



F Personal Approach to the Computer as Art Medium and to the Installation
Stephen Wilson, 1991

I am intrigued and challenged by emerging digital technologies. I know that they are changing the details of everyday life. Even more, I feel they are creating profound new possibilities and philosophical questions. I feel called as an artist to help explore these possibilities. I don't think artists can do this merely by appropriating the new tools to make more pictures. Rather, artists must work to understand the core possibilities of the new technologies and invent new contexts that require the new technologies for their very existence.

I see interactivity as one of these unprecedented possibilities. Never before have we been able to create inanimate objects that can manifest an adaptive intelligence similar to what we expect from animals and other humans. I create installations where the interactive technology is used as a mirror to help people reflect on their own beliefs and ways of thinking. I also use the technology to help me create a new kinds of "social sculpture" in which the computer solicits, organizes, and mirrors back the beliefs of a community back to itself. The structure of belief of a community becomes the aesthetic and dramatic focus.

We are at a cultural crossroads in the evolution of technology. Computers promise great opportunity and great danger. They could usher in a dark age of increasing passivity and mass society centralization or they could bring about a great flowering of individual choice, expression and access to information and communication. I create interactive works that use the new technologies themselves as agents to draw viewers into consideration of these options. They are structured to highlight the importance of individual action. The viewer is asked to become a co-creator and the work is unrealized until they do. I ask the viewer for more participation than mere choice between options.

Inquiry Theatre, for example, focuses on voice as the medium of interaction. Viewers are asked to reflect on what are the immigrant dreams that lead people to leave the places of their birth. Viewers are asked to expose these views via short phrases that the computer will use as the voice recognition controls for navigating the image and sound space of the installation. Viewers put themselves on the line by repeatedly speaking these phrases to control the piece. All these phrases spoken by the community of viewers are stored and become part of the repertoire of sounds for subsequent viewers. The previously spoken opinions become a chorus of response for the present viewer.