interdisciplinary Grant and will be presented in its final form on June 20th.

The Spirit Phone 2.0 is an exploration of the personal, spiritualism, and narrative while acting as a continuation of the work done by Thomas Edison in the 1920s. Thomas Edison proposed the idea of a Spirit Phone originally. It was going to be a phone that would allow people to communicate with their loved ones from beyond the grave. This invention was proposed during the height of spiritualism, a religion that believes that when people die, they become spirits and can continue to communicate with the living through people like mediums. Thomas Edison believed that when people die, their memories and personality were split into tiny particles, like atoms, and if one were able to collect enough of these particles - they'd be able to communicate with the dead from beyond the grave. Thomas Edison never completed the invention before his death, so we have taken up the calling to explore how our phones can communicate with those who have passed.

What we are interested in by using Augmented Reality is the exploration of physical space. What does it mean to have an AR experience in our homes? How do we fully engage with these spaces to have a range of activities?

We believe there is a connection between the digital realm and the physical realm in a way that feels similar to the spiritual realm and the physical realm. Both the spiritual and digital lack physicality but can communicate something the physical can't. For years, advancements in technology, especially telecommunications, happened in direct relationship to the growth of spiritualism. We wouldn't have things like the cathode ray tube and the radio if it weren't for the work of scientists trying to communicate with the dead. The digital and spiritual are inherently linked in history and this project hopes to further explore that relationship.

This augmented experience is a search for the spiritual through the digital. It feels deeply connected to Edison's original intent of reaching the spiritual through the technology of the time.

The use of Augmented Reality allows users to uncover the memories of different ghosts all trying to contact the realm of the living. The user will experience three of the ghost's memories and engage with space differently each time. At the end of the experience, they will receive a phone call from the ghost.

Each of the narratives you can explore are adapting from public domain texts that we thought could engage in AR in an interesting way. For example, in one experience the ghost of Fortunato from Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* is trying to reach you from beyond the grave. You go through Fortunato's descent to the catacombs and at the end of the experience, watch as walls build up around you preventing your escape.

The full experience will be available to play on June 20th on the App Store and Google Play store.

My hope for the impact of the project is an artistic exploration of narrative, and how people interact with space to uncover narrative. I also hope this project will be able to provide a personal exploration into death and my own personal history/ relationship with my grandmother. The character of Niamh is embodying my grandmother's image, personality, and history. Niamh, is, of course, an exaggeration of my grandmother, but she maintains a large similarity to this woman I love and respect deeply.

My grandmother has lived a very long life. She is currently 90 years old. She has been ready to die since she was 80. Every time I ask her how she is doing, she says, "Oh well, the good Lord hasn't taken me yet so I'm going to have to have a conversation with him when I get up there!" My grandmother would never purposefully explore a path that would potentially lead to her death or "accidental" suicide but in this narrative Niamh does. I'm interested in exploring this amplification of the desire to die and what it means to bring an action to that. How can our desires manifest themselves into action and how do we bring humor to our darkest desires?

It is also an exploration of aging and what it is to continue living when everyone you've ever known has stopped. What is it to be the survivor who no longer wants to survive? What do these feelings conjure and move us to do?

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