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VISA 480
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Research Response: Fluxus, Interactivity

The key points that I have taken from my peer feedback were on how the design of the installation can influence the movement of the participant/viewer, and if the back end should be included in the display of the installation.

These questions reminded me of the Fluxus movement and processed-based artwork. I only studied the movement in the context of postmodernism (ARTH 341), so I was mainly familiar with works from pre-1980.

One of the most influential members of Fluxus and “Father of Video Art,” Nam June Paik seemed like the ideal subject for my research. From “The Essential Works of Nam June Paik” in Art Asia Pacific, I found that Paik also took on the question of machine consciousness and how one can “humanize technology.” Many of his TV works have sculptural components, either in the composition of the TV sets (like *Electronic Superhighway*) or as a separate form adjacent to the TV (like *TV Buddha*). In Paik’s era, digital still had physicality; TVs, representing the digital world and containing it, asserted their weighty presence in space. Now, the digital is far less physical: harddrives shrink and the cloud grows.

Skin has become inadequate in interfacing with reality. Technology has become the body’s new membrane of existence. (Nam June Paik 1989)

The projected-upon surface is an inverse skin, reflecting rather than containing light. If I can position my projectors and screens properly, I hope that it will be virtually inevitable for people to cross through the light and for their skin to become the skin of the projection. Beyond participation even: viewers are the medium that re-physicalizes digital space. So, my installation space must be designed in such a way that encourages movement *within* the projection space.

I then shifted my focus to the design and structure of my installation as an interactive artwork. “Strategies of Interactive Art” (Kluszczyński 2010) proposes eight ways that an artwork can produce “an area of activity for the receivers, whose actions bring to life an artwork-event”—the strategies being how those “fields of activity” are organized. “Instrument” describes the current state of my project, something which can be used to create audiovisuals. “Rhizome” resonated with my goals for this installation: an interactivity which is unpredictable and multidirectional. Regarding the first question, I think that Rhizome encourages continuous movement, as there is a level of predictability—that it will always respond in some way—as well as unpredictability—the way that it will respond exactly.

Rhizome is exploratory and transforms continuously. I want the activity-space to be experimental: how can the participant interact with the instrument to generate new visuals? How do those interactions evolve? And finally—does the back-end remove the exploratory allure? For me, it does—but for others, it opens a whole new universe within the artwork. I think that showing the back-end is in a way instructional: it teaches how the work works and in doing so provides a framework for participant interaction. By including it, I feel the installation shifts away from

Rhizome towards System: “characterized by eventfulness which does not find many ways out where the viewers are, but takes place rather in their inner, technological, digital world” (Kluszczyński, 19). This pulls focus away from physical space and towards digital space: it is difficult to not gravitate towards the System which creates interaction. Rather than being a novelly generative event space, one becomes part of a recursive loop where you dictate its action and it dictates yours. (One thing I have learned for certain about including the back-end: if you show people a video stream of themselves, they will never look away from it).

References:

Kluszczyński, Ryszard W. *Strategies of interactive art*, Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 2:1, 5525, 2010. DOI: 10.3402/jac.v2i0.5525

Sim, Suining. "The Essential Works of Nam June Paik." ArtAsiaPacific, September 29, 2021.
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