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passage
- a Hybrid of
Interactive Installation
and Performance

Context

As an interdisciplinary production group we are exploring modes of representation that incorporate choreography and media arts, and lie at the border between installation and spectacle. We are interested in the artistic process as much as the artistic product. One of our objectives is to develop strategies and methodologies for artistic expression using new technologies in the live arts and to foster the integration of expressive systems as tools for creation in the performing arts disciplines. The work with new media and our multiple experiences creating interactive dance performances inspired us to produce an installation integrating live performance, in which the spectator is invited to actually “use” the body of the performer as the interface to the media environment.

passage

is a performance-installation project with one performer, a visual artist and a sound artist. It is a practical research into the possibilities created by blurring the boundaries between active performers and passive spectators. It explores varying states of intimacy and proximity, with the goal to create an artwork that oscillates between interactive installation and performance. The project incorporates dance performance, choreography, improvisation and a dynamic and responsive media environment. The media environment is transformed by continuous live input from multiple users – the spectators – via a series of wireless sensors attached and distributed both on the costume of a performer and throughout the installation environment. The work is accessible to visitors for approx. three hours per day. With passage we propose a situation where the spectator’s participation plays a role in the shaping of events. By manipulating the sensors on the body of the performer and/or on the objects in the space, the visitors are invited to manipulate the sound, image and lights in real-time. The distributed sensors register movement, proximity, touch and pressure. The technical set-up consists of two wireless sensor systems, three computers, a wireless microphone, a multi-channel sound system, three video-projectors, a motorized mirror, lighting and the max/msp software.

During the performance, the performer solicits the participation of the public with the help of specific actions marked by an attitude of availability, invitation and at times retraction. The spectators have the choice of participating and collaborating, or of positioning themselves more as observers.

In the absence of intervention, the environment transforms only in relation to the performer's movements. However, in response to interventions, the transformations of the environment are clearly manifested and the visitor's actions provoke a shift in the installation environment. These fluctuations in ambiance lead the performer to move to another state, which she does by drawing from a bank of movements and pre-determined performative modes.

The elements of passage are constructed around ten separate but interrelating scenes and motifs. Each of these scenes are articulated around a specific state of the performer, in combination with a distinct image and sound environment. They each deal in a particular way with the themes of social interaction, intimacy and observation. The relations between media space, performer and public are developed and executed in an improvisational manner. To be able to modify the audio-visual thread live we developed a compositional grid, a score, for the distribution of the interactive parameters and the management of the data.

By working with the contrasts between solicitation and retraction, passage deals with playfulness and mutuality and explores the notions of exchange and collaboration, the boundaries between beings and their environments. We create a situation that questions the visitor on his relationship to his own body, and by offering the body of a dancer as the ground for exploration we play with the limit of discomfort. Actively implicated and possibly confronted by our artistic proposition, the spectator finds himself at once subject and object.

The fact that this project takes the form of a hybrid between performance and installation brings us to reflect on the notion of temporality. How can it be organized in an installation, in which multiple users can engage and where, at the same time, a performance takes place?

We have attempted to answer this question by exploring and structuring the temporal organization of the separate scenes in a non-linear way. At some moments the order is pre-determined at other moments the visitor's actions determine what follows what, all taking place in an environment where the performer, the visual artist and the sound artist make use of various improvisation strategies.

One of the issues is how to lead the visitor to enter into a relationship with the dancer and his environment. A determining factor for the outcome of each performance is the visitor's capacity to listen and to observe, together with the capacity to communicate and to collaborate. The relationships developed between the visitors, the performer and the environment are one of the central elements. The nature of these relationships shifts between: dialogue, confrontation, collaboration, domination and game.

passage is a work about freedom of choice, intimacy and privacy, participation and connectivity; it provides a reflection about the perception of our bodies and our mediated presence inside networked societies.

References