

## LOOKING FOR THE INTERACTIVE

Almost a year ago, after the end of the trial of OJ, the New York Post ran a front page that consisted of an image of OJ Simpson with a zipper for a mouth. It was a composite, of course, and without question a journalistic joke. Actually I think there are at least two jokes intended. Most obviously, the image is an instant commentary on OJ's abrupt withdrawal from a planned TV interview in which he was scheduled to 'reveal all'. His mouth is zipped shut. But I think the Post is also making a broader joke about the very idea of the newspaper photo

The image foregrounds the idea that photography is now as reliable guide to recent facts as illustration. Of course everyone knows this. We are, after all, in the Digital Age. But this widespread knowledge hasn't resulted in a change in our attitude towards supposedly 'documentary' photography, even when the manipulability of the photo is thrust in our face. Tomorrow's picture of a Mafia boss, or Princess Diana, Hurricane Herbert, the Kurds, or Saddam himself, will be still taken as reliable evidence of something that occurred.

In other words, no matter how blatantly it is undercut, the photograph retains its old place in our epistemological framework. The New York Post, or any other newspaper, even in its World Wide Web version, relies on an acceptance of photography - photographs are one the ways that the news is delivered, and the news consists of facts about the world.

Mere knowledge of the easy transformability of any photograph is not enough to shake its ideological baggage.

The photo on the front page sells the newspaper. The cover is advertisement, and we know it also reflects the point of view of the editors. Previously, an illustration occupied the front page. The drawing decidedly was a translation of reality. We are used to looking at the photo image on the cover as true, but it a coded icon. The issue at hand today is: what is truth?

Viewers of Stan Douglas's installation, *Evening*, initially think the talking heads are actual newscasters. The three figures face the viewer; news clips of the trial of the Chicago Seven and the Vietnam War appear behind them. It comes as a surprise that the newscaster are actors. In this well-scripted environment, Douglas is considering American television of the late 1960's, when the networks became less concerned with the editorial content of their newscasts, than with enhancing the stardom of their anchors. Instead of Edward R. Murrow style of journalism, television provided 'Happy talk news'. This was infotainment before we had a name for it.

The same point can be made with pornography: which gains an important part of its erotic effect from the viewer's unshakable, **desired** belief that the people in the image were, at some earlier point in time - in front of a camera - doing exactly what we see in the picture or on the screen. If a porn consumer were to discover that the performers were brought together by Photoshop, that in reality the German shepherd was in the backyard and the model in a photographer's studio,

it would, I suspect, sanitize, de-eroticize the image for him. I am turned on not only by the scene shown by the image, but equally by the fact that it really occurred. Porn depends on a causal chain of events between reality and the image. This chain of connections is an important aspect of its eroticism.

The argument here depends on the idea that we cannot miss the photographic basis of the image - it is indeed a **photo** of a zipper combined with a **photo** of OJ's face, but the relationship of face to zipper is **produced**. And though the truth value of an image may depend on the relations between its components, its pictorial base (i.e. what it is a picture of and how it was originally produced...) is harder to disguise - we know (or at least think we know), in most instances, whether the base layer of the montage was created with a lens or with a brush. All (nonessential) qualities can change: the color, the degree of foreshortening, shape, angle of view, while how the elements are combined is open and malleable, but there is a core - that I for one can't quite pin down - by which we know that something was produced with a lens-based technology.

In the 1920's, John Hearfield was combining illustration and photography. He turned Hitler into an evil clown perched on the border between fact and fiction, operating the propaganda machine. *Reichstag* (1929) obviously is a photo-montage that makes a political comment

To make *All that* (1995), the artist Michal Rovner began with a photograph of people climbing a cliff. Scanning that image into a computer, she modified the photograph. She printed the manipulated image onto a large canvas, using the Vutex digital airbrush system. Where is truth? Does it matter that she started out with a photograph? Is it only museums that have housekeeping concerns about whether Michal's work is a painting or a photograph?

Is there a change, parallel to the forthcoming change in our attitude toward photography, that we can expect in our attitude toward works that use the computer as much for the way it stores data, as for the way it displays it? The OJ/Post phenomenon is an implication of the **digitization** of images: but equally (if not more) significant are the implications of **random access** to data of any kind, particularly frames of film or video, which previously could be accessed serially by the computer.

It is random access that makes possible the fungibility of media, flippantly and clumsily called 'interactivity'. Only random access enables the possibility that the sequence of image/sound material can be determined equally well at presentation time as at a production time. Interactivity depends on the fact that time-based image projects need no longer have a fixed temporal shape.

I would like to suggest some criteria of interactive narrative, that will both differentiate it from non-interactive narrative and at the same time highlight what might be positive, useful, of expressive qualities of the medium. What is there to be gained from interactivity? The question is: why we would want to produce, why would we want to **view**, an interactive work? Or, to put it in more formal terms, are there any specific ways to distinguish the meaning or truth-value of The Interactive? We need to know what interactivity is going to bring to the table - the table of representation, expression, and communication.

Here are some features of The Interactive that I take to be salient:

- arbitrary sequence
- fungibility
- multiple streams
- inclusion of extra-narrative material

- indeterminate (or undetermined) elements which the viewer can either insert himself into, or arbitrate, tie down, or fix in some other way.
- potential for viewer affect on the flow of the presentation

In looking for examples that demonstrate these features, I have had the best success with contemporary fiction. A number of novelists have been influenced by the conceptual structure of the database - starting at least 30 years ago with such writers as Calvino and Cortazar. In the interest of space, however, I will mention only two books, that I have chosen for their recent publication - both appeared in the middle of 1996.

In *Last Orders*, Graham Swift describes a group of five or six men - long-time drinking companions - on a journey to dispose of the ashes to one the members of the group. The plot is simple - not much more than a single, largely uneventful, car trip. But the way it is narrated is audacious. The time of the narrative moves forward - the story is always told in first person, or rather in a first person, because the narrator's job shifts from one character to another, so that each leg of the journey is written from a different point of view. With each point of view comes a history, a set of memories, hopes, fears, perceptions of the other men as well as secrets kept from them. This set of viewpoints, taken together, draws an opulent composite picture of these interrelated lives, one that the author could never have achieved, had he remained within a single perspective. Which of the characters is telling the story at any given moments is more or less arbitrary - what is important is that it is not the same voice from one chapter to the next.

Viewers of Luc Courchesne's *Family Portrait* (1993) move among the eight lifelike portraits, two at each of the four kiosks. It is as if subjects and viewers are all at the same cocktail party. While the participant engages a single figure, each of the 'portraits' seems to be uncannily aware of what the other members of the portrait group are saying. Our encounter may be cut short due to lack of interest on either side, or the conversation may develop into a discussion of ideas and values, or personal experiences. The interaction is structured into levels of increasing intimacy; you must get to know and trust one another before moving on to confidential matters. The viewer affects the shifting sequences and gradually discovers what relationships exist among the group of people in the story Courchesne set up.

In the narrative space mapped by Graham Swift, an intricate network of relationships between the characters emerges. Exploring this network provides a particular satisfaction, in that many facts are never stated explicitly but must be pieced together from details gathered as the reader moves from one viewpoint to the next. One man has had an affair with the wife of another, a fact known to a third man and deeply coloring his attitude towards the first two: the childhood love of the youngest member of the group for the daughter of the oldest, wished for by all parties but never consummated because of misunderstandings - these tiny details add up to a symbolic portrait of the frailty of the human condition, a composite available only to the attentive, active reader, who must use his memory and imagination like a keyboard and mouse.

One can imagine an interactive piece in which a story is told in this way. The viewer would be able to select the story-teller at any moment, thus navigating a narrative space where time moves forward but in which the story is compiled differently each time we travel through it. One result of this would be an enhanced sense of realism: uncovering the narrative would like be discovering a situation is real life.

Inside Mary Lucier's installation *Oblique House: Valdez* (1993), a quartet of life-size faces frozen in time peer out from monitors on the wall. When the viewer approaches the moni-

tor to engage in a tete-a-tete, the person represented on screen starts to relate an episode from their life. The face freezes up again when the short story is over. Depending on the movement of visitors in the gallery, the solo becomes a duet, or a trio or quartet of randomly told stories. As the video figures relate their stories, filters modulate the tonality of their voices. Phases weave in and out of this chance score.

A portrait emerges of Valdez, the Alaska town devastated in 1989 by Exxon's infamous oil spill. Although Exxon is talked about as an intruder, as the story develops, the corporation becomes a member of the community. (The landscape is projected onto the sloped ceiling high above the viewers' heads; a close-up pan of the pebbly beach, and a 360 degree panorama of the shoreline and nearby mountains.

With *Megatron* (1995), Nam June Paik is waffling on his Cagean, serendipitous roots. The images on Paik's video wall are themes, motifs that he reworks in the same way he would a music score. He threads together a net of symbolic facts and fantasy. The video wall technique is an effective visual way of making an allusion between Disney and the Olympics. The video wall introduces a new form of edit, which is a different kind of simile than a film cut.

John Barth's *On with Story* is a series of interlocking stories told by an elderly couple to each other - an *Arabian Nights* template followed through all the way, just as for Scheherazade, running out of stories, or coming to the end, bring with it an acceptance of The Big End. Along with its explicit subject-matter, which is an ironic meditation on the nature of love in our time, *On with the Story* incorporates a subtle discussion on the theory of narrative. It is a kind of Brechtian praxis, in which many of the point made about story-telling within the stories are demonstrated or disproved - mostly disproved - by, and in, these very stories. The first few chapters of the book are story-beginnings and consider the nature of the opening; the middle few stories deal with middles-of-stories, and the last set are endings and address the idea of closure.

One of the items on the ingredient list is the concept of extra-narrative material: Barth weaves into his stories, as central elements, not only pieces of narrative theory, but also particle physics, a taxonomy of favorite fruits and a psalm of farewell to them, and one episode in which a character finds a page of the very book we are now reading - a page we haven't yet reached.

"Out of context, at least, neither side of pp. 179/180 (so the leaf is numbered, bottom center) makes much sense to its present reader. A more knowledgeable and perceptive eye that B Three's might register that since the leaf's recto (179) happens to conclude one chapter of, or selection from the overall text, and the verso (180) therefore to begin another, the title of the book itself - which would normally appear as a running head on the left-hand, even-numbered page - is missing, further, that inasmuch as no author's name appears under the (unnumbered) title of the item commencing on 180, the unnamed book must consist of articles, stories, or whatever by a single (unnamed) hand, rather than by various authors. Neither a novel-page on the one hand, then (if it's fiction at all), nor an anthology-page on the other. What Bill registers is simply that the lines constituting page 179 (under the running sub-head STORIES OF OUR LIVES) read less like fiction than

like. Bill can't say what The page comprises a clutch of rhetorical fragments, concluding with Rwanda, Haiti, Bosnia, Kurdistan. The doomed marsh Arabs. The web of the world "

John Barth, "Stories of Our Lives" *On with the Story* [ Little, Brown and Company, 1996 ] p 174

By this point, Barth has the reader wondering how the story is going to reach these words in just a couple of pages. I found myself leafing forward, like a user of a Director-driven CD-ROM might click on a forward arrow button, to check if it is indeed a page from this very story Has the character found a page from the book that I, the reader am now holding in my hands? If so, is the page missing from my copy? The author, in other words, has made his reader break away from the ordered sequentiality of page turning, forcing him into a non-linear approach to the book, skipping forward and back among the pages. Barth, with some self-deprecating humor, identifies the page and the book it is from, just before we reach it in the natural course of reading

"a page that her current Baltimore boyfriend [ . . . ] obligingly ripped from some Post-modernist story collection that he happened to be perusing when perusing when Gerri casually asked him, as the pair were reading in bed, for something with which to mark her place while they make love" (p 178)

And incorporates the dazzling passage about the web of the world into textual dolly - out from the scene of the story of the world as a whole, the world seen "under the aspect of the eternal", as they say in Philosophy.

In *Corridor Installation* (1970), Bruce Nauman lined up six long passageways, as if offering a scout a choice of realms to explore. Three pathways are only wide enough to peer into, and the others are barely passable. One of the corridors has two monitors at the far end, stacked one on top of another On each screen in an image of that empty hallway. With the narrow corridor the confining space forces the traveler to proceed in small steps, elbows pressed tight against the body Suddenly an image of the explorer, shot from behind, appears on one the monitors. The monitor is live, in the present The recording camera, positioned above the entrance, is aimed directly at the viewer's head. When turning about to find the camera, their face appears on the monitor, but this image is not accessible The two events - a viewer looking into the monitor, and the image of their face on the monitor, cannot occur simultaneously in the present. The other monitor, showing an unchanging image of the empty corridor, mocks any effort to alter the order of events. Clearly, this monitor, analogous to memory, could show any series of images from the past - any empty corridor, a viewer's back, their face, in any order, or for any length of time. The representation of the past is not subject to a temporal ordering of events.

The written pull-back to a more universal or astronomical point of view is a device Barth uses frequently. The analogy in an interactive work would be the possibility of zooming the lens with which we are seeing the scene to wider angle for a broader perspective, or alternatively, to a longer lens for an examination of detail, either option giving the viewer a different way of understanding the fictional moment now passing.

Thus Barth offers written models of at least two aspects of an interactive fiction-the first a counterpart

of the experience (or activity) of viewing an interactive work , in which the book is transformed into a non-serial , more randomly-accessible object; and the second a model of a possible architecture for such a work , here giving the viewer the option of seeing the scene from a broader perspective and perhaps finding himself contemplating more general expressive and philosophical implications.

The multiplicity of spaces that is understood in Einstein's conception, and that is perceived in Monet's painting, can be experienced in Dan Graham's *Present Continuous Past(s)* (1974). The installation consists of a square room with mirrored walls and a monitor set into the middle of one side. The reflections of everything within the enclosure stretch as if reaching toward a distant horizon Usually a person within a multi-mirrored enclosure, such as a hall of mirrors in an amusement park, is seduced by the myriad reflections of themselves They notice only their own solid body repeated many times, but not the space they inhabit. Dan Graham's environment, however, includes a one-way mirror and a hidden camera The mirrored space is the image on the monitor and forms part of the endless of reflections As a result, the focus of attention is the room, which appears as an infinity of spaces that are reflections of a single space - the mirrored chamber.

In Special Relativity, the notion of space and of time are bound to one another. Time has meaning only in reference to an associated infinity of space-times in relative motion. These concepts are difficult to fathom. Perhaps they are beyond comprehension. But *Present Continuous Past(s)* unites space and time by introducing a time delay of several seconds between the camera and the monitor. Each of the myriad reflections encompasses two space-times - the 'present' space-time of the enclosure, and the 'past' space-time of the monitor Though not an analogue of Special Relativity, the complexity of space-time embodied in the installation challenges traditional ideas about space and time. The sequence on the inset monitor bears a clear correspondence to a *memory* , which to be recognized as such, must have two qualities: it exists in the presents, and also is remembered to have existed in the past. These elements are explicit in German expression for memory: *ist gestubin*, which literally translated as *is happened*. Within *Present Continuous* the knowledge that the current moment will appear as a memory after a short time delay, adds an element of consciousness to the present instant Instead of performing for the camera as might happen with a live feedback, a viewer is more likely to be aware of the total surrounding that forms the memory.

We are considering, then, two ways of thinking about what makes an interactive work - either as a type of structure of architecture, or as something that makes a particular type of demand on its viewer. As I am coming to understand interactivity, this distinction is a crucial one. A true interactive work must have both elements. There must be qualities in the architecture of the work that demand the participation of the viewer The work, that is to say will be lacking, in some way or another, until the viewer participates, and this is a consequence of the way it is constructed.

Architectural quality is not the first concept the term 'interactivity' brings to mind - which is of course that the viewer becomes a *user* who can affect the course, or content, or presentation of the work. It seems obvious to think of interactivity as primarily something that a spectator controls, or at least has input in. However, I think this is problematic. Viewer input is a secondary quality of The Interactive.

The main problem with conceiving viewer input as at the center of interactivity is that is overemphasizes the relationship of the viewer to the work in the mind of the maker. Placing too

much importance on the viewer forces an artist into an uncomfortable position. But it is the standard approach for someone who is producing for mass consumption and for whom the criterion of success is audience appeal and numbers.

Ernest Lehman (writer of *North by Northwest*) and *Family Plot*, Hitchcock's last film) describes the following conversation with Alfred Hitchcock:

He'd had a few martinis, and in a rare moment of emotional intimacy, he put his hand on mine and whispered, "Ernie, do you realize what we're doing in this picture? The audience is like a great organ that you and I are playing. At one moment we play this note and get his reaction, and then we play that chord and they react that way. And someday we won't even have to make a move - there'll be electrodes implanted in their brains, and we'll just press different buttons and they'll go 'ooh' and 'aah' and we'll frighten them, and make them laugh. Won't that be wonderful?"  
Donald Spoto, *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*, [Ballantine Book 1983], p. 440

At the doorway to Tony Oursler's *System for Dramatic Feedback* stands a calico entity, a misshapen video face projected onto its cloth head. Over and over again the little effigy cries, "Oh no, Oh no" The voice is shrill and anxious, as if it were witnessing a harrowing event. The doll's emotional demeanor is poignant, and the state of alarm is archetypal. Viewers can empathize, and thereby experience the trauma. It is an 'in extremis' situation, so powerful that it evokes nervous laughter among some spectators. Others simply step back and view the character as a carnival barker, warning them before they proceed.

Inside is a mound of stuffed, life-size rag dolls. Stitched together out of Salvation Army hand-me-downs, each of these homey characters is animated by a small video projection that defines one distinct action. The dolls express their emotions as ritual acts that insinuate themselves into the viewers' fantasies. The sensation is somewhat like that of watching a popular 'cop' series. The archetypal situation shows the good policeman successfully, if violently, dealing with evil, thus assuaging the public's fears. Whereas standardized television program's channel viewers through a narrow range of emotions, Oursler's effigies, lifelike and non-threatening, beckon them into an open-ended world of the imagination, where the mind is free to assemble its personal fictions.

What Hitchcock fantasizes is the reverse, the contradiction of an interactive work. Slavoj Žižek, quotes the strange passage in his book *Everything You Wanted to about Lacan but were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock*, during a compelling analysis of Hitchcock's film work in terms of viewer's reaction - an analysis which in many ways matches Hitchcock's own descriptions of his work, if the terms - taken from Lacan - are somewhat different. I am mentioning Žižek here because he is the most recent of a long lineage of Hitchcock analysts whose approach finds the meaning of a work in its affect on the viewer, in the way the viewers' desires and identifications are directed and played with in a film like *Psycho*.

Keeping in mind the scene from *Psycho* in which the private detective is killed by Norman Bates' "mother", I would first ask if it is possible to re-imagine the horror film as interactive. Your stomach is saying to Detective Arbogast "Turn back! Turn

back!" - but the effect would evaporate if your inner pleas actually had an effect on the film...if because the viewer wished the detective would turn back, he actually did. Interactivity is a recipe for the vanishing of the delicious titillation of suspense, and the dissolution of the particular way viewers are psychologically trapped by the Hollywood fiction film.

Žižek's analysis of this classic scene turns around the idea that the spectator's viewpoint is controlled and manipulated by camera angle and shot distribution. He argues that at the moment when Arbogast's face is slashed, we find ourselves looking out of the eyes of the inhuman Thing that is performing the ghastly knife work, that we find ourselves identifying with this evil so far as to desire the death of the meddling detective. The switching of viewpoints, the deliberate manipulation of the viewer's identification and desire for closure: this is what binds the spectator to the screen, what makes the fiction film a spellbinding, compelling experience.

Suspense always involves the withholding of some information that the viewer has an immediate wish to know, and this is the reverse of the structure of interactivity, which is, in principle, a means of giving the viewer access to information. And the idea that you need to pass some tests to gain that access (as in a game like *Myst*) does not do the trick. Suspense plays on belief and desire, while the slow release of information, under certain controlled circumstances, calls on different, less visceral mental states. It would take some revision and rethinking to create the sense of suspense in an interactive work, and I do believe that it is possible - however, the sense of binding to the screen and the compulsion to reach a form of closure, is, if anything, stronger and more prevalent in a certain kind of interactive work. Five minutes observing a boy playing a videogame easily can convince anyone that a highly interactive form is at least as compelling as a horror film. But does a videogame rely on the same means to achieve this end - and is it even the same kind of experience?

The compulsion in the Sega cartridge game *Sonic* is the desire for mastery, which closely connected to the desire for narrative closure - the player wants to beat/finish/close the game, and is driven forward partly by an impulse (which is probably another way of describing the same thing) to master the machine. It is interesting, that although the kids who play the game describe the character they are controlling in the first person ("I have to beat the Boss to get through this level" - i.e. "I have to " not "Sonic has to ") the identification with the character with the character is not of the same order as that in a fiction film. No characteristics are attributed to the creature controlled by the keypad, and the emotion felt at its demise is frustration, not sadness. It is more like the relationship of a puppet to a puppeteer. The videogame player feels himself very much within his own body, and the desire for closure is not connected with a plot, but just with the ending of the game, or at least the level. The world is explored to its limits, and in this world success is the achievement of the next stage. A necessary condition of a game's success in the market is that it is not too easy or too hard. Players have to fight for small victories, which must be kept just, only just, beyond the player's expertise. The frustration of the player is played like an instrument, exactly as Hitchcock plays point of view. The craft of composing a videogame, in other words, involves an almost fanatic identification with an imagined user.

I want to compare the installation to a particular form of Japanese garden, the locked world which the observer travels through. Inside this type of garden, we walk along paths lined with stones that force us to look down and carefully place our footsteps. By the time we raise our eyes again, a dramatic new vista suddenly has appeared in the external landscape now framed by the garden. Here we have an unfolding narrative, complete with changing layers of time.

Installations tend to be closed environments. Viewers are enveloped in the spaces, interacting with the parts, deciphering the artists' world view. The large vertical projection in *Borealis* (1993) by Steina Vasulka envelops the viewer. As in the Japanese garden, structure is imposed on nature. Nature provides the raw material for the narrative, creating a metaphor for life and death.

**Chie Matsui** created ornate tableaux, using ordinary objects which she places in unusual contexts. Viewers feel they have entered a Gothic fairy tale, where the glamorous and the humdrum are strangely linked. The viewer must decipher the symbols, assembling the story from parts. (A new work will be presented at the Museum next January in our ongoing "Projects" exhibition series.)

A dining table draped with bright fake fur dominates Chie Matsui's installation. Sheets of clear glass unfold across the table top, like the leaves of an open book. The scene is illuminated by an old-fashioned overhead lamp. On an adjacent wall hangs a dressing table mirror, its faceted surface reflecting a warped view of the room.

Matsui's installation encompasses the private and the public face of women. Here a dining table, traditionally set for family meals, sports a loud and sensual shawl. The glass covering adds a layer of cool fragility. In ordinary life a seductive stance might be rehearsed before a vanity mirror, the intimate space where new clothes and makeup are also tried out. Adopting what is fashionable usually means stepping back from tradition, a conflict for every generation.

"Composing's one thing, performing's another, listening's a third. What can they have to do with one another?"

John Cage, "Experimental Music: Doctrine,"  
*Silence*, p.15

To make a videogame, or a Hollywood film, one must always consider the position of the viewer. Cage, however, suggests that listening is quite a different act than composing. And implicit in his suggestion is the idea that listening is not the composer's business when he is composing.

I think that one aspect of the way we understand the artist in our society incorporates the idea that is inappropriate for an artist to conceive his or her works in terms of spectator reaction.

We think of the artists as perhaps the only people whose 'jobs' depend on their intuitive reactions and personal tastes. A medium that must be worked on with viewer always in the front of the creator's mind is problematic as a means of making art. Furthermore, the kind of meaning we attribute to work is often derived from imagining the viewpoint of the artist as they were making the work, and attempting to understand their non-verbal response to the medium. In recent years, artists have often demonstrated the expressive or formal possibilities of a given medium (many examples of this can be found in film and video): in the majority of cases, artists have either created ways to 'misuse' the medium so that it does what they need it to, or they have experimented and played with the medium, finding out what it could do. Considering the viewer's reaction to their work is anathema to both these working methods.

Upon entering *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* (1982) viewers immediately perceive Viola's dimly lit, multi-faceted environment as a rich conceptual realm. We enter his

world of darkness, which represents the nonverbal, more profound areas of irrational consciousness generally associated with night. Viewers become active participants, moving at their own pace through the long, harsh room, randomly discovering the integrated elements of this spare work that resembles a stage set. At the center of *Reasons for Knocking at an Empty House* is a monitor depicting the artist as a vulnerable presence. Not having slept for three days, he is there alone, confronting his nonstop subconscious thoughts. Through a carefully calibrated acoustic system, the space periodically fills with aggressive, sonorous boom triggered by the gentler second sound track, which can be heard only by the viewer occupying the one available spotlight seat at the center. Seated, the viewer faces a monitor and is confronted with the pre-recorded image of an exhausted, immobile Viola, who stares intently ahead. He establishes the same direct relationship with the audience that home television viewers have with news personalities. Viola's attention keeps drifting off, but he is prevented from dozing by a hand that ominously and regularly appears to rap him on the head with a rolled-up magazine. The viewer wears clumsy, old-fashioned headphones and hears Viola's every gulp, sniffle, and loud rap on his head, which had been picked up during videotaping by microphones placed in his ears. This unedited, forty-five-minute recording was mixed with a soft, separately audiotaped stream-of-consciousness monologue about his boyhood reminiscences, so that the combined sound track gives the distinct feeling one is physically and mentally inside the artist's head. Seen and heard at such close range over an extended period of time, the work strongly evokes the artist's physical presence and demands a response. Viewers are either intimately involved participants, sharing the experience as much as they are able, or else peripheral observers. Both are kept off-guard in anticipating the irregularly occurring loud boom. The tightly focused work addresses the issues of identity and explores as well various states of consciousness. The length of the videotape invokes the states both of waiting for inspiration and of sublimated fury.

In Paik, in Viola, in Hill, we find a constant search for ways to incorporate and find an expression of the self - with its individuated desires, values, and failings - in the qualities and architectures of the video medium. The medium often becomes a metaphor for the self, the absence of the body of the artist compensated in a space where the body of the artist could be: in Viola's work it is a "sweet spot" from which the work can be perfectly seen, and which the viewer sometime cannot physically get to, in Hill's work it is the place the artist sees himself in the work, sometimes photographically, sometimes a space he is absent from.

The components of the body displayed in Gary Hill's *Inasmuch as it is Always Already Taking Place* are without any apparent distinction. Neither Adonis nor troll, neither fresh nor lined with age, the body suits the short endless loops that each body part consists of. The arrangement of rasters does not follow the organization of a human skeleton. Representations of a man's ear, and arched foot lie side by side, tucked modestly behind them is an image of his groin. Each raster invites meditation. Each image fills the frame of its screen. The monitor is perceived as part of the body: an enclosure, a vessel, no longer something that simply displays a picture. Raster and image exist as a unified object, a representation, as a living thing.

Although none of its segments are 'still', the installation has the quality of a still life. Typically, the objects in still-life paintings are drawn from everyday life - food and drink, musical instruments, a pipe and tobacco. Their placement appears arbitrary, and they do not communicate with each other. Often set out on a platform or table, the elements are positioned within arm's reach and appeal to the senses, especially to

touch and taste. *Inasmuch* has most in common with a 'vanitas', a category of still life in which the depicted objects are meant to be reminders of the transience of life. In place of the usual skull and extinguished candle, *Inasmuch* depicts an animate being whose vulnerability underscores the mortality of flesh.

Does interactivity mean that we have to rethink the artist's relationship to the viewer? Is the artist now in the same position as the commercial filmmaker - projecting reactions, testing responses, and making changes based on the tests? Is one of the aspects of 'post modernism' that the artist now focuses on the viewer and controls the meaning?

Jim Campbell's *Shadow (for Heisenberg)* (1993-94) responds to the viewer's position in the gallery, but thwarts their desire to see details of making installations, Campbell does not put himself in the shoes of the viewer and say, "Now what do I do? What do I control?" He puts himself in the shoes of the work and asks, "What can I perceive?" and "How can I respond and reflect?"

Jim Campbell's idea is that the interactive artist does not make a work where he predicts and accounts for audience response - rather he makes a program, and the program interacts with the viewer. Campbell's project is the construction of a machine with certain behaviors, and then he releases this machine into the world where, by eliciting viewer response, it acquires meaning.

In *Sonata* I tried to find an architecture of film that can only play interactively. In the final scenes, two scenes are potentially on screen at the same time. The viewer determines what proportion of each scene is on screen by pointing at the image - where he points becomes the dividing lines between the two images, so he can see what is happening in two places simultaneously. So *Sonata* sets up a situation for the viewer to operate within - how the viewer acts (i.e. where he points) influences what happens on screen, and therefore how the scene is understood. So my search is for a kind of structure that can contain narrative, and needs a viewer for completion - the focus is on architectural qualities, not on viewer reaction or artist's expression.

The life-sized dancers in Teiji Furuhashi's *Lovers* (1994), are drained of life. The naked figures have a spectral quality. Back and forth they move, and occasionally come together in a virtual embrace. One of the figures will stop and seek out a lone viewer. The figure pauses to face the viewer with his arms outstretched. The gesture is not a beckoning one; rather, the man is assuming a beatific pose, as if he is vulnerable and exposed. In reaching out to a single viewer in a direct, personal manner, Furuhashi belies the notion that the human spirit must necessarily be overwhelmed by the juggernaut of technology.

So far we have looked at some works in terms of what the viewer wants and in terms of what the maker wants. In a recent issue of the journal *October*, WJT Mitchell asks "What Do Pictures Really Want?" Does it want to be looked at and admired? Does it simply want to be understood? Does it want to have influence?

What pictures want, then, is not the best interpreted, decoded, worshipped, smashed, exposed, demystified, or the enthral their beholders [...] The desires of pictures may be inhuman or nonhuman, better modeled by figures of animals, machines, or cyborgs or even by more basic images - what Erasmus Darwin called 'the loves of

plants'. What pictures want in the last instance, then is simply to be asked what they want, with the understanding that the answer may well be nothing at all.

W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures Really Want?" *October* 77, Summer 1996, p.82

If we ask the same question about interactive works, I suspect that we will find that what they really want is time.

## Time

And where (or when) is time? Interactivity is not, of course, a feature of computers alone. An elevator is interactive. But an elevator does not represent, does not picture reality. Interactive computer works have the possibility to represent an aspect of our experience of reality that nothing else can - that we can affect it. Our experience of reality is crucially connected to the idea that we can change what we perceive, and to incorporate this feature of experience into works of art can be something of great import.

But now we are talking about time. Because change or effect or influence always take place in time. So an essential ingredient of the architecture of interactivity is time; interactivity is a time-based medium. To ignore that is to make works may as well not be interactive.

A work that does not acknowledge the passage of time as a fundamental aspect of its composition is simply not responding to the potential of interactivity (like music without time, possible, but exceptional, or acrylics without color, possible but making a statement)

Choice and time are more or less mutually exclusive-

choice must be done at the pace of the chooser  
choice means that you know what is going to happen next  
choice excludes story at the moment of choice  
choice is about shopping or fast food

Time brings in memory, anticipation, passage, suspense, hope, fear, desire (rather than drive), fantasy in short narrative. So as artists working in interactivity, we must be concerned with response, not choice, and time.

What is it that an interactive work wants/needs? Time. More time.

As do most of us. As do we in this presentation.

In Nam June Paik's installation, *TV Buddha* (1974), a video camera captures a sculpture of the Buddha and transmits the live image to a monitor. The Buddha, gazing knowingly at his image on the screen, evokes an obvious question, a video koan. What is the difference between the Buddha staring at a live (present time) image of himself, and the Buddha confronted with a replay of a videotaped (past time) representation?

For a viewer studying the Buddha on the monitor, clearly there is no difference. An image on television does not carry a time signature. As Eastern philosophy teaches: time is an illusion, while among Western philosophers, 'Time is a human construct' expresses a similar conviction.

The monitor, housed in an ovoid plastic enclosure, is attractive, and the sculpture of the Buddha is particularly beautiful. The timeless wisdom of the East appears adequate to the challenge of modern technology. The confrontation is balan-

ced, contemplative, but also suggests conflict. After all, Zen koans do have answers, traditionally dispensed by a traveling monk who wishes to supplant the reigning master of the monastery. To Paik's koan, the sojourn might respond by leaping into action and placing a hand over the camera lens. This gesture underscores the difference between a live feed and a prerecorded tape, but as with many koans, the rejoinder only launches other mind twisters.