**RICHARDS — Grove**

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***Grove*: Creating an Ecology of Flows**

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Media artists are increasingly concerned with creating intense audience experiences or immersive works that are opportunities for participants to engage with spaces, mobility, and embodiment. This research paper asks what it is to *move* audiences in mediated environments and offers understandings and insights into creating media art for audiences now attenuated to intense embodied experience in everyday life. Along with illustration of a practice-led component—an installation called *grove*—this research paper provides an emphasis on different key concepts for analysis of current and future media art installations. Through the artwork *grove* and by analysis of other exemplars, the research argues for a schematic sequence by which a participant can engage with an ecology.

Specifically the research argues for the centrality of movement in perception and in participant engagement in mediated environments by drawing on current and attenuated theories of affordance and affect. It explains how we perceive *through* movement—that is, difference and change—in always changeful environments that can be understood as ecologies, comprising flows of information that afford us stimulation across multiple modalities. Movement is core to triggering affects, the precursors to feelings, actions, and cognitions. This research paper hypothesises that to *move* an audience in media art installations is to afford them opportunities for affective actions and reactions in a dynamic environment with which they are one—in short, an ecology. Over time, ‘moving’ experiences become significant events, accumulating and predisposing us to similar responses.

The hypothesis was explored in the creation of a major work called *grove*, a 10m x 10m installation comprising a dynamic light array in the form of a grove of moving, programmed lights, set in a moat of reflective darkness. Documentation of the installation will be used in the paper. The grove itself is animated by the moving lights in a 25-minute sequence that engages light with light, exploring their characters, diameters, effects, and colour, and which also plays on the grove’s terrain molded from black rubber crumb, criss-crossed by paths of glittery salt. The choreography of light-as-media is rhythmic and gently changeful, exploring the inherent materiality of light, its ‘faktura’—reflectivity, transparency, colour, volume—and their *others*: absorption, opacity, and void. Like all groves, the installation space is literally and metaphorically animated and made sacred by light.

The installation aimed to provide audiences with an immersive and contemplative space of refuge from the urban hubbub. Accordingly, it drew on minimalist aesthetics. Light is the medium; its materiality and variables provide the means to animate it. There is no content per se, other than the signification of the metaphor of the grove. Byeschewing content and ostensible interactivity and with its minimalist palette (of light and its antonym, darkness), *grove* invites visitors into a quiet ecology in which to dwell and be immersed in these core registers of visual and spatial perception: *grove* affords audiences a sense of interiority.

The research demonstrates how *grove* and other media arts installations can be analysed and interpreted as heterotopia—bounded spaces where time, inclusion, and sense of place are altered. The research argues that heterotopia provides a historic and cultural framework for understanding the capacity for changed relations within *and* between audiences. By drawing on contemporary theories of heterotopia as sites of flow, this research provides a nuanced argument for media arts installations as ecologies of flows of opportunities for perception, and embodied and affective engagement. In short, this practice-led research hypothesises that to *move* an audience is to afford them affective responses in an ecology of flows with the audience as interdependent participants in that system, integrated across various sensory modalities and physiological scales. The research also explores the rich cultural metaphor and metonymy of the grove, a bounded yet semi-permeable space full of potential aesthetic delights—an archetypal soft architecture that draws one in and offers a reflection space of high cultural value.