Untitled 5. 2004.
Interactive installation: custom software,
video camera, computer, projector, lighting.
Courtesy of the artist.

CAMILLE UTTERBACK

"Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or substance. It is the generation of models of a real without origin or reality: A hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory."

Jean Baudriallard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994)

An interview by Robert Colby, Megan Hancock, Natalie Marsh and Kora Radella

Megan Hancock: What led you to computer programming as your primary medium?
Camille Utterback: I got excited about computer programming when I realized I could use it to create a rich visual system where participants could influence the outcome. I grasped the potential immediately, when I saw early interactive CD-ROMs. Even with this now-outdated technology, the idea that people could literally move through visual material in their own ways, creating different paths or different experiences, intrigued me. I am not really interested in computer programming per

se. I write computer programs to create my work because that is the best contemporary means to allow me to create dynamic interactive systems. What I am really interested in is letting people explore the boundaries and possibilities of their actions within a particular scenario. Our lives are full of codified systems, so writing my own sets of rules is a way for me to explore how different rules can create either stifling or beautiful outcomes.

MH: Do you consider yourself specifically a digital artist? What other types of art do you find inspiring?
CU: I am trained in fine arts and did not use

computers for the early years of my career as an artist. I primarily made paintings and a variety of interactive sculptural systems—including items you would wear on your body to create new experiences. So, no, I do not consider myself specifically a digital artist. I still love looking at painting, and am always awed by the Abstract Expressionists, or any painting where I can feel how a stroke was made by the physical gesture of someone's hand. I find it very eerie to stand in front of a painting and feel the artist's presence through his or her marks.

Robert Colby: It must be totally intentional for you to produce a desired product from code? Are you consciously working toward a desired end or aesthetic? What provides the inspiration for this desire?
 CU: I think people have a lot of misconceptions about writing computer codes, and a lot of romantic ideas about other media. While some elements of coding are intentional—understanding how the logic flow of the program works, why it's getting stuck, and so on—similar intentional elements are there in painting, such as how to mix a particular color. While coding, I am constantly surprised by the effects of the code I write. Writing a code involves creating rules for a process that the computer acts out. So, you can set something in motion that far exceeds what you imagined. For me, it's as intuitive a process as painting at this point. I work some, see what I like and don't like, and continue from there.

Kara Radella: Critics and scholars often use the term "embodied" to describe your work, which can mean very different things in different contexts. How is the body, and embodiment addressed or taken as a theme in your work?
 CU: Because my drawing systems like *Untitled 5* react to physical movement and position, they necessarily engage people at the level of their bodily movements. When interacting with my work, people may use their intellect to pose a question—"what happens if I try this?"—but to test their hypothesis they must engage physically. If you don't physically move in my works, you don't really experience them. To be embodied is also to take pleasure in the sensuality of the movement of our bodies. Because of the immediacy and fluidity with which my works respond to people, participants often find themselves in a 'flow' type experience. While they may become less connected to their immediate surroundings (they lose track of time, for example), they often feel more present in their body because of how the system is visually reacting to them. I guess on a simple level, this is my way of reminding people

that our bodies always matter. There is really no thought or intellect without a body. I enjoy allowing people this clear sense of their bodies, and I think the mental shift this awareness brings has real consequences. I have never tried testing people's blood pressure before and after engaging with my work, but I'm guessing there would be a noticeable shift. More importantly, providing an opportunity for people to move their body in playful ways also encourages playful thinking. Playfulness is a key to new solutions in all aspects of our lives.

Natalie Marsh: Is seeing knowing?
 CU: Seeing is a part, but not all of knowing. In our culture, we are very tuned in to seeing as it relates to consumerism (brand recognition, stylishness and so on), but we don't really trust seeing as a way of knowing in other areas. For example, can you imagine an art museum with no 'explanatory' wall text?

Projection stiill: *Untitled 5*. 2004.
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