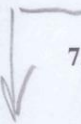


reproduction and distribution creates networked communities, and these communities in turn generate feedback, even noise, as songs are remixed and redistributed on the Internet to be remixed again by others, which necessitates further transformation. Feedback, in other words, is the guarantee against stasis, the infinite promise that new compositions are inevitable.



## 7. Conclusion


We have argued that musicians have long been forerunners of techniques and concepts and possibilities common to contemporary digital-multimedia production. We have advanced terms such as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, feedback, prosumer, and worlding to show genetic links among artists as diverse as Wagner, Hendrix, Yes, Eno, and The Flaming Lips and to demonstrate that new, innovative software such as GarageBand can be seen as an outgrowth of trends going back decades. But, where does this leave us? We suggest first that integration of media will continue. That is, as it becomes easier to generate and combine media, such recombinations—hybridizations—will advance, often in new and surprising ways and, we assert, in ways we are unable to predict. Further, this integration will take place not only by combining different media forms, such as sound and image, but it will be increasingly produced, reproduced, and distributed through technologies, networks, and communities. Indeed, we might say that in some ways it is becoming more difficult to separate out these terms as they seem to presuppose each other. This inter-relationship and (inter)presupposition of technologies, communities, and agency is another fold in our sense of worlding.

We would like to conclude with an anecdote that furthers our arguments but does so by showing that we are only in a moment whose supercession can already be gleaned. First, prior to drafting the section on GarageBand, we spent an entire evening learning the software and composing on it.<sup>11</sup> Feedback and remixing were crucial to the proceedings, as were networking and community. We made our fair share of noise, and some of it even made its way into the compositions. We did indeed feel fully our roles as prosumers! Nevertheless, the software, while relatively easy to use, stops short of being intuitive. It takes real work to use GarageBand, and not just the affective work one normally associates with sound production. These are not idle criticisms, for they show that as advanced and wonderful as GarageBand is, it can be still better, or even superceded. For example, in a Web site devoted to reviewing new media tools, Spencer Critchley (2004) discusses the use of music software from the perspective of an online community of musicians. What repeatedly comes up are specific kinds of frustration, and their criticisms of GarageBand in particular are telling. Among the complaints leveled by the reviewers is the assertion that the interface is too complicated: It is hard to learn and remember, and the learning that must take place is intellectual rather than musical. The review presents the critical perspectives of musical rather than technological experts, and the appeal to pathos is especially significant:

<sup>11</sup> We plan that the digital companion to this essay will contain the fruits of these rudimentary efforts. In so doing, we hope to bring together text, image, and sound. We have already constructed two sound files (we dare not claim they are “music”) that are intended to be heard independent of any text. A third is linked to a slide show that we imagine readers may want to play while reading this static text.

sheds a useful light on the expansion of play and digital game techniques into both installation art and educational museum displays.


This article looks at *Fragments*,<sup>1</sup> an installation of interactive silk tapestries by the artist Adriana Paice on which I collaborated, as a case study. I argue that *Fragments* used techniques drawn from digital games and play to engage both contemporary urban experience and the materiality of the book. By using tapestries instead of touchscreens, it became a collection of “magical objects” that were experientially different than the same content would have been if delivered on a computer or mobile device. This case study provides one model for the incorporation of playful thinking into design and suggests the “magical object” as a practical frame for its implementation.



### The Case for Playful Art

Interactive art can make players out of visitors as well as artists. It gives visitors an opportunity to use free, voluntary, and enjoyable action. In New York’s Central Park, for example, the bronze statues lining Literary Walk are hard to play with because they are hard to reach. The height of their pedestals makes them noninteractive. By contrast, the nearby statue of Alice in Wonderland (de Creeft, 1959) is near to the ground and offers many handholds. Alice’s finger is polished to a bright shine by the generations of children who have gripped it to hoist themselves up.<sup>2</sup>

I define a magical object as a familiar thing given unexpected and fantastical properties by concealed technology. A room in which it rains, a bridge covered with invisible leaves, a book whose illustrations move, and a tapestry that talks, all recent installations, are all magical objects by this definition. I do not suggest that visitors will be deceived into thinking that supernatural forces are at work, but simply that they should be able to play with these magical objects as if they were. The mechanics are not foregrounded and need not be especially complex or cutting edge. It is the context of their deployment that gives them their aura. The magical object is not a reinterpretation of the black box; concealing its workings is not critical. It is the use of mundane electronics to endow familiar things with novel abilities, and thereby produce a sense of wonder. This approach has several advantages over interactive work that emphasizes, rather than disguises, the technology it relies on. First, it protects work from aging in the popular imagination at the same speed as consumer electronics, which are quickly adopted and quickly discarded. Second, it makes a sophisticated point about what constitutes contemporary experience; rain, bridges, and cloth are as much a part of modernity as the digital. And finally, it gives interaction designers a chance to work in the context of very high marginal costs, or, to put it in other terms, with precious things.



Digital games may be interactive art, but interactive art is not always a game. Many game studies scholars describe games as highly structured, with fixed rules, conflict, and a winner, and this is not a good description of interactive art. But digital games are more than their rules. They engage the senses—touch, hearing, sight—to