

For many interactive works, their ultimate desire is immersion. Particularly in the context of interactive installations, allowing the viewer freedom to experience another place is of the utmost importance to the artist. There are, of course, many ways in which this is achieved. Char Davies' *Osmose* (1995) takes a 'traditional' virtual reality (VR) approach to immersion, whereas Sowerwine and Knowles' *You Were In My Dream* (2010) uses more of a fantastical escapism to transport the viewer.

VR is 'traditional' in that the regulation and alteration of senses is an approach that has been favoured in immersive environments for some time. The pursuit of cinema to remove all outside distractions and focus purely on the movie screen (Menotti : 2009) is a typical example of this. The viewer's senses of taste and touch become entirely subordinate to the intense focus of visual and auditory stimulation presented within the film theatre.

Davies' *Osmose* uses a similar approach to create what she believes is an immersive environment. Regardless of her unorthodox opinions toward Cartesian space and favour of translucent objects (Popper : 2007), it is the way in which perceptions are controlled that makes the interaction an immersive experience.

The environment Davies attempts to create for the viewer in *Osmose* is in line with her view of the world when not wearing corrective lens glasses: a meshing of colour and shape, without defined edges and lines. She also suggests that her attempt to remove the Westernised, patriarchal view of the world, prevalent in VR, has led to these explorations (Davies : 2004). Instead of greater freedom, what the "immersant" is therefore exposed to is a *relative* view on reality and still grounded in *physical* experience – it is simply now the view of Davies, and not the militaristic standpoint she rejects.

Paradoxically, it is through the use of technology that Davies attempts to remove this disembodied standpoint and show a physical, or real connection between body and space. There are indeed many contradictions in *Osmose*, and not just limited to physicality. The restriction of the Cartesian grid to move through space is one hurdle that Davies attempts to overcome. Regardless of the elimination of a militaristic, or Westernised/patriarchal interface, it is still the grid that gives the viewer a point of reference – for without it, he or she could not understand how to move (Penny : 2004). Davies' later work *Ephemere* is more successful in this respect, as it introduces the uncontrollable and evolving element of time to the VR environment.

In spite of the potential of the medium, VR is yet to achieve the lofty aspirations of user freedom touted for the technology in the early 1990's. And whilst *Osmose* is clearly comprised of beautiful imagery, it does not convince the user of being a new reality. As coined by Masahiro Mori in the field of robotics, humans reject an attempt to achieve reality when it falls short and in fact favour of pure abstraction and fantasy over an inadequate reality (Mori : 1970). This effect, known as the Uncanny Valley, could also apply to interaction and immersive environments in a broader sense.

So does this make *You Were In My Dream* a more engaging interactive environment than *Osmose*? The former uses a far more simplified method of interaction, which may suggest otherwise. More along the lines of a point-and-click game, *You Were In My Dream* relies on a series of video sequences to propel the narrative between limited interactions from the viewer. *Osmose* on the other hand allows the “immersant” a far greater level of freedom to create more non-linear experiences, which by many definitions, would indicate a deeper immersion.

Similarly to Davies' work, Sowerwine and Knowles' *You Were In My Dream* attempts to remove any outside distractions, in this case by asking the user to place their head within an enclosed space. Interestingly though, they rely on the ubiquitous mouse and keyboard as the method of interaction (McKnight : 2010), thus tying the user to his or her physical environment. Also removing the viewer from immersion, their face is digitally placed upon a character, whereby the user passively watches the action from an external point of view – one which Davies goes to great lengths to try and remove from *Osmose*.

Much like a narrated story, the immersion of this work requires the viewer to mentally place themselves within the experience, without the aid of VR technology found in *Osmose*, this is more akin to a child imagining themselves as the protagonist of a story. To this end, the animated, fantastical feel of *You Were In My Dream* is appropriate, and bypasses the Uncanny Valley issues faced when falling short of an attempted realism.

Whereas *Osmose* uses embodiment for movement (through breath and balance), *You Were In My Dream* is pure simulation and as such may not achieve the level of immersion found in the former work. What certainly makes Sowerwine and Knowles' work less interactive, is the restriction of freedom of choice given to the user. Only capable of mouse-clicking at given times to begin the next video sequence, this level of interactivity is more in line with Internet navigation, rather than an immersive artwork.

However, as Levin suggests, often the viewer projects themselves vicariously onto a work (Noble : 2010) and higher amounts of interaction such as that found in *Osmose* may not actually be required for successful immersion. Likewise, his suggestion that humans do feel the need to interact with the *thing* and give programs – clearly built on finite algorithms – their own personality, could suggest that *You Were In My Dream* is in fact a successful work of immersion.

Both *Osmose* and *You Were In My Dream* are examples of interactivity approached with very different technologies, concepts and emotive outcomes. And still, neither can claim to allow the viewer complete freedom from the work's author. As Penny suggests (Penny : 2004), interaction which relies on vision is a one-way objectivist flow of information, preventing the viewer from the liberty of creating their own narrative.

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