

PROPOSAL - Echo Narcissus Echo

I would like to address the way laugh tracks and 'live studio audiences' are used by producers of popular culture to manipulate our emotions. On a surface level the provided laughter from the program induces laughter in the home audience where there may be little or no real reason for it by simply using the principle of laughter begets laughter. On a more subliminal level the provided laughter produces an artificial community for the viewer to feel a part of. I want the visitors of my installation to take with them a state of awareness with which they can use to disengage from this tactic when encountering it in everyday life.

The physical setup of the installation space will consist of two elements. The first element is a DV camera sitting atop a 19" CRT TV which is placed on a podium at one end of the space. The other element is a rear projection screen at the other end of the space with the camera/TV combination squarely facing this projection screen. The live feed from the DV camera will be shown on the screen of the accompanying CRT as well as being transmitted to a computer. The computer will then analyze the video feed and extract the silhouette of the visitor to combine it with a virtual video wall. This 'virtual video wall' will be a larger single channel video composed of a grid smaller videos. The content of the smaller videos will be explained in detail later. The visitor's silhouette is used as a mask so that only the area on the video wall where the silhouette fills in will be visible to the viewer on the rear projection screen. The final image of the visitor's dynamic silhouette, filled not with darkness but with exposed video grid, is projected onto the screen element of the space. Audible content will be variable depending on which small video grids are exposed by the silhouette. The exposed grids will play their corresponding sound: the provided laughter from that segment. The dimensions of the screen, the distance of the camera/TV to it and the necessary projection throw requirements will all be subject to how much floor space is available in the given location. To help minimize the required throw distance of the projector a mirror will be used to double the throw length.

The traditional setup of the TV set is of a private one-to-one or one-to-few configuration. The provided laughter is the original-content producers way of creating a sense of belonging. This was originally used by early comedy-based television programs to ease the viewers sense of awkwardness that came with the transition from public theater settings where one is influenced by the cues others to private televised programs where the crowd psychology is lacking. The provided laughter continues today as an ingrained staple of popular situational comedies such as *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *Will & Grace*, and *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

The particular moment I am interested in occurs just after the joke as been delivered. The actors usually freeze in place allowing time for the provided laughter to play out according to how humorous the joke was deemed by the original-content producers. It is the awkwardness of these contrived moments that I will engage by extracting these isolated events, compiling them linearly and spatially and sending them at the viewer in a wave of perception relative to their engagement of the space. To represent the artificiality of the private and public aspects of this manipulation I will use elements of interaction to entice visitors to activate the normally dormant space.

The visitor will be able to manipulate his or her unique silhouette of sound and image as if the light source for the silhouette was the television on the podium. Adding the element of playful interactivity brings the aspect of enticement to the space only in front of the TV set paralleling the communal enticement intentions of the laugh track trying to get you to stay in front of the TV. The same parallel exists with the visitors proximity to the TV. A larger community of laugh tracks is created by being in front of the TV and getting closer to it.