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DOUBLE VISION INTERMEDIA PERFORMANCE:

Impossible Blueprint of Territorial Collisions

Sean Clute & Pauline Jennings

DOUBLE VISION

05672, STOWE, VT, USA

DV@DOUBLE-VISION.BIZ, HTTP://WWW.DOUBLE-VISION.BIZ

1 Introduction

DOUBLE VISION, an intermedia performance company, has been exploring innovative methods of combining ideas, art forms, materials, and spaces since 2003. In particular, the group has emphasized these topics by producing a series of performances, *Evolutionary Patterns and the Lonely Owl (EPLO)*. The series was bound by incorporating multiple art forms like dance, video, sound, sculpture, and installation in a defined space for a specified duration. The series eliminated the use of the proscenium, enabling audience to move freely amongst performers and installations, while triggering artistic responses.

The first incarnation, *EPLO (Byte #0)*, was presented at WORKS/San Jose, September 24, 2005. This presentation applied mathematician John Conway's Game of Life to performance. Through physical proximity, audience, artists, and sculptural elements triggered the life and death of nearby performers, thereby creating a complex and evolving performance.

On November 19, 2005, DOUBLE VISION presented EPLO *(Mutation #1)* at Madhorse Loft (Oakland, CA). In *EPLO (Mutation #1)*, attendees were given colored glow necklaces representing DNA strands. DNA combinations incited mutations in individual performances. Audience members experimented with trading their necklaces and using them collectively to evoke unique responses.

The third incarnation was performed May 16-17, 2006 at CELLspace (San Francisco, CA). *EPLO (Mutation #2)* strove for increased freedom from rule-based performance with a shift to anarchistic methodologies. Artists could collaborate, make their own rule-based systems, or completely disregard the other performers and audience members. The collaborative result ebbed between unity and chaos. In this paper, we analyze the performance of EPLO (Mutation #2), by examining individual content and resulting forms. By doing so, we will demonstrate how complexity in simultaneous audiovisual experiences can collectively lead to inventive approaches in the creative process.

2 Content

The following section describes examples of individual works created for *EPLO (Mutation #2)*, which will be useful for considering the event's form.

2.1 Ample Autonomous Accumulators

Ample Autonomous Accumulators was a choreographed piece by Pauline Jennings where three dancers combined references to popular culture and sports with abstract, contemporary movement. During the three-hour performance, dancers competed against each other in an ongoing race, the winner was determined largely by audience participation. Placards were hung in the space bearing a variety of directives like: slow motion, instant replay, fast forward, and rewind. When an audience member placed a placard on a dancer, the dancer had to obey the command until someone either removed it or replaced it.

In *Ample Autonomous Accumulators* rule-based systems allowed for audience control of movement while adding a layer of chance, complexity, and chaos. The work took advantage of the body's natural mobility and juxtaposed it with more static mediums like stationary video and allowed for a sophisticated level of interaction between artist and audience.

2.2 Bouncing Off the Walls

Bouncing Off the Walls was an interactive installation created by video artist and programmer Tim Thompson. Two steering wheels were used to control graphical bouncing balls inside an elaborate video-projected maze. As an audience member steered the movement of the balls, they were able to knock down walls of the maze and created intricate visual patterns. Each ball also had a distinctive pitch and percussive sound associated with its graphical representation which was diffused spatially through four speakers that surrounded the audience.

As in many of Thompson's installations, the viewer was a vital component to his work, without which the piece could not exist. Unintentionally, the work *Bouncing Off the Walls* started a chain reaction that provided content for the next work discussed. Thus, while Thompson's piece was stationary, the effects of his work reached beyond the confines of the installation's home base.

2. 3 Audio Transmission Landscape

Audio Transmission Landscape was a sonic component created by composers David Holton and Sean Clute. The work utilized a variety of sounds diffused through discrete speakers. The compositional form was improvisatory, while the content was generated from multiple sources including algorithmically generated material, a library for FM transmissions, and live-sampling.

The algorithmically generated material came from networked computers. Each computer was running software

that processed a variety of sounds including samples of environments, people, and animals. Using transmitters and receivers, audio signals were routed to localized areas in the venue. The audio signals transmitted came from computers, performers, or audience members. In essence, a completely anarchistic music library could be accessed and updated by anyone present with a computer or wireless personal digital assistants (PDA). .

While other works included audience participation, the *Audio Transmission Landscape* did not (with the exception of the radio library). Instead of utilizing user feedback, the piece focused on having an effect on the user. "Audio Transmission Landscape" directed audience attention to different places by what sonic material was being diffused into the space.

2.4 Name Games

Name Games was a video and performance piece by Jessica Gomula. The video, a "blizzard of sexualized slang" [2] and animated cowgirls, featured large-scale projections across hanging, semi-transparent fabric strips. Gomula's use of language and light delivered a vivid visual component while its enormous size affected the viewer's sense of space and time. In addition to the video, Gomula cyclically transformed the space with an interactive performance component.

Three times during the event the audience was rounded-up by a number of cowboys and cowgirls wielding lassos for a hoedown. During the playful square-dancing, audience members were branded with stickers labeled with words similar to those seen on the video projection. The stickers addressed the difference between actively and passively navigating the sexually indicative slang words. *Name Games* held a dominant artistic voice during the event because of the sheer size of the projections and the demand for the audience to join the square dancers. In contrast to the other described works, the performance aspect of the piece rarely occurred during the evening. In essence, the hoedown created clear climatic episodes that dramatically altered the event's landscape.

3 Overall Form

While the previous analysis discussed individual pieces in *EPLO (Mutation #2)*, the audience did not experience them as such. It is important to note that the more-than-twenty individual works occurred simultaneously. We will now highlight the relationships and interactions between project territories, artists, and audience members. From this analysis, we will demonstrate how the overarching form of the event was achieved through processes such as negotiation and adaptation.

3.1 Form by Negotiation

EPLO (Mutation #2) was performed at CELLspace, a 10,000 square foot warehouse-like venue in San Francisco. The venue housed a ground floor gallery, large open room, and second floor balcony and loft. The space was arranged to exclude "seating" thereby encouraging the audience to freely explore the entire venue. Prior to the performance, artists working on static projects negotiated with each other for locations within the space. Considerations for these projects included physical proximity to others, ideal lighting, diffused video, and local verses ambient sound. For mobile projects, artists determined what spatial limitations, if any, would be placed on their performances. In this manner, the venue was collectively divided to best meet the needs of individuals. Because there was no director or moderator, artists where left to their own negotiation skills to acquire ideal physical, aural, and visual territories.

The overarching physical form, therefore, appeared complex, especially when artists shared or collided other territories. Adding to this complexity was a sense of impermanence caused by an audience who further divided or connected spaces and projects by participation. When viewing the space from above, the environment could be akin to inspecting the inner workings of a city. Installations and sculptures, like the walls of buildings, housed citizens and their diverse activities within and surrounding them.

3.2 Form by Serendipity and Adaptation

Within the event landscape, multiple perspectives could be observed as artistic interactions occurred. For example, two dancers in *Ample Autonomous Accumulators* crossed into the *Bouncing Off the Walls* territory where the *Name Games* projection illuminated their bodies. Triggered by the dancers' presence in the space, the *Audio Transmission Landscape* amplified sounds in that same space. As a result, the audience may have shifted attention toward this moment and witnessed an entirely new piece forming. If the viewer was close to the action, their focus may have been on a microscopic level such as observing a dancer's leg muscles flexing. Conversely, if the audience member was watching from above, their focus could be on the pattern of the action or its contrast to another activity occurring elsewhere. For that matter, an audience member could be inside a structure like the geodesic dome, rendering them oblivious to peripheral action. Because hundreds of events like this one occurred every second, the viewer's focus was in a constant state of adjustment, exploration, and discovery.

Abstraction's Affect on Form.

The above example focuses on the division of tangible space caused by a physical source like dancers. Audio and video, however, have a quite different impact on the partitioning of space. For example, audio and video could engulf the entire space with an increased amplitude and projection size or could conversely embrace a small space with localized sound and focused projection. These elements could effectively change dimension without encroaching upon the physical space of installations. This type of space division further accentuated the complexity inherent in the event.

Like the use of audio and video, the wireless technology needed to transmit sound in "Audio Transmission Landscape" added another layer of complexity to the overall physical form. The data was transmitted throughout the space without interfering with or affecting the other pieces. Unlike the audio and video, the wireless transmissions

were another step removed from observable representation. The audience members were able to experience the transmissions and even affect what was contained in the user sound library but were not able to reach out and touch it like they could a dancer or video scrim.

Audience's Affect on Form.

The audience contributed yet another dimension to the overall form of the event. Given the freedom to explore the space, the audience altered the landscape simply by being present in it and triggering artistic events. An example was demonstrated when two individuals, unaware that they were being video broadcasted, were intimately embracing inside a covered geodesic dome. Their video feed was projected onto territories that required performers to respond to the amount of physical or video-represented people locally present. The irony in chain reactions, as seen in this example, is that the couple in the dome had no knowledge of their impact on artists, other audience members, and the form of the event. Whether intentional or not, a single participant's actions could dramatically change the event in unpredictable ways.

4 Conclusion

EPLO (Mutation #2) exhibited similarities to that of a contemporary city. A single audience member, like a pedestrian, could navigate and explore a multitude of spaces and experience unlimited perspectives. The audience could unconsciously have an impact on other individuals and events, thus reflecting their ability to affect their own city, country, and future landscapes. Artists, like the inhabitants of a city, create, adapt, transform, and contribute to the development of the environment, society, and culture.

EPLO (Mutation #2) demonstrated these characteristics, but as an artistic event, it also displayed several major differences. These differences are exhibited in the manner of experimentation, freedom, and expression of the event's inhabitants. While the event did not claim or try to be a kind of utopian environment, it inspired imagination in extraordinary ways.

4.1 Non-Systems as Methodology

By examining the individual content of the event, evidence of a number of imaginative and innovative processes can be observed. Whether by incorporating methods of audience interaction, custom-built technologies, or formats for audiovisual diffusion, each artistic project was a seed for continued exploration and development. Intermedia art permits the combination of such seeds that further the expansion of individual ideas, methods, and possibilities. A challenge posed by intermedia art therefore lies in discovering methodologies to consciously combine diverse elements into an overarching form.

While there exist many systems for organizing diverse artistic elements such as the self-organizing systems used

in John Conway's Game of Life, DOUBLE VISION chose a non-organizing system or non-system. The form of the event was instead derived from the content of individual works and void of rules, regulations, and governance. The freedom within this non-system allowed for the contributing artists to be uninhibited in the development of their pieces. Additionally, with a form lacking in a central focus, stage, and direction, the audience was permitted to experience the event freely. This type of artistic environment is vastly different from the rules, regulations, mores, and boundaries established by our societies.

4.2 Transvergence through Collaboration

The process and realization of *EPLO* was quite contemporary in nature. In an age when access to ideas, materials, and perspectives is growing in scale, transvergence of these aspects presents great possibilities. Theorist Marcos Novak addresses this topic within his definition of transvergence:

> The clusters of cultural impacts and creative conditions brought about by accelerating technological change. This work articulates and explores the realization that we are not only witnessing the "convergence" and "divergence" of media, disciplines, institutions, and so on, but a much more radical "transvergence" leading to widespread epistemic speciation in practically all areas of knowledge and expression, and to the continuous emergence of entirely new fields. On a global scale, the projects we are most captivated by, and often most highly invested in, are projects that no longer progress along expected lines of development, but that are instead jumping across diverse and initially mutually alien territories [3].

4.3 Future Growth through Adaptation and Collaboration

EPLO (Mutation #2) provided a space and time in which transvergence could exist. The pieces, patterns, forms, and experiences had by those in attendance could affect future creative processes and methodologies. It is hard to imagine these possibilities being realized without collaboration and the lack of imposed formulaic structure on both the artists and spectators. By being open to discovery and sharing in the process of development and innovation, *EPLO (Mutation #2)* in the very least provided proof that form could arise from anarchy and that a community could be built and served through an adaptive, collaborative system.

REFERENCES

1. Gardner, M.: "Mathematical Games: The fantastic combinations of John Conway's new solitaire game 'life,'" Scientific America 223 (October 1970): 120-123

2. Gomula, J.: "Name Games: Sex and Semantics," Accessed at <http://liquidneon.org/sketches/?page_id=26>

3. Novak, M.: "2004 World Technology Awards & Finalists." World Technology Network, (2004) Accessed at <www.wtn.net/2004/bio212.html>

The four rules include: (1) Each cell with one or no neighbors dies, as if by loneliness; (2) each cell with four or more neighbors dies, as if by overpopulation, and; (3) each cell with two or three neighbors survives [1]