

## Living Room Plankton, 2007

Environment and spectator as evolution agents

Living room Plankton is an interactive installation inspired on plankton and lichen species in which a virtual organism grows and reacts according to the surrounding environments. LRP brings to discussion two aspects which became popular on artistic practice: interactivity and artificial life.

Technology has been driving the way we build and perceive experiences allowing the creation of new worlds, departing from a mimetic look through nature, that were first static and its now becoming more and more real, evolving into unknown places with or without our presence.

From the early computer generated pieces in the 60's by artists like Vera Molnar and Michael Noll, exploring automatic drawing based on mathematic abstractions, to recent artists like Casey Reas and Ken Rinaldo, complex systems arise from basic element interactions based on simple rules. The early static visual forms rendered in the 50's-60's, were lately (during the 70's) turned into moving image sequences where time was the new introduced element. The next decade brought the real time sound and image synthesis. During the 90's, artists as Scott Snibe and Toshio Iwai explored new interactions, where the mouse is substituted by other inputs as mechanical, optical and sound sensors which augmented our experience towards object and space. More than a technical transformation these artworks brought questions related with author and spectator relationships.

Interactive art is the latest manifestation of the "death of the author". The "interactive artist" is merely a context-maker, who provides the basic ingredients, sets up the situation, and then disappears. The spectator-turned-into-the-user that provides the meanings, in a sense creates the work at the moment of the interaction.<sup>1</sup>

As in Myron Krueger's "responsive environments" LRP arises from the "collaboration between the artist, the computer, and the participant" and through system interactions or by other words, growing and living in autonomy, depending on the environment conditions. Exploring the idea of interpersonal interaction, the users might collaborate to create a specific output provided by the conjuncture and the moment. Since systems interactions occur the user(s) are no longer self-represented on their own but in addition with the system behaviour.

Nature and organic aesthetic and functionality has become the inspiration source for many artists using new technologies and Living room plankton explores it as well. In nature we find phenomena and choreographies emanated by living beings and inanimate matter which are invisible to the eye or that slip our attention either for being too mercurial or supine and unhurried. Mirroring nature at some level this object leads to plastic contemplation through an virtual organism's daily routine and interactions with real world.

Artificial Life artworks could be considered as a subgroup of Artificial Life research in that most artists are more concerned with creation of an aesthetic as opposed to testing theoretical biology.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of LRP as an artificial life object is firstly to be a contemplative experience and not a mimetic one, by other words, the emergent properties don't need to fit exactly the one's observed in nature since the organism evolving shares functional and form properties from different organism's living in nature. This life cycle is visually portrayed through a projection on an existing wall of any space subject to perceivable daylight fluctuations and the growth pattern is intimately related with the atmosphere of its placing, by using a network of humidity, light, temperature and sound sensors. LRP outputs will range dramatically, as the habitat it dwells in with its climate conditions will dictate its performance.

Living Room Plankton as other artificial life artworks and their emergent characteristics, create constantly new aesthetic and functional realities, different from the ones we know from nature, allowing each user to "act as a selective pressure in the evolution of the work" and giving a specific and unique meaning to inter-personal interactions.

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<sup>1</sup> Huhtamo, Erkki, Seven Ways of Misunderstanding Interactive Art

<sup>2</sup> Rinaldo, Kenneth E., Technology Recapitulates Phylogeny: Artificial Life Art