Drawn: The Artist, Audience and Interactivity

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Abstract

New media technologies are expanding the range of possibilities for digital media design. Interactivity has been seen as one of the most dynamic features in new media technologies, especially for those new media artists who endeavour to explore the capacity of digital media technology. This paper aims to highlight the important relationship between the digital media artist, audience and the digital media work, by analysis of the audience's reaction to a digital media work. Giving adequate consideration to how the audience might comprehend a digital media work helps to ensure optimal setting for interactive media design. In addition, this paper suggests the importance that the audience understands interactivity has been used to achieve an immersive creative experience, and it is vital for the artist to appreciate the extent of the audience's understanding of the use of technology in their work. This paper discusses the relationship between the artist, audience and digital media work by evaluating an interactive media work, *Drawn Installation*.

Introduction

While information technology is currently based around technical rationality and the efficiency and effectiveness of content delivery, increasingly it impacts all aspects of our lives, including our sensory and emotional experiences and the parameters of our imagination. As such, interactive design should not simply cater to factors like base level cognitive processing but the affective and creative centres of the brain.

Interactive digital art works involve new forms of live interactivity and performance, especially those of particularly experimental nature which are difficult to understand or critique for most audiences. Even though what constitutes the 'audience' today is more ambiguous than in earlier times, one might consider the audience as an element of artists in their own right, some simply less familiar with the concept or use of digital

technology. The *Drawn Installation*, the subject of this analysis, raised the question of how and to what extent the audience experiences and interpreted the thematic elements: interactive live performance of hand and ink.

The Work

The *Drawn Installation* was made in 2005 by new media artist Zachary Lieberman in America. Lieberman's work uses new media technology in a playful and mysterious way to explore the nature of communication and the boundary between the visual and invisible. *Drawn* uses computer vision techniques to allow users to paint with ink on a canvas, and then transfer the resulting drawing on to a computer screen where it becomes alive through computer intervention. Ink stains are erased from the page and are free to move around the screen in reaction to user interaction.

Drawn is an ideal example of "augmented reality" used to create a poetic space between the real and the virtual, throwing in plenty of playfulness and generosity. *Drawn*

Figure 1: A visitor exploring the *drawn installation*

provides an intuitive media interface, and the projected results become both a work stage for the user and a performing space for observers. The sketches left behind by users were displayed on the walls in the gallery as a document both of the artist's and of the users intention becoming a charming side product of the interactive installation. (Figure1) However, *Drawn* is concerned

with interactivity, applying complicated technological solutions to the creation of playful and poetic spaces.

Interactivity in the Context of Digital Media

Interactivity is a broad term that carries a number of meanings. One of the most sought after goals in the digital age is that the user can actively manipulate the media and the information, thereby eliciting a 'high' level of interactivity. The idea of high-level interaction implies that the user can initiate actions in a digital media context. These moments of interaction define the texture of each individual multimedia experience. Internet and new media consultant Tony Feldman suggests that interactivity offers the potential to create a new era in information, entertainment and education. Through interactivity, once dull, passive experiences will be transformed into something infinitely richer and more compelling. Feldman's utopian enthusiasm for new technology imagines its potential to produce new levels of human experience, far surpassing the singular consumption of information in older media forms. However, new technology is not in itself transformative in the ways Feldman suggests. Enhanced user experience of media and information depends on how the new media technology is applied to the content, and how interactivity is developed.

The notion that the user is an active participant in the context of new media gives rise to the idea that users are potential co-creators through their power to interpret new media content, their engagement potentially extending to the construction of meaning. Interactivity extends the creative dimension, and enhances the action that defines the texture of a specific reading behaviour. It suggests that when individuals participate in a communication process, the roles of sender and receiver are in some ways interchangeable. Such an understanding encourages new media artists to act on the user's receptivity. Interactive art represents one of the highest levels of interactivity between users and new media. As an ideological imperative, interactive art involves a direct exchange between the artist or designer, the digital work, and its audience, emphasizing and stimulating the creativity of the spectator.

Conclusions

Lev Manovich argues that the new media object is not fixed but something variable can exist in different, potentially infinite versions. Recognition of the character of user authority shifts the focus from the simple idea of interactivity to the user's ability to manipulate material as presented, to specifically facilitate the production of individualized meanings and experiences. Interactive systems require the user to react. As technology expands, more variations of possibilities will become available, not only between the user and the system but among the content within the system. Eventually, computer interface systems will most likely reflect the personality of the user.

In a digital media environment, *Drawn* encourages the user to explore the creation of their work; the potential of digital technology could possibly be the integration of both content and technology with an individual personality. However, in *Drawn* the capacity for participation allows an individual to construct the content that differentiates the individual from a passive controller to being active with a sense of personal identity and able to give thoughts and desires and offer creativity. From this basis, giving adequate consideration to how the audience might comprehend a digital media work helps to make sure optimal setting for interactive media design. In addition, it is essential for the artist to appreciate the extent of the audience's understanding of the use of technology in their work.

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