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This presentation examines how constraint works as a methodological principle in an ongoing PhD study that incorporates an alternate-history virtual reality (VR) artefact on Apolinario Mabini and the First Philippine Republic. Rather than treating constraints only as production problems, the presentation argues that historical, narrative, embodied, and technical limits can help guide speculative historical design.

The study draws on research-through-design (Zimmerman et al., 2007), speculative design (Dunne & Raby, 2013), and alternate-history thinking (Rosenfeld, 2002). The approach uses a single Philippine historical case: a VR experience that places users in Mabini's perspective during the political crisis surrounding his resignation from Emilio Aguinaldo's government. Although participant evaluation forms part of the larger PhD study, this presentation focuses specifically on the design and production phase. The materials examined include Mabini's writings, secondary historical sources, production documentation, and advisory feedback from a Philippine history expert. This feedback was used to test the plausibility of speculative design decisions.

The presentation identifies several constraints that shaped the design: incomplete historical records, which shifted the project from exact reconstruction toward plausible representation; counterfactual limits, which prevented speculation from becoming unrestricted fantasy; Mabini's seated first-person perspective, which turned limited movement into an embodied historical framing; and VR duration, branching structure, and 360-degree pre-rendered production, which shaped what could be represented, compressed, or excluded.

Audiences can expect examples from the VR design process, including selected production materials that show how historical interpretation was translated into immersive scenes. The presentation concludes that designing within limits is central to historically responsible alternate-history VR. For Philippine Studies, design research, and digital humanities, the work offers a way of treating emerging media as spaces for disciplined historical interpretation, where imagination remains accountable to evidence, context, and political consequence.

Keywords

Philippine Studies, virtual reality, alternate history, historical constraint, research-through-design, Apolinario Mabini

References

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