

Time Smear Demo

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ABSTRACT

My primary area of research is trying to develop, or at least contribute to, a *language of interactivity*. Central to this process is the notion that play and playfulness appear to be central features of interactivity along with the physicality of the interaction (even down to mouse movements).

The *Time Smear* demo is part of a series of works that deal with live video and the slicing of time as interactive building blocks. The use of a camera as the interface effectively dissolves the interface and thus the interaction (and in this case the interactor) becomes the content, the experience and the “work” itself.

The main ambition of the piece is not technical, but rather attempting to discover the minimum amount of “pre-authored” elements that cause the maximum interaction. In particular I am keen to induce people out of their normal “gallery visitor”, serious state and into a state of play for as long as possible.

Time Smear works in a similar way to a scanner or photocopier. It takes a “slice” of time repeatedly across the screen width. The sample size can be altered as can the speed of the scan. In essence it freeze-frames many slices over time leaving a “smeared” image if there is movement in front of the camera. Crucially, the video feed is live before it is frozen in a slice so that the interactor can orchestrate their movements.

The end results are, of course, reliant on the interactor’s movements but are often reminiscent of Francis Bacon’s paintings. This simple interaction usually manages to capture people’s attention and make them wave their arms in the air, move around strangely, and generally play with the possibilities of the piece. The longer they engage in this behavior the more successful I feel the work has been compared to the thirty seconds someone might spend in front of a Picasso at a national gallery.

1. TECHNOLOGY

Time Smear is written in Macromedia’s Director and utilities a video capturing and tracking Xtra called TrackThemColors Pro. The processing is relatively simple, though the machine it runs on, the graphics card and the amount of RAM make a significant difference to the fluidity and resolution. However, the piece is usually more successful when the “scan” is slower so that the interactor can keep up with it.

It is currently built for OS X) on the Macintosh (though a Windows port should be fairly easy) and uses a Firewire input from a video camera (currently and iSight webcam). It should run on anything from a 1GHz G4 with 1GB of RAM upwards.

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Figures 1 & 2 – Two sample images of the author interacting with the Time Smear work.