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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

VOL 18 NO 3 VOLUME EDITORS LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU / EDITORS JONATHAN MUNRO AND ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

Touch and Go is published in collaboration with Watermans and Goldsmiths College in occasion of the Watermans' International Festival of Digital Art, 2012, which coincides with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. The issue explores the impact of technology in art as well as the meaning, possibilities and issues around human interaction and engagement. *Touch and Go* investigates interactivity and participation, as well as light art and new media approaches to the public space as tools that foster engagement and shared forms of participation.

TOUCH AND GO

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Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Volume 18 Issue 3
August 2012
ISSN 1071-4391
ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5
The ISBN is provided by Goldsmiths, University of London.

LEA PUBLISHING & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Editorial Address
Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Sabanci University, Orhanli – Tuzla, 34956
Istanbul, Turkey

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info@leoalmanac.org

Web
» www.leoalmanac.org
» www.twitter.com/LEA_twitts
» www.flickr.com/photos/lea_gallery
» www.facebook.com/pages/Leonardo-Electronic-Almanac/209156896252

Cover Image
Scenocosme

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is published by:
Leonardo/ISAST
211 Sutter Street, suite 501
San Francisco, CA 94108
USA

Leonardo Electronic Almanac (LEA) is a project of Leonardo/The International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology. For more information about Leonardo/ISAST's publications and programs, see http://www.leonardo.info or contact isast@leonardo.info.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac is produced by Passero Productions.

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC, VOLUME 18 ISSUE 3

Touch and Go

VOLUME EDITORS
LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU

EDITORS
JONATHAN MUNRO, ÖZDEN ŞAHİN

Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012

***Touch and Go* is a title that I chose together with Irini Papadimitriou for this LEA special issue.** On my part with this title I wanted to stress several aspects that characterize that branch of contemporary art in love with interaction, be it delivered by allowing the audience to touch the art object or by becoming part of a complex electronic sensory experience in which the artwork may somehow respond and touch back in return.

With the above statement, I wanted to deliberately avoid the terminology 'interactive art' in order to not fall in the trap of characterizing art that has an element of interaction as principally defined by the word interactive; as if this were the only way to describe contemporary art that elicits interactions and responses between the artist, the audience and the art objects.

I remember when I was at Central Saint Martins writing a paper on the sub-distinctions within contemporary media arts and tracing the debates that distinguished between electronic art, robotic art, new media art, digital art, computer art, computer based art, internet art, web art... At some point of that analysis and argument I realized that the common thread that characterized all of these sub-genres of aesthetic representations was the word art and it did not matter (at least not that much in my opinion) if the manifestation was material or immaterial, conceptual or physical, electronic or painterly, analogue or digital.

I increasingly felt that this rejection of the technical component would be necessary in order for the electronic-robotic-new-media-digital-computer-based-internet art object to re-gain entry within the field of fine art. Mine was a reaction to an hyper-fragmented and indeed extensive and in-depth taxonomy that seemed to have as its main effect that of pushing these experimental and innovative art forms – through the emphasis of their technological characterization – away from the fine arts and into a ghetto of isolation and self-reference. Steve Dietz's question – *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* [1] – remains unanswered, but I believe that there are changes that are happening – albeit slowly – that will see the sensorial and technical elements become important parts of the aesthetic aspects of the art object as much as the brush technique of Vincent Willem van Gogh or the sculptural fluidity of Henry Moore.

Hence the substitution in the title of this special issue of the word interactivity with the word touch, with the desire of looking at the artwork as something that can be touched in material and immaterial ways, interfered with, interacted with and 'touched and reprocessed' with the help of media tools but that can also 'touch' us back in return, both individually and collectively. I also wanted to stress the fast interrelation between the art object and the consumer in a commodified relationship that is based on immediate engagement and fast disengagement, touch and go. But a fast food approach is perhaps incorrect if we consider as part of the interactivity equation the viewers' mediated processes of consumption and memorization of both the image and the public experience.

Nevertheless, the problems and issues that interactivity and its multiple definitions and interpretations in the 20th and 21st century raise cannot be overlooked, as much as cannot be dismissed the complex set of emotive and digital interactions that can be set in motion by artworks that reach and engage large groups of people within the public space. These interactions generate public shows in which the space of the city becomes the background to an experiential event that is characterized by impermanence and memorization. It is a process in which thousands of people engage, capture data, memorize and at times memorialize the event and re-process, mash-up, re-disseminate and re-contextualize the images within multiple media contexts.

The possibility of capturing, viewing and understanding the entire mass of data produced by these aesthetic sensory experiences becomes an impossible task due to easy access to an unprecedented amount of media and an unprecedented multiplication of data, as Lev Manovich argues. [2]

In *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* Timothy Murray writes that "the retrospective nature of repetition and digital coding—how initial images, forms, and narratives are refigured through their contemplative re-citation and re-presentation—consistently inscribes the new media in the memory and memorization of its antecedents, cinema and video." [3]

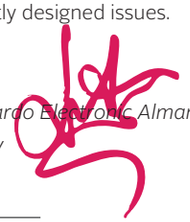
The difference between memorization and memorialization may be one of the further aspects in which the interaction evolves – beyond the artwork but still linked to it. The memory of the event with its happening and performative elements, its traces and records both official and unofficial, the re-processing and mash-ups; all of these elements become part of and contribute to a collective narrative and pattern of engagement and interaction.

These are issues and problems that the artists and writers of this LEA special issue have analyzed from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, offering to the reader the opportunity of a glimpse into the complexity of today's art interactions within the contemporary social and cultural media landscapes.

Touch and Go is one of those issues that are truly born from a collaborative effort and in which all editors have contributed and worked hard in order to deliver a documentation of contemporary art research, thought and aesthetic able to stand on the international scene.

For this reason I wish to thank Prof. Janis Jefferies and Irini Papadimitriou together with Jonathan Munro and Özden Şahin for their efforts. The design is by Deniz Cem Önduygu who as LEA's Art Director continues to deliver brilliantly designed issues.

Lanfranco Aceti
Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery



1. "Nevertheless, there is this constant apparently inherent need to try and categorize and classify. In Beyond Interface, an exhibition I organized in 1998, I 'datamined' ten categories: net.art, storytelling, socio-cultural, biographical, tools, performance, analog-hybrid, interactive art, interfacers + artificers. David Ross, in his lecture here at the CADRE Laboratory for New Media, suggested 21 characteristics of net art. Stephen Wilson, a pioneering practitioner, has a virtual – albeit well-ordered – jungle of categories. Rhizome has developed a list of dozens of keyword categories for its ArtBase. Lev Manovich, in his Computing Culture: Defining New Media Genres symposium focused on the categories of database, interface, spatialization, and navigation. To my mind, there is no question that such categorization is useful, especially in a distributed system like the Internet. But, in truth, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, "ornithology is for the birds what categorization is for the artist." Perhaps especially at a time of rapid change and explosive growth of the underlying infrastructure and toolsets, it is critical that description follow practice and not vice versa." Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists? Web Walker Daily* 28, April 4, 2000, http://bit.ly/QjEWlY (accessed July 1, 2012).
2. This link to a Google+ conversation is an example of this argument on massive data and multiple media engagements across diverse platforms: http://bit.ly/pGgDsS (accessed July 1, 2012).
3. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.

ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5
ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

Touch and Go: The Magic Touch Of Contemporary Art

It is with some excitement that I write this preface to Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012. It has been a monumental achievement by the curator Irini Papadimitriou to pull together 6 groundbreaking installations exploring interactivity, viewer participation, collaboration and the use or importance of new and emerging technologies in Media and Digital Art.

From an initial call in December 2010 over 500 submissions arrived in our inboxes in March 2011. It was rather an overwhelming and daunting task to review, look and encounter a diverse range of submissions that were additionally asked to reflect on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Submissions came from all over the world, from Africa and Korea, Austria and Australia, China and the UK, Latvia and Canada and ranged from the spectacularly complicated to the imaginatively humorous. Of course each selector, me, onedotzero, London's leading digital media innovation organization, the curatorial team at Athens Video Art Festival and Irini herself, had particular favorites and attachments but the final grouping I believe does reflect a sense of the challenges and opportunities that such an open competition offers. It is though a significant move on behalf of the curator that each work is given the Watermans space for 6 weeks which enables people to take part in the cultural activities surrounding each installation, fulfilling, promoting and incorporating the Cultural Olympiad themes and values 'inspiration, participation and creativity.'

Some, like Gail Pearce's ***Going with the Flow*** was made because rowing at the 2012 Olympics will be held near Egham and it was an opportunity to respond and create an installation offering the public a more interactive way of rowing, while remaining on dry land, not only watching but also participating and having an effect on the images by their actions. On the other hand, Michele Barker and Anna Munster's collaborative ***Hocus Pocus*** will be a 3-screen interactive artwork that uses illusionistic and performative aspects of magical tricks to explore human perception, senses and movement. As they have suggested, "Magic – like interactivity – relies on shifting the perceptual relations between vision and movement, focusing and diverting attention at key moments. Participants will become aware of this relation as their perception catches up with the audiovisual illusion(s)" (artists statement, February 2011). Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Emeka Ogboh are artists who also work collaboratively and working under name of One-Room Shack. ***UNITY*** is built like a navigable labyrinth to reflect the idea of unity in diversity that the Games signify. In an increasingly globalized world they are interested in the ways in which the discourse of globalization opens up and closes off discursive space whereas Suguru Goto is a musician who creates real spaces that are both metaphysical and spiritual. ***Cymatics*** is a kinetic sculpture and sound installation. Wave patterns are created on liquid as a result of sound vibrations generated by visitors. Another sound work is Phoebe Hui's ***Granular Graph*, a** sound instrument about musical gesture and its notation.

ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

Audiences are invited to become a living pendulum. The apparatus itself can create geometric images to represent harmonies and intervals in musical scales. Finally, Joseph Farbrook's ***Strata-caster*** explores the topography of power, prestige, and position through an art installation, which exists in the virtual world of Second Life, a place populated by over 50,000 people at any given moment.

Goldsmiths, as the leading academic partner, has been working closely with Watermans in developing a series of seminars and events to coincide with the 2012 Festival. I am the artistic director of Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS), which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engages in a number of research projects and provides its own postgraduate teaching through the PhD in Arts and Computational Technology, the MFA in Computational Studio Arts and the MA in Computational Art. Irini is also an alumni of the MFA in *Curating* (Goldsmiths, University of London) and it has been an exceptional pleasure working with her generating ideas and platforms that can form an artistic legacy long after the Games and the Festival have ended. The catalogue and detailed blogging/documentation and social networking will be one of our responsibilities but another of mine is to is to ensure that the next generation of practitioners test the conventions of the white cube gallery, reconsider and revaluate artistic productions, their information structure and significance; engage in the museum sector whilst at the same time challenging the spaces for the reception of 'public' art. In addition those who wish to increase an audience's interaction and enjoyment of their work have a firm grounding in artistic practice and computing skills.

Consequently, I am particularly excited that the 2012 Festival Watermans will introduce a mentoring scheme for students interested in participatory interactive digital / new media work. The mentoring scheme involves video interviews with the 6 selected artists and their work, briefly introduced earlier in this preface, and discussions initiated by the student. As so often debated in our seminars at Goldsmiths and elsewhere, what are the expectations of the audience, the viewer, the spectator, and the engager? How do exhibitions and festival celebrations revisit the traditional roles of performer/artist and audiences? Can they facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity? How do sound works get curated in exhibitions that include interactive objects, physical performances and screens? What are the issues around technical support? How are the ways of working online and off, including collaboration and social networking, affecting physical forms of display and publishing?

As I write this in Wollongong during the wettest New South Wales summer for 50 years, I want to end with a quote used by the Australia, Sydney based conjurers Michele Barker and Anna Munster

> *Illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception.* [1]

The world is upside down in so many alarming ways but perhaps 2012 at Watermans will offer some momentary ideas of unity in diversity that the Games signify and ***UNITY*** proposes. Such anticipation and such promise!

Janis Jefferies
Professor of Visual Arts
Goldsmiths
University of London, UK

23rd Dec 2011, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

1. Stephen L. Malnik and Susana Martinez-Conde, *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our Everyday Deceptions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 8.

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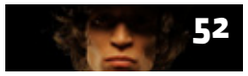
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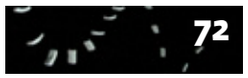
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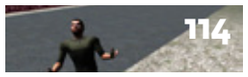
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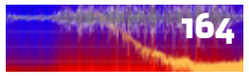
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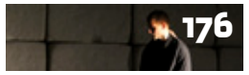
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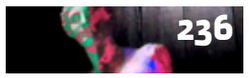
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ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

HOKUS POKUS

HokusPokus, Michele Barker and Anna Munster, 2011, interactive installation.

by

Michele Barker & Anna Munster

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Much of our creative practice has explored questions and issues asked and explored by neurology, from how we perceive to how actual brain damage affects our movement in and sensing of the world. *HokusPokus* developed in response to our most recent interest in *enactive* visual perception. We wanted to find a visually rich and accessible way to explore how we perceive actively in relation to and with our environment – how we see what we see and how this makes us 'interact.'

Recently, neurologists have begun looking to magic in order to help make sense of some of most complex – yet fundamental – aspects of perception: why don't we always see something right in front of us; why do our eyes more easily follow curved rather than straight gestures across space? There are no simple answers yet magic, which has explored such aspects of the visual for centuries, offered us a framework to explore these issues in a visually interesting way.

HokusPokus consists of three channels of high definition video arranged in a u-shape and four channels of audio set in each corner of the space. A magician's top hat that is senor-enabled sits on a plinth in the middle of the space. At the entrance of the installation is a double-sided postcard. On one side, an elephant – with either four legs or five depending on how you look at it – and on the back, a quote from two of the leading neurologists investigating magic. Susana Martinez-Conde and Stephen Macknik point out that, "illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception." [1] How you imagine – or perceive – something, then, amounts to how you are operating in the world. When something or someone undermines that, or simply changes it somehow, your perception likewise alters. Magicians are masters of just such a process, redirecting your attention, re-forming your memories and effectively making the impossible appear possible. They exploit what is known as the 'spotlight of attention,' whereby you actively ignore everything going on around you except for what is

ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5
ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

within your immediate, narrow field of vision. Knowing that you are comfortably focused on one very small area, a good magician can set up a trick quite literally in (your) plain sight.

HokusPokus is concerned primarily with close-up or parlor magic, which reached its peak during the Victorian era. The piece is divided into five sections: 'cards,' 'cups & balls,' 'coins,' 'thimbles' and 'rings.' A magician was filmed performing these tricks but our intention was never to simply document a magic show. Part of what makes magic work is the experience itself – the surprising realization that the magician produced a coin out of nowhere as you seemingly watched his every move. The tricks in *HokusPokus* have not been digitally manipulated; their multichannel display does not 'reveal' how the tricks have been done. Rather it unfolds them temporally and spatially, amplifying and intensifying aspects of close-up magic such as the flourish and sleight of hand.

The work acknowledges early cinema from the late 1800s, and in particular the work of early filmmaker and magician Georges Méliès, who created many silent magic-based films. These explored both the optics of early moving image cameras and the optical illusions that could be created through careful consideration of timing and staging and through in-camera editing. Additionally, neuroscience and cinema both emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, and so this became the perfect period to aesthetically place our magic performance. In fact, early attempts to understand neurological functioning by nineteenth century psychologists involved actual filming of magicians' deceptive movements. [2]

For some time we have been interested in the ideas of enactive perception developed in the work of theorists of mind and neuroscientists such as Alva Noë, Evan Thompson and Francisco Varela. [3] This approach has been hotly debated in neuroscience, connectionist theories of mind and experience and has also become influential in dance, architecture and new media practices and discourses. The enactive approach understands an organism's nervous system and its environment to be co-determining. Perception does not 'sit' in the brain of the organism as the receptive capacity that senses the world. Nor is it simply a

HokusPokus, Michele Barker and Anna Munster, 2011, interactive installation.

ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

> *Perception does not 'sit' in the brain of the organism as the receptive capacity that senses the world.*

question of the nervous system 'processing information' from the outside world, as if it were a kind of computational unit.

Instead, the enactive approach understands perception as a process that is actively generated through the relation between what the environment offers the organism and how the sensorimotor system of that organism actively organizes its environment. Neither environment nor organism is a fixed entity although each has certain parameters and the organism will tend to stabilize itself according to these parameters. A human, for example, can only hear between about 20hz and 20khz, whereas a bat's hearing range extends to 120khz. But according to an enactive approach, changes in either sensory parameters or environment affects and modulates the process of perception. This means perception is not just given – 'I see red.' Instead, I see red against a spectrum of color, out of which I actively perceive red against its variably shifting chromatic background(s). Taking vision for example, then, this means we are not dealing with just 'seeing' or 'red' but rather, as the artist Olafur Eliasson has noted, with "seeing yourself seeing." [4]

HokusPokus is certainly not an attempt to directly apply and 'prove' these ideas of enactive perception. But it certainly resonates with them. In the interaction design for its video and audio components, we wanted to use gesture to call up clips and sequences. But rather than simply providing a direct correspondence between a gesture and an image, video segments, for instance, pop up and out from the peripheries of the visual field. As you wave your hand across the top hat, new images load – often on the side screens – and sounds transit across the room, shifting your attention as you actively sense the media around the space.

Viewers often seem surprised as the magical media environment unfolds around them: "oh, I keep seeing things out of the corner of my eye"; "I can't tell whether that's the magician's arm coming up or a real arm". *HokusPokus* emphasises peripheral vision, which in humans' visual systems is important for detecting movement in the environment. The piece works to foreground the less consciously noticed elements of the ways in which our perception not just *is*, but *becomes* within different environments. The *HokusPokus-participant* 'system' is part of a new kind

ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5

of media environment in which it and your nervous systems enact the complexity of perceptual relations between movement, visual, auditory processes and surrounds.

Media artists are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their designs for interaction, exploring myriad forms of embodied interaction via technologies such as Kinects and sensors. But we still inhabit a mainstream media environment where ideas like 'user control' (the Kinect's advertising slogan proclaims: "you are the controller"), and fast reaction time dominate. In taking 'perception' itself as the subject matter for *Hokus-Pokus*, we wanted to say that interaction is not just what happens at the technological interface between user and device. Rather, interaction is a complex clustering of technical and organic speeds, modalities and relations, which are enacted *in situ*. And as they are enacted, interaction and perception change and develop in sometimes unexpected, surprising ways. If in *HokusPokus* your eyes and ears actively shift around the space because you see/hear something you weren't expecting, then we believe the work will have done its magic. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Susana Martinez-Conde and Stephen Macknik, *Sleights of mind: what the neuroscience of magic reveals about our brains* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 2010), 103.
2. Matthew Solomon, *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and the New Magic of the Twentieth* Century (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 22.
3. The term 'enactive perception' was first used in a philosophico-neuroscientific article that sought to reposition the perception of color as an actively constructed optical process in, Evan Thompson, Adrian Palacios and Francisco J. Varela, "Ways of Colouring: Comparative Colour Vision as a Case Study for Cognitive Science," *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 15 (1992): 1–74. Alva Noë has developed the idea extensively in his book from 2004, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press).
4. Olafur Eliasson and Robert Irwin, "Take Your Time: A Conversation," *Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson*, Madeleine Grynsztejn ed. (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2007), http://www.olafureliasson.net/texts.html (accessed May 6, 2012).

HOKUSPOKUS CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HokusPokus, 2011. HD multichannel, audiovisual interactive installation, Michele Barker and Anna Munster

MAGICIAN Ben Orson
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Tania Lambert
INTERACTION DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAMMING
Ardrian Hadjono
HARDWARE DESIGN AND PROGRAMMING Robert Lawther

We wish to thank Chris Bland (camera assistant), Roy Aston (location sound), Trish Barker (costume), Emily Hayward (hair and make-up).

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body. Michele Barker and Anna Munster are supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.

HokusPokus, Michele Barker and Anna Munster, 2011, interactive installation.

 ISSN 1071-4391 ISBN 978-1-906897-18-5