

Cyber-Angel

Authors:

**Michel Guglielmi
Stefania Serafin**

Summary:

This installation gives people a chance to become an angel, which can read into peoples' minds while they pass on a bridge.

Keywords:

Automatic perception

Telepathic thoughts

Word texture

Thought generator

Cyber angel

“It is one of the commonest of mistakes to consider that the limit of our power of perception is also the limit of all there is to perceive” (1)

Most of spiritual traditions through the world are referring to some kind of souls acting as guardian and protector or divine messenger for humans (angels or divinities).

They may take different shapes and attributes in different cultures, but they have in common some refined ability to read and perceive information from the subtle world.

Among other things, they are able to read peoples mind and see their aura, which is not visible to ordinary sights, as well as their enteric body. Those phenomena are utterly well described in the tantric literature (2).

Our project, which has been in process since June at the Department of Medialogy at the University of Aalborg, makes a poetical attempt to apprehend such esoteric experiences. We wish to give the opportunity to “normal” people to experience - and be aware of - such state of consciousness trough an adapted use of technology.

Description:

An angel-shell made out of two wings is standing on the side of a pedestrian bridge.

It looks and feels like a cocoon inviting the people passing by to be encircled by it.

When people take on the wings (as if they would take on a jacket), they immediately get conferred the transcendental property specific to all angels - to hear (via inbuilt speakers) peoples thoughts and whispering while those pass by over a bridge.

Sounds and thoughts get louder when people come closer and then seem to vanish again, when they walk further:

This real time effect will be obtained by automatic distance evaluation using advanced camera systems and form recognition technology.

The Angel (the user who takes on the wings) is now immersed in his own mystic reality.

He listens with kindness and sympathy to the thoughts, which are occurring in the minds of all the people around. The angel expresses caring and concern as he listen to the hopes and fears, anxiety and desperation of the people passing by.

But wings are needed to experience this state of consciousness.

Without the wings, the user will not be in contact with the peoples' inner voices.

Also, a large amount of carefully written small narratives is archived in a databank and function as a random “thought-generator”.

This installation raises the question of the relation between technology and especially computer technology and spirituality.

Quoting the French nineteenth century writer Stendhal

"A novel is a mirror that strolls along a highway. Now it reflects the blue of the skies, now the mud puddles underfoot." (3)

Stendhal suggests that books can be paths towards an analytical self-discovery, but technology can do even more for us. It can give us a way to explore our subconscious in a manner that we previously could not. We hope to be able to demonstrate this in our project.

The angel project is like a spiritual mirror reflecting our divine nature.

We can see ourselves in the manner our creator sees us.

We can see ourselves like angels and souls see us.

Computer technology can create awareness by a first hand experiences trough Immersion, but also by creating a sense of sharing and belonging to something bigger: If we see the computer as a device able to make many into one, then, when many become one, that one is getting infinite.

This awareness of oneness and unity with the infinite is a spiritual experience in itself. It is true that some human being have already achieved higher state of enlightenment through history. But those cases can merely be considered as "anomalies".

For most of us, a little help is welcome and technology can play its role to build up the favorable conditions for getting us on the right track.

The rise of political consciousness has been the result of the printing press.

Today, Planetary consciousness may (or HAS TO...remember Malraux's curse:

The end of this century will be spiritual or it will not be.) Arise from computer technology:

Not only by creating a worldwide communication network, accessible to all, anywhere and at any time but also by creating poetic devices making us again aware of the beauty of our soul.

In our installation, the "beauty of the human soul" takes form trough the strangers "Inner child" which happens to be passing by.

We (as angels) perceive a non-sexual, crystalline and bewitched nature of his dwelling soul while our compassionate heart opens up to the experience.

Here, we find inspiration in Wim Wenders movie "Himmel über Berlin", where a recurring element in the film is the narration of a poem written by Peter Handke, which begins, "Als das Kind, Kind war" ("When the child was a child").

The poem describes child's consciousness of the world.

But on a more pragmatic level, by mapping a child voice on passers-by, it resolves a technical issue, which is that our camera-based form recognition system is not (yet) able to differentiate between peoples gender.

What do we hear when we become an angel?

We hear thoughts of all kinds.

But by digging more deeply into this material, we will discover common bedrock shared by all of us. Sometimes, it appears clear and structural. The hearts are then open and we tune right into the sacred space. Sometimes, it appears fragmented:

In this case, the words overlap and collide with each other.

They are like a dense intertwined texture made out of bits of strings. Words as texture can offer an almost physical experience:

They can touch us.

Their gentle flow can enwrap us, reverberate or feel like a blow when they hit the body.

Another type of thoughts perceived by the angel are reminiscent material from previous experiences.

We imagine interferences of data issued in previous installations and intruding occasionally into the background as a kind of "dejà entendu" resulting from a reincarnation of the installation somewhere else in the world.

This will give a new depth and complexity to the experience, connecting all events together trough time and into a 3-dimensional audio-texture made mainly by words but eventually by sounds as well.

How do thoughts succeed to each other?

Everything in nature has a cycle, where things arise, build up, sustain and fade away, just to repeat the same cycle.

Days become nights, waves arise and fall even our hearts follow this rhythm.

This is intuitively known to most people and many eastern spiritual traditions consider this universal principle as a key for enlightenment as it is the case in shivaisme where Lord Shiva dances the cycle of Time into a big wheel while smashing ignorance under his feet.

So simple, yet so profound, it has taken science thousands of years to come to the same conclusion.

In our project, we assume that thoughts follow the same universal pattern.

By practice of meditation this comes rather clear.

If ones try to sit still for a moment and observe his or her own thinking processes, he or she will notice that thoughts arise, and sustain until another thought takes over. They can be triggered by and internal or external process, for example a sound or a smell, or they might arise from a previous thought.

Therefore, our installation does not work in a linear mode, where one thought takes over by another, gradually overlapping. But rather, thoughts will follow each other like waves.

Most things in nature are believed to being built up by wave interactions: economy, sound, light even sub atomic material. So why would thoughts not follow those physical theories based on general wave theory? The periodicity into the energy level of the perceived thoughts will be simulated with the help of algorithms and built into our system.

Ability to tune into peoples thoughts

We assume that the ability to tune into thoughts varies depending of the energy level of the emitter and his aptitude to enter in resonance with the receiver (the angel).

Resonance starts only when the frequency of the two systems (the receiving and the emitting) is very close or identical.

In resonance, a receiving system (in our case the angel) tunes into an emitting system.

This is particularly the case while practicing yoga when resonance with the surrounding is maintained through focus and concentration.

During resonance, a transfer of subtle energy takes place, from the emitting source to the receiver.

We emphasize that resonance theory is not scientifically proven (although taken usually very seriously by Scientifics trying to explain black holes and worm holes) but are based on experimentations and refinements trough human history in various spiritual disciplines.

Therefore, we see possibility for such phenomena to be part of the installation experience by making us aware that “tuning “ into an individual is not always easy to achieve.

Project location

Ideally, the angel is all over the city but as it is the first version of the project, we will limit our ambition to a fixed point on a pedestrian bridge.

The (almost) linear movement of the crowd should ease the work of the computer, which calculates the distance between people and the angel.

Moreover, the bridge suggests metaphors of transition, which indicates that life is a transitional period made out metaphysical questioning.

Concerning the readability of the installation in different cultures, our angel is a universal angel.

The symbol of transcendence and the sentiment of compassion, which is the theme of our installation, is part of a trans cultural set of values.

As such, it is possible to present the installation in many different places without being misunderstood.

Figure 1,2, 3 and 4 go here.

Figure 1, 2, 3 and 4 show a sketch of the angel.

The angel is a free standing object in public space. The form consists of simple wing-like elements that are fulfilled once the user enters it. The outside of the form should awaken the curiosity of by passers. The inside should offer a feeling of protection from the surroundings as the user surveys whoever passes by. The sound of the thoughts is only audible inside the form.

Technical details

The installation is implemented using the Max/MSP and Jitter software from Cycling 74 (4). An iSight webcam is mounted on the top of the angel. When a person passes in front of the angel, a motion tracking algorithm detects a change in the landscape.

The distance of the person is estimated, and this distance is mapped into acoustical parameters. As an example, when a person passes in front of the angel at a distance far apart, the resulting sound will be strongly attenuated in amplitude.

At the same time, the algorithm is able to detect and simulate the sound parameters of people moving closer to the angel by increasing the amplitude of the resulting thoughts.

Although a perfect recognition of distance and motion of the people involved is a challenging task, none less our installation is able to perceptually create the impression of the angel being able to read into people’s mind. This will be demonstrated at the conference.

Conclusion

The goal of this installation is to investigate different forms really or supposedly undertaken by thoughts and interpret and make them perceptible on a poetic way, by using an advanced computer based technology.

Reference:

- (1) C.W. Leadbeater, 1927 "The chakras"
- (2) Georg Feurstein, 1998. "Tantra, the path of Ecstasy", p 259
- (3) Stendhal, "Le Rouge et le Noir"
- (4) www.cycling74.com

Biography:

Stefania Serafin

Stefania Serafin was born in Venice, Italy where she received the "Laurea" degree (summa cum laude) in Computer Science from the University of Venice, Italy, in 1996. At the same time, she studied violin and music theory at the Music Conservatory B. Marcello of Venice. In 1997 she moved to Paris where she worked in the Analysis-Synthesis team at Ircam, researching physical models of bowed strings and studying for a master degree in Acoustics, Signal processing and computer science applied to music. Since then she has been pursuing her research in different labs such as CCRMA Stanford University, Cambridge University, KTH in Stockholm, and the University of Virginia. In 1999 she moved to CCRMA, Stanford University, where she obtained her Phd on Computer based Modelling and acoustics, with a dissertation entitled: The sound of friction: real-time models, playability and musical applications. Currently she is assistant professor in Media logy at Aalborg University, Denmark (For more information, see: www.cs.aue.auc.dk/~sts).

Email: <sts@cs.aue.auc.dk>

Michel Guglielmi

Architect, graduated from the Architecture School of Strasbourg, France.

Assistant professor in Media logy at Aalborg University, Denmark, where he teaches "Performance systems" and "interactive installations."

He supervises the production of installations in public spaces like metro Stations and museums environments.

He is also teaching at the Danish School of Design, institute for Digital Design, where amongst other activities he was organizing and teaching the workshop around the theme "virtual worlds", "digital space", "slow flow", "digital interaction in the physical room." With his students, he produces Virtual Reality installations like "Votion" in collaboration with Uni-C's Virtual-Reality Centre in Lyngby, Institute for Mathematic Modelling and the department of computer science, Copenhagen University.

He is also Co-Editor and publisher of the online magazine "Diffus-magazine" (www.diffusmagasin.dk), a magazine about Digital art, design and performance and senior partner at the Design office "Diffus". (www.diffus.dk).

Email: Guglielmi@cs.aue.auc.dk