ParkBench Public-Access Web Kiosks

ParkBench kiosks address the problem of elitism in cyberspace. The Internet's information and connectivity resources seem to promise universal access. Our aim is to reach out to those who lack the prerequisites for getting online.

Worldwide, it has become obvious how technology widens the gap between haves and have-nots. From our experience introducing disadvantaged students to digital graphics, audio, and Web authoring programs, we are convinced of technology's power to unlock creativity and enhance self esteem. The Internet reflects a dynamic portrait of its creators. If it is to evolve to represent our global culture, we all have a responsibility: public art must become the public's art.

ParkBench kiosks are currently under development at 14 public schools, where we are training teachers and students in visual and Web literacy. Their first project is to create a journal of Visual Poetry. These artworks will serve as the catalyst for discussion among sites. The kiosks, located in school libraries and computer labs, will be open at selected times to family, friends, and other community members. Students will serve as turnkey instructors, passing on their own knowledge. We will complement this network with kiosks at other accessible sites in New York, including museums, libraries, public atriums, and transit stations. Student-teachers will serve as hosts at these kiosks, introducing the public to Web literacy, showing their work, and demonstrating their knowledge to a public beyond their own communities.

The kiosks' functions include Internet access via the World Wide Web, videoconferencing among sites, collaborative drawing, an electronic bulletin board, and email.

Alice Sat Here

We collaborated with a team of New York University computer scientists and engineers to equip a wheelchair with a wireless telerobotic camera. The result, *Alice Sat Here*, was shown in November 1995 in CODE, at Soho's Ricco/Maresca Gallery. With gallery visitors steering Alice's Throne and remote participants controlling camera direction, *Alice Sat Here* was a passage between the physical world and cyberspace. Participants converged from Web-side and street-side, explored parallel spaces separated by glass, and peered through the membrane at each other's representations.

Alice's Throne

Interactors at the front window were digitally inset into images grabbed by the mobile camera. This image was downloaded from the Web.

Design Engineer Fred Hansen designed and fabricated the servo-controlled unit for Alice's camera, in addition to mounting and powering all accessories to Alice's Throne. Toto Paxia and David Bacon collaborated in design and implementation of Alice's client/server architecture, which ran on two PCs networked locally at the gallery, connected via PPP to the gateway server at NYU. One PC, running Windows, housed video and touchpad servers; the other, running Linux, was the pointing motor/network server. Video was sent wirelessly from the throne's camera to the video/touchpad server, displayed on a monitor in the front window in real time, then sent to the pointing motor/network server, and from there to the gateway server, where it was made available to Web users. By touching the pads in the front window, participants sent camera directions to the video/touchpad server, which passed them to the pointing motor/network server, where they were processed by a custom board built by Paxia and sent to a remote-control device that used radio waves to control the up/down and right/left position of the videocamera's servomotors.

Thursday Night Performances: ArtisTheater

We envision each kiosk as a miniature television studio transmitting to other kiosk sites and to Web users. We have been experimenting with this medium during our *Thursday Night Performances*, which are visible at http://c4dm.nyu.edu/parkbench/Thurs8.html. By using puppets, sculpture, painting, dance, and cooking – along with guest artists, including students from the Lexington School for the Deaf – our aim has been to determine what kinds of performance are viable in this medium.

When we began experimenting with Richard S. Wallace's telerobotic camera in 1994, it was one of the first on the Web, and it inspired our performance series. Fred Hansen designed and manufactured LabCam's Spherical Pointing Motor.

ParkBench is the most recent in a series of public video installa-

Image downloaded from ArtisTheater

tions by artist, performer, and lecturer Nina Sobell. Emily Hartzell is a multimedia artist and curator ("At the Intersection of Cinema and Books" and "Woman on Earth"), who also collaborates on design and manufacture of input devices for artists. They are currently producing Iris prints derived from their live Web performances.

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