

## Laughing is allowed!

Andy Best

Meetfactory / Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK

Merja Puustinen

Meetfactory / Finnish Academy of Fine Arts, Finland



*Having fun inside Empty Stomach at Eurocultured 09, Manchester. (Photo by Andy Best).*

Over the past twenty years the body and substance of our media art work has been driven by a desire to create interactive experiences. Applying Brenda Laurel's categorization, the forms range from the mechanical click-through solutions to the deepest sense of interaction where the work cannot be rendered back to any point of origin after the user participation. Our works range from 3D web based community gaming platforms through

mobile applications to sensor-controlled real time video projections, audio soundscapes and immersive environments.

Our 'encounterings' as media artists working within and outside the institutional art world have led us to pay close attention to both the evident disparities in value propositions and the expected artist and audience roles provided. The paradigmatic hybris for the technological determinism surrounding the media art scene is often countered by institutional reservations reinforced by traditional readings of art history, curatorial and conservatorial practice and pedagogical politics. On the one hand - paying tribute to the ethos of truth to materials within the minimalistic tradition of art - the technology itself is seen worthy of exposure. The technology turns into the cultural high as a self-referential end to the phenomenality of materiality, whereas the conceptual end of the realm carries a promise for the extension of the mind and body - a gateway to an improved self, deeper social engagement, and sensory experiences. On the other hand the self-referential quality of the technology is regarded as a potent, if not an exclusive, obstacle in the quest for a transcendental art experience of a higher order.

In our view however, the human being as a species is a social animal and hence by default interactive with her physical environment and social surroundings. According to neurobiological and pedagogical research our sensory perception, basis of logical thinking and linguistically organised thought are built on an a priori sensomotorical bodily experience with the physical world. Cognitive processes themselves are largely multisensory, metaphorical and unconscious - as based on our experience of the bodily movement in space. Interaction with our physical and social environment is therefore the natural condition for the cognitive mind seeking for the adaptability and fitness for survival in terms of knowledge production, logical thinking, emotional and intuitive understanding.

In our most recent works we have created full-bodied physical interactivity within a communal space. We pursue the creation of a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ) around and within the work. We regard the artwork as an offering to the participants – there are no rules attached, you interact as you see fit. Due to the highly visual nature of the works, they attract children and fun-seeking adults. By breaking the taboo that art must be serious (and/or boring) we seek to re-invent the conditions within which artworks are thought to be experienced. Quite naturally the works also speak to people who otherwise would be disenfranchised from the art community.

In conclusion, we believe that technology is a worthwhile tool within a wider palette of materials and social interventions for creating deeper forms of interaction. The social community that appears in our physical environments compares strongly with those that form within online virtual communities. The empowering nature of fun as physical play within a stimulating environment, allows mental reflection on the meaning of the artwork in an entirely new light.

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