

# Anima: a soul-capturing play experience

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We live in an age where the processes to capture and manipulate images are readily available to the masses; it no longer takes an expert in a specialised lab to develop, print and store visual memories. Photographic images have become now a demystified commodity. However, in many cases, producers and consumers of images are not aware of their intrinsic value.

An image used to be worth a thousand words, but in a world with billions of images and photo opportunities available, it is not surprising that the act of taking a photograph have become a most banal and commonplace experience. Our proposal, Anima, is an artistic exploration on the meaning of the photographic act and its uncanny ability to capture the essence of its subjects.

Inspired by the ancient amerindian and south pacific aboriginal peoples' belief that photographic images can steal one's soul, the Anima experience project is an attempt to bring back some of the magic aura and the sense of wonder of the basic principle of photography, freezing a moment in time on a 2-dimensional surface.

## The Game Concept

Anima is a novel interactive experience designed to make people of all ages reconnect with the animistic nature of image capturing. This experience comes in the form of an interactive, physical game to be played in an urban setting, amidst tourists mechanically taking pictures and the places and landmarks photographed over and over again.

In the game, all players are equipped with modified Polaroid cameras. The goal for each player is to capture images of other players as a metaphor for capturing their souls and their innermost essence, while not letting others do the same to his or her own soul. As part of the game equipment all players wear t-shirts with a dynamic electroluminescent display that acts as a physical representation of the soul.

When the game starts all players have their soul displays turned on. The soul display is visible from afar, indicating the health status and vitality of the subject; nevertheless, when a participant's soul is captured (by other player taking a picture) the soul display changes to a low power mode, indicating that the player is in a soulless state. Moreover, at the mo-

ment of having the soul stolen (when other player is taking a picture of it) the electroluminescent soul display shows a special pattern that is captured on the Polaroid film, depicting the very moment the soul leaves its owner.

Every player has to capture as many souls as possible during the game, being careful to efficiently use the available "hunting ammunition" (a limited amount of Polaroid papers). When a player is reduced to the soulless state, he or she must get their soul back, hunting down the original hunter. By taking a picture of this hunter, the soul comes back to the original owner, the soul display t-shirt returns to the on state, and the player is ready to hunt other souls again.

Matches of Anima have a time limit at the end of which players can share their soul capturing experiences, having an opportunity to get to know more the "true soul" of other players who might be total strangers at the beginning of the game. While players, friends and strangers are gathered, images of the captured souls are projected onto a screen, along with personal pictures belonging to the participants (which are collected before the game starts). The goal is to create a ritual by which seemingly "sacred" images are shared among unknown people, reflecting on the value of the image and celebrating what it captures and exposes, our lives.

## Rules and Procedures

Anima is designed to be a scalable, adaptable experience. It can hold up to 30 players, who can be scattered around and make use of an urban area measuring up to 1 square kilometer. Anima matches can be scaled down or up according to local idiosyncrasies, number of players, weather conditions, etc.

The duration of a match depends also on the number of players and the geography of the field. It is estimated that for a game with 30 players the optimal duration is about 1-1.5 hours. Evenings are specially suitable for Anima, due to the low luminosity nature of the electroluminescent soul display and the atmosphere of mischief that surrounds the experience.

## Game Mechanics

Prospective players are advised to bring comfortable clothes and shoes, along with a meaningful personal photograph (this is not mandatory). Once inscriptions have been closed and logistics are ready, players are gathered in a room (Anima headquarters) to be briefed by the game coordinators on the rules of the game and receive the equipment to become soul hunters.

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Equipment includes a modified Polaroid camera fitted with an infrared communications module and a timer, a set of Polaroid papers, a map of the game space and a battery-powered electroluminescent t-shirt that players have to wear at all times.

Once the game has commenced (as declared by a game coordinator), players have a 10 minute accommodating period in which they should distribute/hide around the predefined game space. During said amnesty period, capturing of souls is strictly forbidden. To keep track of different on-game events, each player has a timer module (embedded in the camera) that alerts by sound when certain periods of time start and end. The 10 minute accommodating period is marked by the timer of each player.

After this accommodating period ends the real game starts. Players can begin to hunt each others' souls; this is accomplished by taking a frontal snapshot of an opponent before he or she does the same. If the capture attempt is successful, the opponent's soul display (t-shirt) will emit a special pattern (that is captured in the Polaroid snapshot) followed by a decrease in luminance that indicates that the soul has been snatched from the player, and such player cannot capture more souls until he can recapture his own soul back.

Once a player's soul has been captured, a 1 minute timer cycle is set, during which the soulless player cannot attempt to get his soul back from his hunter, this time allows the hunter to take cover and the soulless player to prepare to get his soul back, as will be explained further on.

Hunters, i.e. soulful players, may capture as many consecutive souls as they wish, but in order to be awarded with points they have to go back to the Anima headquarters during the game to show the Polaroids to a game coordinator, who will update a screen display showing the status of each hunter, and can potentially reward the soulful player with more paper, according to his performance.

Soulless players can attempt to get back their souls by hunting down the soulful player who currently owns his soul, facing him, pointing the camera and pressing the shutter button. If the action is successful, the soulless player's soul display should come back to life and after a 30 seconds amnesty period, both players become fair game to each other once again. Although the procedure to get one's soul back uses the camera, it does not take a snapshot, since one is not trying to capture the other player's soul, this way paper is saved to capture more souls later on during the game.

Once the predefined game time reaches its end or most players have ran out of paper, participants will head back to Anima headquarters, where a debriefing session will be held. In here, players may brag about the souls they have captured and their experiences during the game, as a way of capitalising on the bonding experience they all just lived. While this post-game social encounter is taking place, images captured during the game are presented along with the personal pictures submitted earlier. This enables players to further expose themselves and to have something to think about the nature of capturing images.

## Technical Considerations

A fundamental part of the Anima's play experience is the magical moment when the act of taking a picture has a physical, tangible effect on the photographed subject. This is achieved by establishing an infrared communications protocol between players. Every time the camera's shutter button is pressed, an LED sends out a unique infrared code pointing in the same direction of the photograph's subject. This subject has an infrared receiver that detects and stores the incoming code and, by means of a microcontroller, the configuration of the electroluminescent display changes.

The infrared communications protocol for a soulless player works in a slightly different way. Firstly, being in the soulless state disables the camera, so this type of player cannot waste Polaroid paper or capture souls until he recovers his own; secondly a soulless player can only attempt to find his hunter by pointing the camera at players and pressing the shutter button. This action causes the infrared LED to send out a special inquiring code, that is understood by infrared receivers at the other end as an invitation to send back their own signature. Once this signature is received by the soulless player's infrared unit, the microcontroller compares this incoming signature with the one stored which corresponds to that of the original hunter. If a match is found, that means the hunter has been correctly identified, then the electroluminescent soul display comes back to its "soulful" state and the camera is allowed to hunt souls again.

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## Appendix 1. Storyboard



1. EL t-shirt with the dynamic soul's display connected to the camera and the infrared module.



2. When the game starts all players have their soul displays turned on.



3. When a soul is captured, the soul display shows a special pattern, which is photographed.



4. A soulless player cannot hunt other souls before hunting down the original hunter of his soul.