

Interface Cultures at Ars Electronica Festival 2011

Unuselessness—the useful useless

Art and usefulness, a complicated liaison. This exhibition shows a critical reflection towards media culture and its constantly changing framework, where the role of art as a transformer and enabler of new creative solutions can be put into question.

It is especially the freedom of art to create and realize initially useless ideas, which eventually yields radically new approaches in interaction design by thinking out of the box. While design and technology will usefully improve our everyday relation to machines, only artistic research is capable of producing previously unexpected results. Therefore our artworks and installations are driven by the forces of unuselessness, the useful useless.

We want to cultivate the borderline between artworks, interaction prototypes and an open approach towards art and functionality claims. The young generation of media artists and creators is aware of its roots in art and design and especially of interactive art and its connection to participation and performance art and their places in art history.

The presented works have been contributed by members of the master and doctoral programs at the Interface Cultures department of the University of Art and Industrial Design Linz.

Un-Nutzlosigkeit – das nützlich Unnütze

Kunst und Nützlichkeit – ein scheinbarer Gegensatz. Diese Ausstellung bezieht kritisch Stellung zur Medienkultur und deren ständig wechselnden Rahmenbedingungen, die die Rolle der Kunst als Motor der Veränderung und Wegbereiter neuer kreativer Lösungen zunehmend infrage stellen.

Vor allem die Freiheit der Kunst, zunächst nutzlose Ideen zu entwickeln und umzusetzen, führt durch die Auflösung konventioneller Denkmuster zu radikal neuen Ansätzen im Bereich Interaktionsdesign. Technologie und Design können zwar unseren alltäglichen Umgang mit Maschinen erleichtern, doch nur die künstlerische Forschung kann neue und unerwartete Ergebnisse hervorbringen. Die treibende Kraft bei der Konzeption unserer Kunstwerke und Installationen ist daher die Un-Nutzlosigkeit, das nützlich Unnütze.

Wir möchten an der Grenze zwischen Kunstwerk, Interaktionsprototyp und einer offenen Herangehensweise an Kunst und Funktionalitätsansprüche operieren und diese Schnittstelle produktiv nützen. Die junge Generation von Medienkünstlern und -künstlerinnen ist sich ihrer Wurzeln in Kunst, Design und insbesondere der interaktiven Kunst bewusst, verweist auf die Zusammenhänge mit partizipatorischer Kunstpraxis und Performance und kennt ihre Stellung in der Kunstgeschichte.

Die Ausstellung zeigt Arbeiten von Studierenden der Master- und Doktoratslehrgänge der Studienrichtung Interface Cultures an der Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung in Linz.

Aus dem Englischen von Martina Bauer

Instructors: Christa Sommerer, Laurent Mignonneau, Martin Kaltenbrunner, Michaela Ortner, Marlene Hochrieser, Georg Russegger

Irmgard Falkinger-Reiter and eight Simmental cows
QmusiQ



QmusiQ is the name for “Digital Cow Music” which is played by eight dairy cows. Their data of milk production and gravidity provide the substructure for visualization on the screen, going together with some information about the cows and dairy farming. For sonification the single cow’s milk melody is underlaid with her unborn calves’ drones.

To question the instrumentalization of animals as production media their productivity data is analyzed and put into a new context. The programming for the digital music provides a new voice for each cow and calf. This can be seen as an instrumentation, which places them on a stage in front of the visitors

to emphasize their singularity. The audience can either watch and listen to the concert or actively influence the performance as a guest conductor, by cueing a single cow as a soloist, creating a small group of their favorite cows, or joining them all to form a small chamber orchestra.

Maša Jazbec, Tiago Martins
Weltschmerz

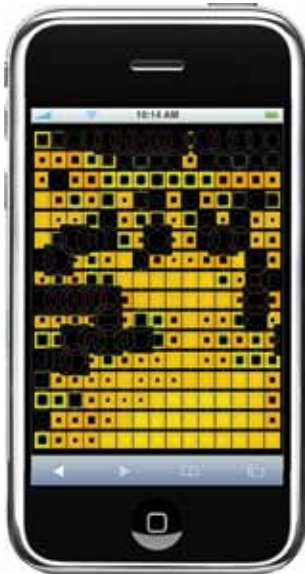
Images are the true reality today. (Slavoj Žižek)

This installation invites visitors to sit down and play Russian Roulette with the *Weltschmerz* Channel, which, in spite of being fictive, plays videos that are quite real. To take part in the installation, the visitor has to sit down, pick up a revolver, spin the barrel, put the revolver against his/her head and pull the trigger. A television set will then play a short video, which could be part of almost any newscast. The participant may watch it while having his/her reaction subtly tracked, amplified and played back as the throbbing of a gruesome piece of meat on a table. The choice of video is random, yet it is made from a limited selection of given footage.



Fabrizio Lamoncha, Ioan Ovidiu Cernei, Maša Jazbec
FMR1

With this project we want to show the fatal connection between technology and Internet in today's society, which leads to consequences such as loss of identity and confusion. We attempt to show the invasion of technology in the most intimate areas of our lives. Insights into the womb and the fetus are an extreme form of intrusion into intimacy. The virtual image without emotion, without understanding, therefore, only information satisfies the curious eye. We were able to get videos of a fetus from the YouTube platform. Although that child was not even born, his image is already exposed to everyone on the Internet. The installation *FMR1* allows the spectator the possibility of entry with its 3D shape into the 2D virtual world using a breathing device to interact, which gives him the role of a creator. When he breathes into the device, he is able to move the embryo on the screen. The viewer loses the status of creator when he stops using the breathing device. The entry into the virtual reality is taking place in real time, while we are in two worlds simultaneously. Only the awareness moves into the virtual world, while the body remains in the real world and time. Man and machine co-exist in a dynamic system. The human body is therefore the last part of physis that is still connected with the real material world. New technologies culturally mutate our perception of the human body from a naturally self-regulated system to an artificially controlled and electronically transformed object. All that gives us an ontological understanding of the cyborg principle.



Veronika Pauser
iWilson

iWilson is a mobile web application, in which the screen of a mobile phone is used as a canvas in order to produce generative art. People can create graphical output in real-time by uploading an ordinary photo to the application. The resulting images are based on Mark Wilson's artworks (generative algorithm images), especially the archival ink jet print *csq2265*. The uploaded pictures are analyzed and the resulting image data is mapped to circles and squares in different sizes and colors. These results in graphics are similar in style to the ones produced by Mark Wilson. In the artworks of early digital art pioneers, chance played a main role. In this piece any randomness is entirely replaced by user interaction.

Fabrizio Lamoncha, Ioan Ovidiu Cernei, Maša Jazbec
Huis Clos

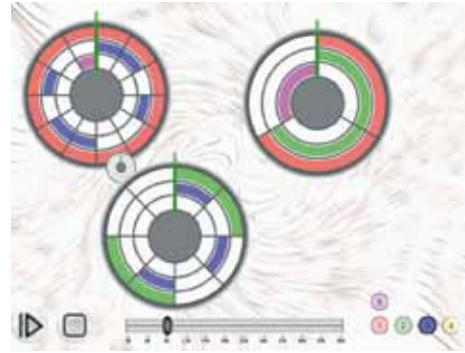


“If you can answer me who I am, then at least I will have an identity. I will know what or who to be.”

By knocking on the house you interact with the ego inside of it. With the project we are exploring the basic understanding that humans have a free will. But that freedom of choice leads to anxiety. In other words, because man is free and aware of possibilities, anxiety is part of his human experience. With choices the absolute responsibility for ones action comes. The fear of and anxiety caused by this responsibility leads many people to ignore both their freedom and their responsibility by letting other people make their choices for them.

Ulrich Brandstätter, Oliver Buchtala
GearBox

GearBox depicts a new kind of musical loop sequencer by adapting the metaphor of interconnected mechanical gears. It enables the composition of complex beat sequences with minimal user interaction via touch screen. The combination of a playful conception and a plain and simple interface invites both novices as well as experts of electronic music to play and perform. At the same time it challenges full player attention due to its powerful compositional capabilities: Virtually unlimited tracks, represented as gears with individually adjustable beat counts, are able to be conjoined arbitrarily and follow the laws of mechanics.



David Brunthaler
Oma, erzähl mal!

Memories are the essence of everybody's unique personality. There are countless untold and unheard stories, so the number of unrecorded known tales from a long-gone past, is probably even higher. One could argue that our priorities have changed and therefore one has less motivation to listen to old stories from grandmother's youth. Perhaps it is the ever-increasing rhythm of the world economy that therefore leads to a more stressful lifestyle with less time for our ancestors.

My grandmother enjoys collecting stones. They don't have to be precious, they just have to appeal to her in one way or the other. Concerning the bare functionality *Oma, erzähl mal!* (Tell me a story, grandma) uses a simple audio recording and playback device. However, beyond this technical perspective, the project aims to preserve as many memories from my grandmother as possible. The stones become containers of her personal memories. The stones preserve grandma in their memory.

Vesela Mihaylova
Error Messages

Windows operating system error messages are something that we are all used to. They are part of today's most familiar computer interface and they appear when there is a loss of communication between the program and the user or a misunderstanding. With the contemporary communication technologies we are more than ever bound to the screen as a window to and through the world. Nevertheless this is not really helping us to keep our connectedness and we often fail to communicate with each other. By using the almost forgotten and old-fashioned craft of embroidery, the error messages appear in cross stitch and are given a new context. As they are part of the modern aesthetics of the computer screen, the embroidering gives them the status of the new "beauty" and the new "hip".



Lenka Klimešová, Arwa Ahmed Ramadan
The Will



On the floor there is an Islam symbol of Allah square kufi made from conductive carpet. Near the carpet there are three pairs of slippers with mini vibration motors inside. When the spectators put on the slippers and walk on the symbol they feel the vibrations. The slippers are in the three colors of the US flag. The art piece comments on the military conflict between the US and Iraq and the ensuing terrorist attacks. It is not permitted to walk on the symbol of Allah. Everybody has the opportunity to choose. As does the person who makes a suicide attack.

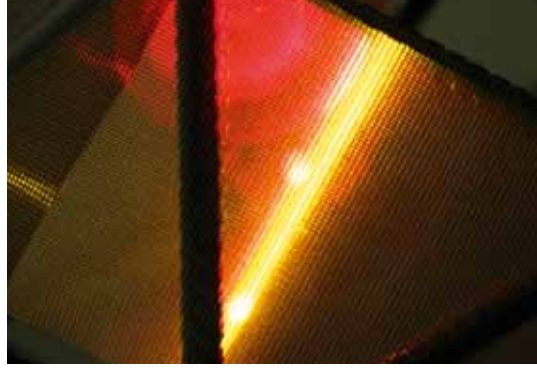


Henning Schulze
Lichtspeicher

Lichtspeicher, created by Henning Schulze, is a portable device to scan, store and compile light situations and ultimately play them back on its skin.

It is inspired by the work process of Impressionist painters, where they would choose a situation, observe it, understand its light and then commence the painting. While painting, the artist could choose whether to depict a real light situation or to compile a new one from the gathered knowledge of his observations.

Analogously, *Lichtspeicher* scans the current light situation in 360°—taking a single snapshot in time—and recreates it onto its skin. Thus the ambience of the light situation is seemingly reflected from the inside out. When a scanned light situation is being replayed, what appears like low resolution video is displayed on *Lichtspeicher's* skin. It does not intend to be a pixel by pixel representation of the environment. In addition, like in the artist's domain of possibilities, new light situations can be compiled by the device.



Squeezer
Fabrizio Lamoncha, Ioan Ovidiu Cernei, Maša Jazbec

Exposure to media is a shock to our nervous system that blocks feelings of discomfort and, like lab rats, has us mindlessly navigating through a maze for more satisfaction. Marshall McLuhan explains that access to tools and technology in society determines how that society will crumble or prosper. We become what we behold. An example of a technology that has been able to change social behavior is the television. Television is an urban compound that is present in almost all houses and the simple act of turning a television on can reduce a room full of people into silence.

With a *squeezer*, a genital like tangible music interface to interact with your television or any device with a headphone output, you are able to modify the audio pitch of the gadget, which it is attached to. The variation of the pitch is proportional to the pressure exerted to the *squeezer*. The more pressure, the higher the pitch.



Andrea Suter
Sight Clearing

A windscreen wiper is installed onto a wall and starts moving, leaving marks, when rain is falling outside. *Sight Clearing* plays with ideas of inside and outside and reverses mechanisms, hence challenging our perception of how things are. *Sight Clearing* is a humorous and minimalist parable about the everyday.

