My Finger's Getting Tired: Interactive Installations for the Mind and Body

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Introduction

This sketch presents an overview of Ritter's large scale interactive video and sound installations which use interactivity as content, and require viewers to use their entire bodies to control unencumbered interactive experiences for multiple users simultaneously.

Unencumbered Interactivity for the Entire Body

When experiencing interactive art as a cultural medium, the goal is to create an overall aesthetic experience. The use of any encumbered device, such as a mouse, can detract from this experience because the physical motions required by an encumbered input device rarely provide a pleasant physical experience. In the interactive video-sound installation "Fit,"[1] viewers use their entire bodies to interact with a video projection of an aerobics instructor. In response to a viewer's own exercising, the aerobics instructor begins exercising in synchronization with music. Within "Fit," viewers interact with their entire body without the use of an encumbered input device.

Interactivity as Content

Many interactive computer based works incorporate designs that are functionally similar to light switches: a button is pressed and a light turns on, a mouse is clicked and an image is displayed. Although this capability provides a convenience when coordinating events over time, the physical gestures expressed by viewers are not conceptually related to the responses. The experience of interactive media may be more satisfying aesthetically if a conceptual relationship exists between the human gesture and the interactive response: interactivity can be used as content. In the interactive video-sound installation "TV Guides,"[2] viewers encounter a living room environment containing a television which plays live programs overlaid with crosshairs. In response to any movement by the viewers, the television sound fades out and the cross hairs recede into a small circle, followed by text on the screen which requests viewers to remain still. The television imagery and sound will resume only when viewers remain motionless. The inactivity required by the viewers reflects the intended content: TV as medium of control.

Multiple Users Simultaneously

Because most people enjoy and apparently prefer group experiences -- especially during cultural events -- it seems appropriate that exhibitions of interactive art provide simultaneous interactive experiences to groups rather than single users. In the interactive sound installation "Intersection"[3] viewers encounter the sounds of cars speeding across a dark 40 x 50 foot exhibition space. In response to a viewer's presence in a lane, the cars screech, idle, accelerate and crash. This installation exists as a four or eight lane version and can accommodate more than 100 users simultaneously.

Multiple Users as Content

The accommodation of many viewers simultaneously by an interactive work is an efficient use of technology and provides a social environment for viewers. This form of design also has the potential to use the multiple-user design as an element within the content. The 50 x 50 foot interactive video-sound installation "Skies"[4] presents people with the experience of cooperation between themselves and cooperation with nature. As viewers walk onto video projected imagery, they discover black paths under their feet. According to the combination of paths discovered, different video sequences of nature are projected onto the wall and floor. The installation can accommodate and be controlled by an unlimited number of viewers simultaneously, although at least five must cooperate with each other to experience the work completely.

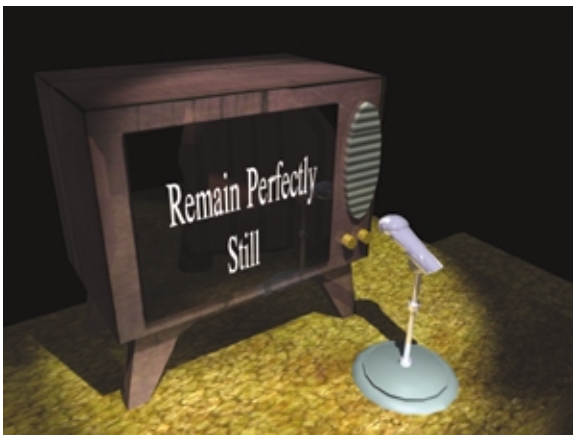
Conclusion

Although the experience of screen based interactive art may be satisfying visually and audibly, the experience of mouse clicking is not a satisfying physical experience. If interactive art is going to become an influential and cultural medium, the entire body and mind should be involved in the interactive and aesthetic experience. This can be accomplished by using human interfaces which are conceptually related to a project's content and require participation by the entire body.

References

1. aesthetic-machinery.com/fit.html
2. aesthetic-machinery.com/tvguides.html
3. aesthetic-machinery.com/intersection.html
4. aesthetic-machinery.com/skies.html

Don Ritter, "Skies" interactive video-sound installation, 50 x 50 feet.



Don Ritter, "TV Guides" detail of interactive video-sound installation, 15 x 25 feet.

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Electronic Art & Animation Catalog, SIGGRAPH 2001: Los Angeles, USA.