

Ingress as a Media Archaeology Artifact

by Kaitlin O'Brien

After my initial decision to pursue death imagery in older games, I have decided to shift in a different direction and to instead focus my blogs on the augmented reality game (ARG), Ingress. Yesterday's discussion left me with a lot to think about, and I realized that in many ways, components of Ingress are rooted heavily in media archaeology. Over the next week, I aim to delve into Ingress and explore its manifestations of socio-cultural imagery within the game. Ingress is a mobile game rich, with a narrative that heavily supports its gameplay mechanics.

1. How does embodiment relate to Ingress?

Game players, known in this game as agents, are applying their physical bodies to this augmented reality space and in doing so are interacting with this ARG that has been essentially superimposed onto the real world.

2. How does surveillance play a role in Ingress? When discussing surveillance, who benefits when an agent sacrifices his/her anonymity to play the game? How does anonymity work in Ingress?

Individuals who want to play Ingress do so at a personal cost: they must disclose their private information including their geographical location to Niantic Labs, and by association Google. In this exchange, I am curious to know who benefits and why. As a subject of relevance to present day media consumption, surveillance is a growing concern, and I am interested to explore why game players are willing to sacrifice personal information about themselves in order to play the game.

3. How are past iterations of Ingress gameplay archived and documented?

Ingress has an affiliated newsletter that gets distributed to agents of the game on an occasional basis. This newsletter provides updates on the game's narrative and situates the agent in that narrative by using the language that has been created in the game and addressing the correspondence to the agent's name, for example, in the following way AgentName: KatoTheGreateo.

4. What effect does the notion of "space" have on playing and understanding Ingress? How does Ingress convey historically and culturally significant spaces, as ascribed by game players in the game? What is the effect of this?

Game players work together within their factions to establish portals in areas that are culturally relevant within a particular region. While there are significant game play details and strategies involved in establishing these portals, the important thing to remember is that they are significant because by looking at what portals are present in a particular region, one is able to gather information relating to what places and spaces are important to the people living in a particular area.

I am an occasional Ingress game player, and have been for the last six months. Ingress first became available as a mobile game in 2013, and since then it has produced a following of agents who subscribe to the Ingress newsletter and avidly participate in the game play. My approach to an analysis of this game in the upcoming blogs would be autoethnographic in nature and I would make observations about this game through the lens of a beginner.