OPEN Signs

http://www.transmediale.de/content/open-signs-curated-heather-kelley

Partner 8: Kunstverein Monochrom, Austria > Günther Friesinger

1.   Exhibition Concept

OPEN Signs was an exhibition of media art in the architecturally unique McLuhan Salon of the Canadian Embassy in Berlin, in conjunction with   the media art conference and festival Transmediale 2011. The show featured works in multiple mixed formats which were created with an open   process and/or outcome, and showcased artists from Canada and elsewhere around the globe. Artists included environmental artist Brandon   Ballengée, robotic photographer Ben Bogart, filmmaker Brett Gaylor, and game creators Metanet.

In parallel with the rise of open-source software, electronics, licensing and distribution philosophies, artists have pioneered the notion of open   culture systems to create works that take free access as both strategy and ethic. *OPEN Signs* reflects the diversity of open development and   distribution strategies among Canada-based media art and culture projects, inclusive of robotics, internet, electronics, biological research,   games, and video work.

2. Reception

The public (primarily media and software art festival-goers, and national government representatives) were receptive to the work, about half of which was interactive.

3. Exhibition Design

The exhibition venue, the McLuhan Salon of the Canadian Embassy in Berlin, is known for its round shapes and media screens embedded in the walls. Additionally the space hosts a small library, and a dramatic hallway equipped with media kiosks against windows looking out to a waterfall fountain. The exhibition design took over all of these spaces in a maximal way, installing a screen-based artwork in all screens of the round main room, a new work which was custom designed for all four screens of the hallway kiosks, and immersive installation in the intimate library space. By this way, the artists „occupied" the cultural spaces of the Embassy.

The show included pieces which might have challenged visitors" inhibitions, such as a piece which required them to sing in public, and a piece which asked visitors to send text messages to be written on a blackboard by a robot (see image 1)

4. Conclusion: in respect to the COP1 and COP2

Toolkit 1 – to make Europe visible (COP1) – Not applicable. The intention of OPEN Signs was to make Canadian-related work visible to Europeans.

Toolkit 2 – integrating cultural Europe (social arena): (COP2) – The exhibition was free and open to the public, however, strict security requirements and relatively out-of-the-way location of the Canadian embassy meant that it was somewhat complicated to access.

Toolkit 3 – activation, participation and & role modification: (COP2) – About half of the works encouraged interaction or activity to appreciate, and a strong effort was made in the exhibition"s supplemental materials (gallery guide, etc) to clearly explain the interactions for visitors who might be less familiar with interactive art.

Toolkit 4 – synesthetic translation of perspective (COP1) – Not applicable regarding any specifically European perspective, however the exhibit gave an extremely synaesthetic perspective on „open" culture, including open source software and hardware technology, fair use video remixing, participatory artwork, music sampling, and community-created artwork.

Toolkit 5 - Social web and interaction: (COP2) – The exhibition was accompanied by a web site which explained the intentions and showcased the artists and their work. Beyond the normal methods of information browsing, it was not especially interactive. Notably, however, this site continues to document the exhibition and give a promotional platform to the artists involved.

Image 1: Alexandre Castonguay‟s *Tafel* at the Canadian Embassy in Berlin. Foto Transmediale 2011.
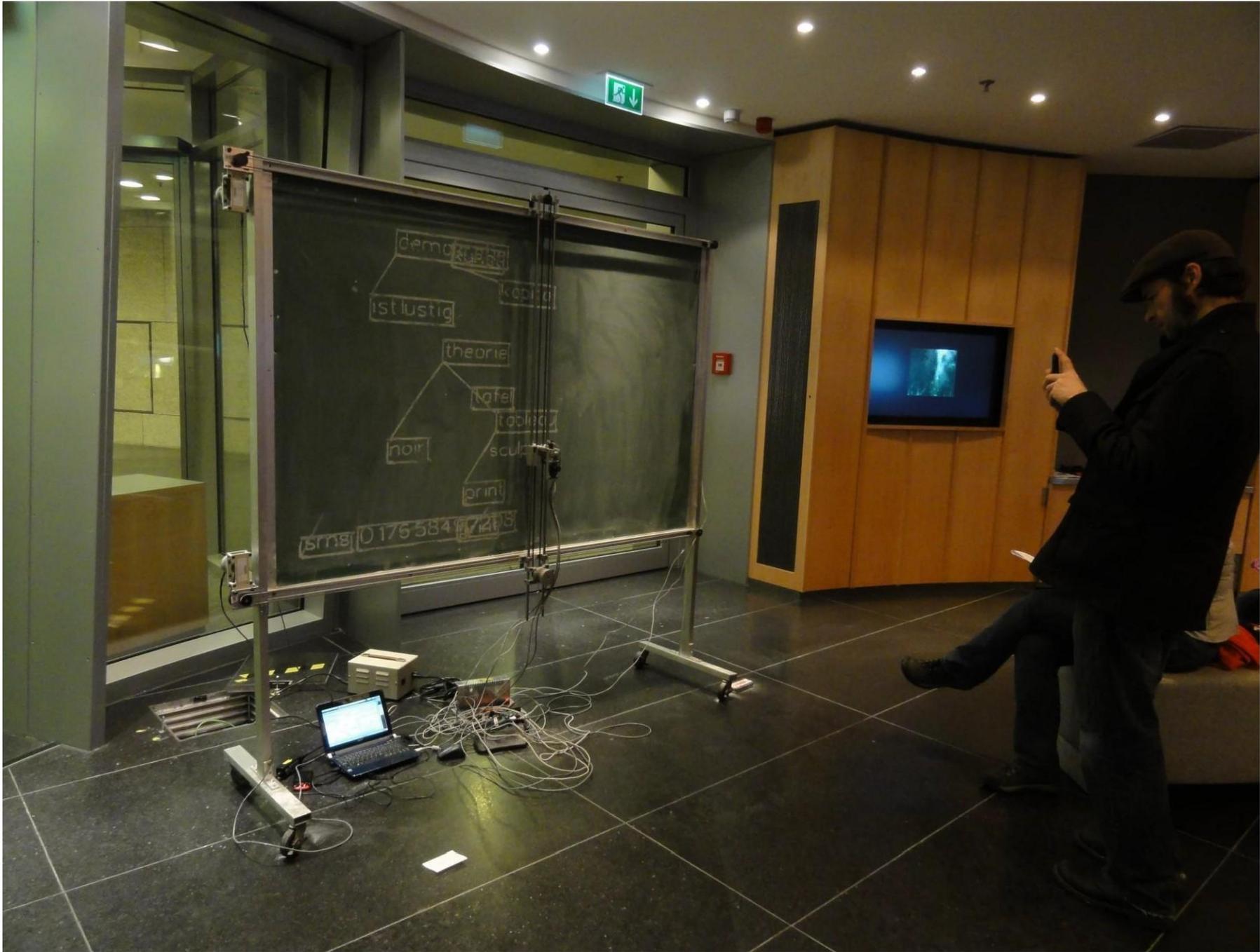
Alexandre Castonguay‟s robotic blackboard *Tafel* is part of the „inscriptions‟ series of drawing machines - artworks that analyze, inscribe and encode written information. At a time when the written form is undergoing a massive migration to a digital format that promises quick access to vast amounts of data but also shifts the mode of experience and attention given to its contents, the artworks tend to give a tangible form to information, to re-embody the digital through writing at the time of the disappearance of cultural forms perceived as obsolete. This occurs through a digital and electronic process that revives old protocols like HPGL (Hewlett Packard Graphics Language) and reclaimed stepper motors to augment a blackboard into a chalk drawing machine. It accepts texts sent by users via sms or email, processes them and inscribes a response in the form of written text or diagram in the hand of Joseph Beuys, whose „tafel‟ lectures form the basis of this participative work.

Image 2: memelab‟s *royalty f(r)ee* at the Canadian Embassy in Berlin. Foto Transmediale 2011.

Art group memelab created a new work specifically to re-occupy the Embassy‟s information kiosks, which normally display educational "Canadian" content. Their work *royalty f(r)ee* is an open-source, automated music sequencer, designed to randomly load and play content from Canadian-born, Berlin-based electronic music producers. In accordance with SOCAN guidelines / Canadian copyright laws, it also acts as a royalty fee counter, dynamically updating and displaying both the royalties owed to the respective artist, as well as a constantly-modified ownership info-graphic. The work aims to question and disturb notions of ownership, authorship, and openness.

Focus on COP2