

Ho Yi Dan

U1830527H

DD3016 History of Design

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III. Choose a historic or contemporary media artist not discussed in class to carry out independent research that draws from our study of interactive media history, theory and its concepts and forms. The artist and their work should be relevant to our study of multimedia concepts and paradigms (ie Interactivity, Hypermedia, Immersion).

‘An artwork is like a nightclub- only when the public come in do you know if it’s going to be a good party’ (Menezes). These were the words of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in his interview with Studio International. Even though he graduated with a degree in Physical Chemistry, he laid out a career as an electronic artist and he attributes this to his family background- nightclub owners as parents and poet as his uncle. In this essay, I chose to explore more on Rafael Lozano-Hemmer because I believe with the recurring theme of audience engagement, his works embodies Interactivity, Hypermedia and Immersion.

When focusing on ‘Interactivity’, I would propose we analyse how ‘Body Movies’ was being executed. ‘Body Movies’ is an upscaled version of shadow puppetry whereby shadows of passersby were being casted onto two huge screens, size ranging from two to twenty-five metres (Lozano-Hemmer). In a presentation done at the Hirshhorn Museum, Lozano-Hemmer mentioned that upon seeing this, what ensued was instinctively, people started playing with their shadows. He reasoned that most cultures have a sophisticated tradition of theater with shadows or puppetry with shadows. (“Meet the Artist: Rafael

Lozano-Hemmer - Hirshhorn Museum”, 00:09:05 - 00:09:11). Hence, his work became a very intuitive interface where you do not have to explain what to do. In turn, enhancing the reciprocal exchange between the artwork and the audience. This claim is, certainly, not unfounded. When a particular interface is centered around cultural background, it helps the artwork achieve intuitivity and immediacy. This is reflected in a study by IDEO.org (Fu). Even though ‘Body Movies’ might not involve a digital interface, it has taken on this concept of ‘involving the people’, allowing for easy participation which promotes audience to engage in an open-ended, decision making play and becoming the artist of their own. Hence, with this feedback established, ‘Body Movies’ encapsulates Interactivity.

Next, looking deeper into Hypermedia, I would like to draw attention to ‘Voz Alta’ also known as ‘Loud Voices’. This piece was commissioned for the fortieth anniversary of the student massacre. Audiences participated by speaking freely into a megaphone right at where the massacre took place. This is then translated as beaming a 10,000-watt searchlight in sequences of flashes onto the top of the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Locals could also tune into 96.1FM Radio UNAM to listen to what the lights were saying (Lozano-Hemmer). With these, Lozano-Hemmer was able to incorporate the idea of Hypermedia by linking of multiple media elements to create a trail of personal association. However, I believe that he did not just do this to turn ‘Hypermedia’ into a ‘feel-good mantra’ to describe his work (which seems to be a prevalent case for the word ‘sustainable’ and its use in describing products, services and systems where such label is unwarranted). Instead, he cleverly integrated ‘Hypermedia’ to enhance the message behind this piece. The voice-as-light projections superimpose public voice onto emblems of national heritage. With the use of sound, it allows the public to negotiate boundaries between historical record and the public collective memory of what actually happened, focusing on it as a mechanism for

power (Kleinman, 3). Through the use of these mediums, what Voz Alta achieved for its participants was an activation of memory associated with the massacre, and its potential to supplement the incomplete history, by providing an agency to do so.

About immersive, we should analysis the 'Pulse' series which takes hold of data of heart rates and fingerprints. Following which, displays the data from the last 10,000 participants on a scaled grid of massive projections, or ripples water tanks and reflects it onto the walls, or have hundreds of light bulbs hanging from the ceiling pulsing with the heartbeats of past participants. (Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Pulse). We have to admit, by increasing the quantity and scale does not necessarily translate to 'Immersive-ness'. However, what he did was to simulate what we often take for granted as our identity, in order for us to appreciate it in its totality with our other senses. Personally, simply with deeper appreciation being invoked for the presence of people and how they are different from each other (Loos), is already evident to show that he has successfully created a simulation, considering that on a daily basis, despite fingerprints and heart beat being part of us, we do not feel anything. The creation of that simulation is already immersive. How he decided to manifest it, which was by going big scale, is only a way to intensify the experience.

In conclusion, despite analysing three of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's works separately, we can agree that all his works seeks to social engineer. His designs sought to make a break with material limits and ultimately draw on multifaceted engagement, making him a talented conversation facilitator.

750 words

## References

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