

Ran Nahmias, Body Induction Site, 17.12.99 – 14.1.2000

Exhibition site: <http://www.hagar-gallery.com/ran0.html>

### **Ran Nahmias. Body Induction Site**

Text by Ran Nahmias

The site is a spatial scope embracing the viewer's body, the electromagnetic oscillation it generates in the work space, and the resulting sounds and images. The work crystallizes to life when an individual enters the induction field; prior to that it has no existence. In this sense, it cannot be described as an installation, but rather as an open arrayment susceptible to calibration or violation by the body present therein.

The work entails the connecting of computer systems to a device called Termin, so named after its inventor, L. S. Termin, who in 1919 developed alarm and detection systems for the Soviet government. The device is based on electromagnetic induction. The presence of a human body in proximity to the antenna produces a sound which varies in frequency and intensity based on the distance between the body and the antenna. Termin, who apart from his physics studies devoted himself to astronomy and music (playing cello and piano) as well, realized it was possible to play music with his alarm, and he is indeed considered the promulgator of electronic music.

The magnetic induction mechanism and part of the sound production apparatus of the device are used mainly in alarm and detection systems. The musical version of the device spawned the synthesizer, albeit the synthesizer's sound is controlled by means of a keyboard and controllers. The common element in both cases is the desire to achieve maximum control, while yielding potential degrees of freedom. This pattern of thought is one of the essential cornerstones of computer systems as well.

Ingeniously, the computer offers freedom and countless options along predetermined routes. The user sits in front of the computer, pointing a finger, as if saying: "I want this". This operation has a name: "Interactivity".

The pretension of man-computer interactiveness is rendered open, leading to unpredictable interrelations between the person's action and the system's response. In interactive works the viewer is perceived not as an operator, but rather as a participant in a game against a partner simulating a high degree of intricacy through a wide repertoire of responses.

The current work creates a dissonance. It indeed generates open interrelations between the viewer and the system's response, but not through technological complexity, nor via powerful computation, but rather by means of an acute reduction of the computer's simulation capacities. The computer is virtually bypassed.

The contribution of its memory and processor to the system's sound or image response to the viewer's presence is almost negligible. In this respect at least, the interactive relationship is ironically manifested in the work; it subverts and undermines the illusory power of interactive systems where the technological mechanism is transparent to the user. Thus it renders the viewer aware of that which is usually concealed or that which he/she is made to forget - namely, the basic means by which the experience is produced, its illusory dimension, his/her here-and-now as a body found within the real, physical realm.

At the same time, however, the work embeds no anti-technological ideology. Its rhetoric and aesthetics somewhat echo the Dada and Fluxus. It evokes a wide range of possibilities omitted once the computer and software technologies were appropriated by the industry and the commercial world; initially open technologies have undergone an accelerated process of specification and standardization under an array of assumptions concerning the profile of an "average user", "target audience", buyers, etc. The current work seeks to point out earlier decisions, neglected options, the problematic nature of the assumptions concerning the needs and preferences of an "average user". These assumptions create a reduction in the real presence and experience of the individual himself.

The work's form and mode of operation are directly influenced by the space in which it is installed: It is site-specific, time-specific and ambiance-specific. The structure of the antennas in the space creates a wave which continues through the structure's columns, around the

computers, into the walls and out again. Both ends of this wave generate an inversion in the visible plane and in the form of the electromagnetic field. The production of image and sound at one end inversely effects the image and sound at the other. The computers in the show are set up close to the structure's columns, at the points where the visual sequence of antennas is interrupted by the columns. The electromagnetic induction circuits are set at points where the antennas intersect, in fact preventing the latter from "short circuiting". Unlike the computer circuits which are closed within a case, the work's induction circuits are entirely exposed. The signals and interruptions appearing on the computer screens create a dual situation, where the viewer is aware of the obscure screen view, yet in that very view he/she is able to detect concrete shapes and interruptions which respond immediately to his/her own body.

This is not an unidirectional effect. Just as the body's presence alters the field, so the field affects and alters the viewer's behavior in the space.

**Ran Nahmias (1971)**

Israeli artist. Lives and works in Jerusalem.

1997 Studied at the Computer Art and Animation Department, Camera Obscura School of Art, Currently studying at the Waldorf School of Education' David Yalin College, Jerusalem

**1999 "Body Induction Site", Heinrich Boll Foundation, Tel Aviv\***

From: Ben Zvi, Tal (ed.), 2000. *New Middle East: Eleven Exhibitions, 1998-1999, at Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tel Aviv*, Jaffa: Hagar Association, pp 91-90