

Two things define the computer as an artistic medium. Firstly, it is a skilled chameleon, potentially able to mimic most other types of creative media if properly programmed. Secondly, the computer is capable of being active and responsive.

The first characteristic confronts the artist who uses the computer as his/her medium with a difficult problem. An artistic medium is somewhat like a language, it imposes a set of structures and constraints which become the basis for expression. The computer in itself does not pose such limitations. It must be further articulated (through the means of a computer program) before it has tangible and useable characteristics as a medium. Programs exist that transform the computer into a surrogate for a wide variety of media. To me however, the challenge is to take the flexibility of the computer in hand and create my own programs (and therefore my own media). The aim of this process is to tap the unique potentials that a computer offers above and beyond the mimicry and extension of traditional media. One of the most interesting of these potentials is found in the second point that I mentioned above.

The product of artistic activity with the computer need not be a static object, image or composition. The computer can hold an abstract definition of an artwork in its memory. The audience can be presented with a view of that artwork unique to the instant and context of their viewing of it. Like a hologram, this composition of possibilities offers many possible facets, each to a unique point of view.

Again, this set of facets need not be static. The object itself can change in response to the viewer's path through this set of possible perspectives. The artwork then exhibits a responsive behaviour. At this point, the relationship between the artwork and the viewer expands into full-fledged dialogue and interaction.

The artwork at this point approaches becoming a medium itself, through which the interactor expresses him/herself through their actions and interactions. The final realization of the work is a collaborative act between the audience/interactor and the artist.

In 'Very Nervous System', I have explored this capability of computers in art. A video camera observes a section of gallery space. The camera's stream of images are analysed in order to determine the movements and gestures being made. The sequence of movements are maintained as a sort of short-term historical record. Each gesture in relation to this history represents a unique viewpoint into a composition of sound possibilities. By moving, the interactor realizes a music or sound composition. Through sustained exploration of the nature of the interaction, the interactor evolves a personal gestural language with which they can navigate this constellation of possibilities. A relationship develops between the artwork and the interactor, and it is this relationship, rather than the sounds themselves, which is the core of the work.