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Question III

Interactive Media: Scott Snibbe and Multimedia Concepts of Interactivity

“Creamus, ergo sumus” (“I experience, therefore I am”; Heibach 1999) encapsulates Interactive Art and the movement of the audience member becoming a necessary “actor” in an artwork (Stern, 121). A contemporary media artist who captures the paradigms and concepts of interactive media into his works is Scott Snibbe, a pioneer of interactive art, augmented reality, gesture-based interfaces and digital video. In this brief essay, I will be analysing Snibbe’s later interactive work, *Deep Walls* (2003), in its Interactivity, Hypermedia and Immersion, and its relations to the history of Interactive Media (McLuhan).

Snibbe believed that the world is interdependent, where “linkages and breakages between bodies” made up the core of his work (Stern 159). Through his digital work on screens, he aimed to visualise the invisible relationships between individuals and the space between them to emphasise that no-thing can exist as an island, and that society is built upon bodily interactions. His work *Deep Walls* (Fig. 1.) was a 5-foot-tall retroreflective screen and projector, which displayed 16 individual boxes that would present audience members’ interactions with the screen in an iconic, silhouette form of their figures. To interact with the screen, audience members step in front of a projector and cast shadows on to the grid, obscuring the present figures, and a camera captures their “silhouetted movements in the square” until they leave the boundaries of the screen (Stern 166). The captured footage then replaces the oldest footage in the grid and is looped until replaced by other interactions.

Firstly, the multimedia concept of Interactivity is evident in *Deep Walls* in the necessary user manipulation of the work. The user effects their experience of the media directly with immediacy (where a shadow is immediate) and by having their outline and silhouette captured and presented once their shadow leaves the edge of the screen. The user can also communicate with future participants via the screen as the snippets of their performance are replayed indefinitely (166). Every new spectator would be able to view the previous actors experience and effect on the artwork and can then choose to contribute to it. The 16-panel grid can read similarly to storyboards or comic strips, suggesting a linear narrative to the screen with scenes. Thus, spectators can take the opportunity to communicate through the shapes of their bodies, whether intentionally or not, to form narratives or action, creating a level of interactivity in the artwork.

Secondly, the principle of Hypermedia is achieved in *Deep Walls* where a trail of personal associations is created in having one's silhouette screened as one doventh of an artwork on loop until replaced. This is especially so when interactors add multiple scenes to the grid, creating their own narratives and personal linkages. The work functions "as we may think" in that each participator views the previous contributions and makes their own idiosyncratic decisions and linkages (Bush, 1945). Despite the grids' linear arrangement, the grammar of interaction is inexplicit, and interactors have the agency to decide to communicate with other frames on the grid, or future participators (Simanowski, 142). Hypermedia is then evident in *Deep Walls* due to the recording nature of the work.

Lastly, *Deep Walls* possesses elements of Immersion, though not in the traditional simulation sense. To participate in the artwork, interactors are required to suspend the knowledge of themselves as people, but rather understand themselves as iconic shapes. The work does not build a three-dimensional alternate reality on its own, but to consider Snibbe's 2005 solo exhibition

Shadow Play, where the *Screen Series* inclusive of *Deep Walls* was curated, an environment where a shadow holds more worth than the body is created (Fig. 2.). Each work in the exhibition functions in a similar way where interactors would interact with their shadows, instead of the common aesthetic of touch. In this sense it can be argued that *Deep Walls* taps into Immersion, where the more interactors participate in the exhibition, the more detached and at the same time, connected they are to their bodies as shapes and shadows.

In conclusion, McLuhan's principles of Interactive Media have stood the test of time. Though contemporary, Snibbe and *Deep Walls* communicate Interactivity, Hypermedia and Immersion with new technology and altered cybernetics of the body and social communication. Interactive media taps into human behaviour and the obsessive desire to leave a mark and be seen with others and by others. As basal desires and instinct will always supersede societal and personal influence, the foundation of interactivity, so long as it is the interactivity of humans, is will always remain.



Fig. 1. Scott Snibbe *Deep Walls*, 2003.



Fig. 2. Scott Snibbe *Screen Series*, 2003.

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