

Experiments in Touching Color 1998-99

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Media in general and the media arts in particular too often define human experience as an audio visual process and the memories of experience as images and sounds. "a memory is like photograph..." etc. This reduction is easy to do given that the mediums that are used are audio visual processes. Computer technology, because of its metaness (in the form of memory) and malleability (in the form of programs), allows us to go beyond the historical metaphors of processes and definitions of mediums. My current work is exploring visual perception outside of the realm of visual imaging by using computers as tools to facilitate synesthetic experiences by transforming one sensory representation into another.

Experiments in Touching Color consists of a small black pedestal in a small dark room. The pedestal has a glass screen in the top surface and is hollow with a video projector inside. An image is projected onto the glass rear screen from below. When the viewers first walk into the room they see an image on top of the pedestal in a silent room. When a viewer puts their hand on the glass screen two things happen at the same time. A sound from the image fades up in the space and the image dissolves to a single color. As long as the hand stays on the glass screen the sound remains and the image stays a single but changing color. As the hand moves around the image, the color field emanating from the pedestal goes through a sequence of colors. This color is based upon where specifically the viewer is touching. For example, if the image is of a talking head, as the viewer moves his fingers from the lips up to the eyebrow the emanating color from the screen changes from pale pink to varying flesh tones to dark brown. The color seen at any one time is based upon the color of the pixel that the viewer's middle fingertip is touching in the now unseen image that was there. The viewer's memory of the image that was there along with the exploration of the colors at the various points in the now hidden image define a new image that is part memory and part detail. And the image is moving. So after the image fades out and the color field fades in, the image continues to change. This is why the sound is important. The sound which contains the movement of the event helps the viewer to imagine what the image is now doing. In other words there are two cues pointing back to the image; the sound and the color. Often the rhythm of the changing color field and the rhythm of the sound reinforce each other. For example, by putting your finger anywhere near the talking lips of a face, the words are heard in sync with the color changing from red to black to white based on the hidden lips moving. This is the first in a series of works that involve color and touch. The one that I am working on now involves a three dimensional glass object as the interface (a cast glass face).

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