

## **Understanding interactive media art based on Qi philosophy in traditional Orientalism**

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### **Introduction**

Current interactive media art frees itself from a singular meaning of art and univocal communication: it becomes a combination of various characters and materials. Audience with passive attitude has been changed into active participants through new ways of communication and plurivocal messages, and the endless interaction between audience and artwork transforms art into sensuous and vivid living creatures. To understand these new phenomena in interactive art, new aesthetic consideration has been attempted, and sometimes the first step has been found in a Buddhistic, horizontal outlook on the world and also Taoism, especially in the thinking of post-structuralism. However, as a matter of fact, it's difficult to find concrete examples of discussion based on such oriental values. Therefore, in this paper, I try to discuss interactive art with oriental terms and thought, to offer a better understanding of media art, which has been woven with uncertainty principles and contingency. The purpose of this study is to provide an opportunity for us to understand aesthetic meanings of interactive art - in a new way - through an oriental traditional aesthetic matrix.

### **The necessity of a new angle for interactive art**

When the art is considered continuous with a computer system or structure, it is sensed by the whole body. The artwork demands an entire sensuous and physical act from the audience. Also the audience is making the artworks operate by seeing,

listening and touching them. Current interactive media art have changed into art as experience that induces the audience's physical act to complete artwork. This aesthetic - of participant and multi-connectible - has become an essential characteristics in the art of today. Roy Ascott views the interaction between a human and computer as having a profound effect on an aesthetics of today where artists have to include collective and interactive aspects within the artistic experiences. The meaning creation by multi-interaction has becoming an issue in art and this has to be included in the aesthetics. This demands a fresh analysis of interactive art.

### **The art of a change and relation**

In this paper, I hypothesize that interactive media art is a relational art acquiring a vital power by a mutual-understanding with the audience. Interactive art has a specific technique in mutual-understanding, and the aesthetic meaning is produced by this technique. In Chinese literature, an essential meaning of mutual-understanding is to connect(通) waterways after acceptableness(疏). The oriental concept of mutual-understanding preceding a discussion about acceptableness before connection, offers a pertinent theoretical hint to understanding a system of behaviourism in interactive art. Zhungzi speculated mutual-understanding with the Other, emphasizes that you have to first forsake your burden so that you can obtain a mental light to cross a deep abyss between I and the other. If you do not follow Zhuangzi's process, you will maintain a heavy condition so that you might be in danger of falling into the abyss. To empty things means to move out of a fixed and selfish category. An emptied identification of one's own is not about oneself being steadfast, but an interrelation between others. The world of interactive art can be strange and new for an audience. With the audience as 'the other' it may appreciate some interactive artworks through a deconstruction of a familiar world and an acceptance of a new one. However, the audience in the interactive world might be interested but also have fear of the unknown. To reduce the difference between the audience and the artwork is a primary mission of interactive art. In short, a principal of interaction - which itself can produce an aesthetic meaning - can be elucidated by a logic of mutual-understanding along with 'the concept of empty'. After achieving a concept of empty, we can prepare a philosophical foundation - that interactive art is the art of change and relationship. An oriental phenomenon characteristic in the 'concept of empty' can be the root of a viewpoint. A concept of empty goes by the name of 'Voidness'(空) or 'Emptiness'(虛) in traditional Orientalism, and Emptiness is

not fixed, but it involves an opening of, and connecting with others. This view of Emptiness, means something is not a fixed substance, rather it keeps itself maintained through change; it continuously gets tangled up with other things. We can imagine calling 'Emptiness' the philosophy of change and relation because Emptiness becomes the driving force to continuous change through an endless flow. Like emptiness, interactive art can also be considered as having a philosophy of change and relation, because it has a transformational process through a continuous mutual-understanding with the audience.

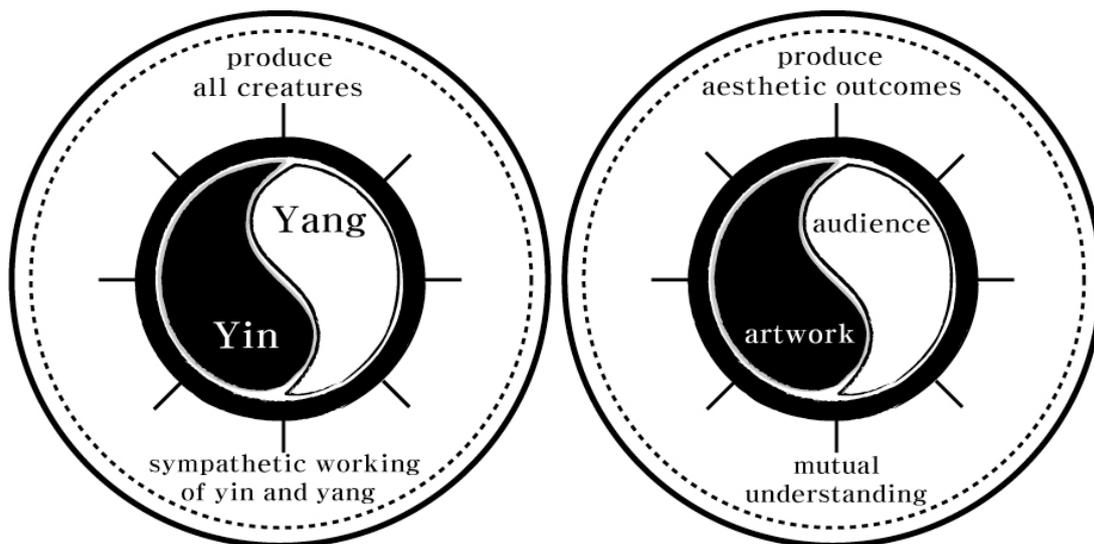
### **The lifelike art**

Interactive art does not dream of becoming a substantial aesthetic appreciation. The new of interactive art, is to express a vitality in and of itself by mutual-understanding with the audience. In other words, the audience's life is brought into the inside the interactive art, and so the art changes - like a vivid organism. Thus if interactive art has an aesthetic experience through interpenetration among the self, and the world of events, it can embody a vivid aesthetics. Herein lies the original link with an oriental traditional aesthetics matrix. In a traditional orientalism, it is thought the world is an organic being and a natural phenomena is a flow of life moving. This worldview of vitalism is the essence of a 'vivid aesthetics' in oriental art. Oriental art expresses and shapes an emotion from life as considered a remarkable phenomenon: in other words expressing a feeling of vitality at all times. The bottom line is - a vivid aesthetics is not an art expressing just living things - we have to understand that a vivid aesthetics presents a mind of the *whole universe*. Interactive art is a continual process, and it produces aesthetic outcomes constantly, by beings within their own world. Thus we can consider interactive art from a new angle. This research offers an opportunity to gain a fresh understanding in interactive art in terms of organization and relation.

### **The analogical consideration for a structure of a relationship**

In interactive art, the audience as a participant is interchanging with the artwork and they are weaving aesthetic outcomes. The audience and an artwork are the same textile: it is made up by endless weave - in the sense that the characteristic of relationship is crossed by an influence from each other. The universe of interactive art is a transformational place - weaving multifarious possibilities - and it is not linear, but has uncertain principles and contingency. This universe is not a form that is

vertical and rankles, but a formation that is horizontal and relational. We can understand that an internal principal of interactive art, generating a relational net, is similar in an intrinsic connectivity to that of the Oriental's universe. In Orientalism, the discussion about relationship is connected directly with the thought of Qi(氣). Qi has been understood as an original matter of all things, which means that all things can be reduced to Qi. Qi is both a generator and principal of generation, and it fills up the universe with itself so that all things are the same. Qi splits across the cosmic dual forces in yin(陰) and yang(陽), and all creatures are produced by the specific process where forces are complicated, being opposed and sympathizing with each other. The universe of Qi in producing all things by a sympathetic working of yin and yang, is similar to the world of interactive art in terms of producing aesthetic outcomes by a mutual-understanding between audience and artwork. An interactive artwork is in a continual process of weaving outcomes through interchanges with the audience. There is only 'one' (entity) as whole thing, and, a flow of network. Similarly, the universe of Qi has only 'one' of Qi - weaving all creatures and is a principal of creation by a motion-change of Qi.



Comparing 'sympathetic working of yin and yang' with 'mutual-understanding' in interactive art

This oriental worldview is to have an organic and monistic characteristic - because the universe is entangled - like an organic net in Qi philosophy. In this monistic world, it is not conscious of the Other as a substance against self, but connects to unify self and the other. Interactive art is not an individual gathering. Interactive art is monistic

because it is based on mutual-understanding and it is an organic art to express an *aliveness* through being a continuous, never ending transformation.

## **Conclusion**

There are many studies in interactive art that have tried to make clear inter-actional structures and develop a theory on method and experience by the audience. We believe that we cannot find the aesthetic meaning until an internal principal of the art - constructed by its own method - is explained. There are a number of theories on aesthetics of interactive art, but arguably there needs to be a radical new approach for a better understanding of interactive art. I have attempted here to analyze interactive art as *mutual-understanding and harmony*, which overcome the division of audience and artwork.

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