

Tamás Waliczky: Focus

Structure

A long and straight main street in a big city fills the screen. The entire street is in view, because the virtual camera stands in the middle of the street and is positioned higher than eye-level. On the right and left sides of the screen are houses in the city. The street has no perspective distortion, since our virtual camera has an extremely long focal length: all objects on the screen appear at the same scale. The street is crowded with people. The lighting conditions are that of a sunny day. The picture appears to be a photograph.

In fact what we see is not one photograph but a multi-layered composition of more than two hundred photographs, elements of which have been digitally sampled into more than eight hundred individual images. Each layer contains photographed people and objects, which are opaque, while the rest of the layer is transparent. The entire composition is like hundreds of transparencies on top of one another. The layers are all full-screen, but each successive layer has been shifted slightly: the first layer starts at the bottom of the screen, the second a little bit higher, the third a little more, and so on, until the last layer starts just below the top of the screen.

On the top of the composition there are layers containing people and houses from Germany. At the bottom of the picture there are Hungarian people and their houses. In the middle part of the composition, there are people and houses from various parts of Europe. There are even some people from other continents. Every layer has its own composition and an artistic, speculative or personal reason for its contents and position.

Interactivity

Under the picture on the screen there are two sliders: one represents the focus ring of a photographic lens, the other one represents the aperture ring. The aperture ring has the

usual f/1.4, f/2.8, f4, f/5.6, f8 and f/11 settings. The focus ring is more unusual: it has a linear division between zero and ninety-eight. There is a red line on both rings representing the actual values. The viewer can change the values on the focus ring by clicking on different parts of the unsharp composition, and change the values of the aperture ring by clicking on the different f-stop numbers.

If the red line on the focus ring is set to twenty-five, layer twenty-five will become sharp. To be precise, every part of layer twenty-five that is not covered with other, unsharp layers, will appear in focus. Each layer can be seen by clicking on the proper part of the unsharp image, and new compositions consisting of sharp and fuzzy layers will emerge.

The aperture ring works in the opposite way. By moving up the scale on the aperture ring, the viewer broadens the depth of field of the image, causing neighbouring layers to become sharp. The aperture ring makes connections between different layers, merging independent elements of the image. Changing the values of the two rings together allows for a multiplicity of image configurations.

Lastly, there is the zoom function. Point to an area on the screen and click the mouse button, and that area becomes sharp. Then click on the red button at the bottom right corner and an enlarged detail of that part of the image is displayed. All of the original photographs are viewable in this manner.

Focus can be seen as a metaphor for searching, selecting, making connections and finding origins. It is a unique way of visualising the workings of memory.

Focus is also a metaphor of my personal experience of Europe. These photographs (Eastern and Western Europeans living in small villages and capitals, Europeans living overseas and people from other continents living in Europe) are remembrances of different meetings, places and projects. Together they form a very personal, very colourful composition, which represents my image of Europe.