OBJECTS AS EVENTS

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by

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INTRODUCTION

When I entered The Ohio State University's graduate program in Art in 1988, I continued the new direction of my work begun as an undergraduate in 1987, which was creating sculptures that utilized sound, motion and technology to enhance their dramatic appeal. Here at O.S.U. I integrated new motions, sounds, lighting techniques, forms, materials, and fabrication processes to transform my objects into events. At this point in my artistic development, I consider my sculptures to be events because their kinetic properties do not allow them to be sized up as particular forms or objects at a single glance. At the flip of a switch my sculptures take on "life", and the viewer must participate in the sequences of information (content) - lights, sounds, movements - that the sculpture's form transmits.

On the following pages I will describe some of my more concentrated efforts at creating sculptural events - The RANDOM MOTION MACHINE, THUNDER, UP/DOWN ROUND & ROUND and the SPINNING SONIC TEPEE. Included are photocopies of each sculpture with short material and mechanical descriptions.
THIS SCULPTURE STANDS OVER 10 FEET TALL AND HAS A MAXIMUM DIAMETER OF 15 FEET.

RANDOM MOTION MACHINE

STEEL BASE

OCTAGON STEEL CAGE

BELT DRIVEN BICYCLE WHEEL

8 WOODEN TRIANGLES

1725 RPM AC MOTOR

ROTARY TRANSFER MECHANISM

HIGH POWERED AC FAN

STEEL TUBE

JOINT

SPEAKER

PAINTED PLYWOOD HOUSING

EPOXY HAND HOLDING STROBE LIGHT

OVALED ROCK

CONVEX MIRROR

ON OTHER SIDE: COMPACT DISK STROBE LIGHT, CONVEX MIRROR SPEAKER

UKALELE FRET BOARD

NYLON STRING + 2 SPEAKER CABLES

3 FOOT LONG FIBERGLASS ROD

AC TERMINAL

SPEAKER TERMINAL

WRAPPED & PAINTED STEEL TUBE


FIGURE 1... RANDOM MOTION MACHINE
THE RANDOM MOTION MACHINE

The RANDOM MOTION MACHINE is the first sculpture that I constructed here at The Ohio State University. This sculpture is important because it is an example of my first experimentations with random motion making mechanisms, AC electric motors and strobe lights. With the addition of these new elements I was able for the first time to contrast a constant linear spinning motion with a periodic nonlinear motion, exhibit my work in a dark environment and express my fascination with systems that appear to be living because of their ability to change.

The contrast created by having two different types of motion on the same sculpture enhances and distinguishes the expressive feelings that motion can create. Whereas the spinning wheel is monotonous and boring in its act of revolution, the mobile figurine can be dramatic and exciting in its creation of ever-new patterns.

Although I did not intentionally design the RANDOM MOTION MACHINE (Figure 1) to be seen and heard in a dark environment, I found that this sculpture is most provocative when experienced in total darkness. Because it does not have to compete with other environmental influences, it implies an almost a priori existence and it allows for the introduction of illusionistic formal elements that enhance the overall mystery surrounding the true nature of the piece. All of this is made possible because there are two strobe lights attached to the mobile figurine. In addition to allowing me to exhibit my sculpture in a dark room, the strobe lights cast randomly-moving shadows.
of the spinning wheel and base about the room, freezes the spinning motion of the wheel so that it appears to stand still, and leave trails of after-images on the retina of the viewer's eyes.

This first piece completed here at O.S.U. utilizing strobe lights and random motion helped me to de-emphasize the objectness of a sculpture and to emphasize the actions and expressions that a sculpture can convey, which was an important discovery for my sculptures to follow.

The RANDOM MOTION MACHINE capitalizes on these formal considerations and expresses probably better than any piece that I have made my fascination with the sensual, temporal, transient, emotionally expressive qualities that an object/system in the act of changing can create. In many respects the elements that I emphasize in my sculptures are the elements that I appreciate in myself and other people. We (and I speak for my sculptures as well) are interesting not just because of our proportions or form but because we can move, speak and illuminate on our own. All we need is a little electricity (electromagnetic energy) to get things going. Without electricity my sculptures are just lifeless bodies - beautiful perhaps, but boring and soul-less.
THUNDER

12 VOLT DC STROBE LIGHT
MIRRORED OCTAGON CONE
PLYWOOD OCTAGON CONE
SPEAKER
SPEAKER
100 RPM AC MOTOR
ELECTRICAL ROTARY TRANSFER MECHANISM
COOLING FAN

THIS SCULPTURE IS 3½ FEET TALL
BY 2¼ IN DIAMETER AND IS
FINISHED WITH WOOD OIL.

TWEETER
TWEETER

SAND FILLED ¾ PLYWOOD OCTAGON BASE
AC TERMINAL FOR FAN, MOTOR & TRANSFORMER

SPEAKER HOOK UP TERMINALS
SPEAKER WIRES

PLYWOOD MOLDING
AC EXTENSION CORD

THE TOP PORTION OF THIS SCULPTURE SPINS COUNTER CLOCKWISE AT 100 RPM.
THE SPINNING SPEAKERS EMIT THE SOUNDS OF FALLING RAIN AND THUNDER.
IN A DARK ROOM THE STROBE LIGHT FREEZES THE MOTION OF THE SPINNING
SPEAKERS. AT HIGH VOLUMES THE THUNDER SOUNDS CAUSE THE PERCEIVER TO
SEE THE SPEAKERS SPIN AT DIFFERENT RATES.

FIGURE 2...; THUNDER
THUNDER

THUNDER (Figure 2) is significant to me because of its simplicity. The spinning speakers, strobe light, and thunderstorm sound track work together in a dark room to create a unified event that simulates the powerful presence of the natural forces found in a thunderstorm and takes advantage of form and content stripped of ornamentation.

THUNDER expresses my feelings of excitement, anticipation, fear and surprise toward a thunderstorm because the speakers spin at an apparently dangerous rate (sometimes I think that the speakers will explode or I will get hit by them if I get too close to the sculpture), which creates the sensation of airy, voluminous pressure of a cloud; the strobe light freezes the speakers in ever-new orientations, which creates the effect of lightning; and the 50-watt speakers emit an omni-directional pulsation of sound, at unexpected intervals, like a thunderstorm.

THUNDER is interesting because it can simulate the forces of nature with minimal means; whereas my previous sculptures exhibit multiple forms and functions, THUNDER’s form has been reduced to three octagon-shaped cones, one AC electric gear motor, a strobe light and two speakers.

I feel that this lack of ornamentation and simplicity of form enhances the directness and delivery of the piece’s content, in addition to eliminating any distracting or secondary associations that additional ornamentation may generate. THUNDER also
fulfills practical considerations because it can be disassembled easily and placed in specially-made crates for easy transportation.
UP/DOWN
ROUND & ROUND

This sculpture is 2½ feet in diameter, 7 feet tall and finished with wood oil.

The speakers on this sculpture spin horizontally at 70 RPM while also spinning vertically at 8 RPM. The strobe light on the aluminum arm orbits the speakers in a horizontal plane at 70 RPM. In a dark room the strobe freezes the motion of the speakers (which may appear to be going backward or standing still) and casts an orbiting shadow on the surrounding walls. A Doppler effect is created by the rapidly orbiting, ascending and descending speakers which emit sounds and music.

Figure 3..; Up/Down Round & Round
UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND

UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND (Figure 3) was constructed directly after the completion of THUNDER with the intent of making a kinetic and sound implied sphere. With the addition of a simultaneous vertical and horizontal spin I discovered a new awe-inspiring illusionistic element - confusion - and I was able in a more intense fashion to express my fascination with continuous change and its influence on the senses and intellect.

UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND, when activated in a dark room, creates several note-worthy illusions. The symmetry of the speakers causes a confusion as to which speaker is ascending or descending; as a result of the speakers appear to drop into the horizontal plane and then return to their original position. The only way to see the speakers make a full vertical spin is to closely follow the distinguishing feature of a black face plate on one of the speakers in its act of revolution. In addition to the confusing vertical and horizontal spins, the orbiting strobe light casts an orbiting shadow of the spinning speakers around the room, and depending on the rate of the strobe flash (which is random) the speakers are frozen in ever-new positions.

All of UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND’s characteristics add up to create a dramatic dynamic effect: The speakers radiate a continuously-changing soundtrack in every direction. The orbiting shadow and strobe light darkens and lightens the value of the surrounding environment 69 times per minutes.
In many respects all of my sculptures address the idea of continuous change, but I believe that UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND with its confusing motion, soundtrack and flashing lights does the best job of communicating this idea because it is so much about itself (literally) that it is difficult to relate it to any other thing. In other words, this sculpture creates a one-of-a-kind experience that can be described only in terms of its function which is to draw attention to itself and stimulate the senses of the viewer in such a way that the viewer questions their senses and the true nature of the sculpture. Because UP/DOWN ROUND&ROUND is able to create a dramatic change in a local environment and is such a strong entity unto itself, it demands a lot of attention from the viewer and thus inhibits a viewer’s ability to pay close attention to anything else. I have found that the influence of this sculpture is either very exciting and exilerating or irritating and taxing depending on how tired or awake I am.
SPINNING SONIC TEPEE

The spinning sonic tepee is 10 3/4 feet tall and 9 3/4 feet in diameter. When activated, the cone spins at 15 RPM.

VELCRO FASTENING ENTRANCE

Only one person is allowed inside the tepee at one time. This person is shown how to activate the cone by hitting a button and throwing a switch and how to adjust the strobe light rate by turning a dial. After the entrance is closed, the person is free to activate the cone. While in action, the individual inside will experience visual and auditory contradictions. The spinning stereo speakers will sound as if they are spinning in different directions at different rates while the black and white sequences painted on the wall will appear to stand still or go backward and forward. The floor which is mirrored reflects this visual effect and makes the cone appear twice as large.

FIGURE 4... SPINNING SONIC TEPEE
SPINNING SONIC TEPEE

WHITE CANVAS CONE
HIGH POWERED FAN
PLEXIGLASS MIRROR COVERED PLYWOOD PLATFORMS
RING DRIVE SYSTEM
COOLING FAN, 240 RPM AC MOTOR AND DRIVE WHEEL
CAR STEREO

THIS SCULPTURE BREAKS DOWN INTO EASILY TRANSPORTED COMPONENTS. ONLY ONE PERSON IS NEEDED TO ASSEMBLE AND DISASSEMBLE THE PIECE. THE ENTIRE SCULPTURE CAN BE TRANSPORTED IN THE BACK OF A TRUCK OR VAN.

ELECTRICAL ROTARY TRANSFER MECHANISM
BEARING
STROBE LIGHT
RING SUPPORT WIRES THAT CONVEY CURRENT TO SPEAKERS AND ELECTRIC FANS.

STEEL FRAME
THE FRAME DETACHES INTO 9 EASILY TRANSPORTED COMPONENTS.

PLYWOOD RING MADE OF 8 DETACHABLE ARCS.
DETACHABLE WIRE FASTENERS.

ELECTRICAL CABLE CONTAINING WIRES WHICH FEED THE STROBE, FANS AND SPEAKERS.

50 WATT INFINITY SPEAKERS (TWEETER AND WOOFER)

FIGURE 5.; SPINNING SONIC TEPEE
THE TEPEE INTERIOR SPINS AT 15 RPM AND IS LIT BY A FLASHING STROBE AT THE TOP OF THE STEEL SUPPORT STRUCTURE. THIS IMAGE TO THE VIEWER IS MOVING TOWARDS THE LEFT. THE FLASH OF THE STROBE MAKES THE BLACK AND WHITE SEQUENCES APPEAR TO MOVE IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS. MUSIC IS ALSO EMITTED FROM THE SPEAKERS IN THE RING.

FIGURE 6 . . ; SPINNING SONIC TEPEE
THE SPINNING SONIC TEPEE

The SPINNING SONIC TEPEE (Figure 4, 5, 6) is the last and I feel most powerful sculpture that I did here at O.S.U. because it takes advantage of all the ideas that I discovered with my previous sculptures. Since this piece was to be included in my thesis exhibition I decided to create an experience that would leave a lasting impression in the individuals that would be seeing my show. In order to do this I thought it would be appropriate to isolate willing individuals inside a sculpture with audio and visual illusions that would cause the individual to become so confused and disoriented that they would ask, "Where am I?", "What am I experiencing?", "What am I supposed to do?", and so on and so forth.

The SPINNING SONIC TEPEE requires that an individual enter the space alone. Once inside, under the influence of the flashing strobe, loud chaotic soundtrack and spinning wall, the individual's sense of sight, hearing and balance become confused. There is nowhere for the individual to go or neutral area where the individual can avert his eyes or ears for relief. In short the individual is forced to participate in this event.

The SPINNING SONIC TEPEE is confusing an disorienting because the wall has sequences painted on it that appear to go in multiple directions under the flash of the strobe, the spinning speakers create a kaleidoscopic experience of sound that appears to move up and down and clock- and counter-clockwise in relationship to the chaotic music, and the mirrored floor, which reflects all of the above information, confuses 14
which direction is up and which is down. The effect this combination of elements has on an individual is quite startling because he or she feels as if he or she is spinning and that the wall is standing still. This sensation is heightened when the lights in the room outside are turned on and the door to the tepee is left open. The fact that this happens seems to suggest that a surrounding environment plays a greater role in a person's sense of direction or orientation than knowledge; this is true for me at least because even thought I understand how the sculpture is put together and how it works, I still feel as if I am spinning and the sculpture is standing still. Although I cannot claim to understand how this effect is created I can at least say that it creates the sensation that I wanted to express.
CONCLUSION

All of my sculptures use sound, light and motion as elements of expression. As an audio visual kinetic sculptor I create pieces that allow me to explore how change influences our understanding and perception of objects and environments. I do this because I am interested in actualizing myself and because I am interested in how a changing object or environment affects our understanding of that object or environment's value as art.

I believe that my sculptures are important because they express qualities that cannot be created any other way. My sculptures are hard to describe and must be "seen and heard to be believed".