

We love you Warren Neidich - A study of Conversational Maps (2002)

Group D

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Identification of the theme:

According to John Borg 93 % of understanding a message comes from the subliminal informations and body language, while only 7 % of the message contains of words. All though other scientists finds these numbers exaggerated, they all agree that the majority of the communication are understood by non verbal behavior and context.

Warren Neidich created the two artworks Conversation Maps, (“I worked on my film today, are you dating someone now” and “I am in love with him, Kevin Spacy”) in 2002, in which he captures sign-language and convert the gestures into art work through light, long exposure and digital photo manipulation.

He photographed artificially setup of everyday conversations conducted in sign-language, where the participants had lights attached to their fingers and arms. The pictures were taken with long exposure and in black and white. The final artwork consists of 5 to 30 layers of conversations, which has been colored using image manipulating software.

Content:

We will analyze Neidichs “Conversation Maps” using relevant theory.

Through an exploratory approach we will investigate some of the aesthetic issues that this piece of art raises. We intend to include an original work by ourselves that has been inspired by Neidich’s original work.

Finally we will compare our own reflections to the relevant theory, and Neidichs “Conversation Maps”.

Strategy of research:

In order for us to obtain understanding of processes and the thoughts of Warren Neidich, we have decided to create an artwork similar to Neidich's with similar parameters. Using the Arduino platform, we will connect LED's to our fingers and capture still images using long exposure with a digital camera. We will constantly review the results and make corrections to our layout in order for us to generate images that are as similar to Neidich's originals as possible. Further down the line we will possibly tweak the setup in order for us to create our own meaning and understanding of the artwork. One of the issues that we have not figured out yet, is how to setup some parameters that color the image as the originals since there are no information on how this was done by Neidich. It seems like he has coloured the pictures himself without any input from users etc. but we find it more interesting using the input from the user which results in a product being less manipulating and constructed by an artist.

An option we are considering is to involve people using actual sign-language, and letting them have a conversation, with the lights attached. Another option for us, is to capture the body language, thus leaving out the actual conversation and thereby creating the reverse conversation map.

The purpose of the fine tuning is partly to obtain insights as well as to generate questions for ourselves to answer, with regards to the artwork.

Reflections:

We find the idea of peeling of 93 % of communication, and moving the remaining 7 % to a new media, very interesting. What remains of the original conversation in Neidich's piece is actually the words, put on top of each other in a new media. Furthermore by keeping only the words, represented by light, he removes all representations of the context in which the conversation originally took place. This is also depicted in the fact that there is an excess of empty canvas in the original, this is where he lets the viewer fill in the remaining 93 %, without actually knowing what the 7 % are, since you need more than just the title and an artwork to decode the meaning of the remaining 7 %.