

***Helsinki / Berlin 2014***

***Susanne Schuricht interviewed by Zania Sovijärvi-Spape of the Helsinki University,  
Department Professor Giulio Jaccuci***

***You have a MA in industrial design but also studied History of the Arts and are involved in the international art scene as well as various interdisciplinary projects. Do you yourself consider yourself an artist, a designer, a ...? What are the most important theoretical underpinnings of your work?***

I consider myself an artist.

I studied at the University of the Arts Berlin (UdK Berlin) Industrial Design and Experimental Media Design at the University of the Arts Berlin (UdK Berlin), graduating in 2003 with an MA in Industrial Design. Other studies include art history at the Technical University Berlin, painting restoration and also photography at the Museum Folkwang, Germany.

I benefit a lot from the variety of my education. Combining my experiences in developing well crafted installations, from the idea, over the whole production process and the presentation of the artwork. I can easily switch between Design-thinking and Artistic processes. I always was interested in interdisciplinary working and in overlapping fields between Art and Architecture, Art and Science, Design, Art and Architecture... or digital and analog, virtual and embodied...

*What are the most important theoretical underpinnings of your work?*

My work engages in the "Perception of Seeing", in the conscious pause in order to perceive. By settings limits to the gaze, gaps and details and staging them it turns the visitor into an active viewer. "The more you become aware of yourself and your environment the more you become an active member, an actively seeing person. For me, seeing means insight/knowledge. Insofar it can change your way of thinking. I believe that art has its share and that in the long run it can exert influence on people."... In many of the installations the human scale and interaction are relevant.

As an artist I am looking for processes by which to see the well known with new eyes and thus re-perceive oneself as well. Creating and jointly construct objects, environments and situations to use them as catalysts to find out more about our and others' culture and, to better understand our position in society. Inspiring people to expand their boundaries, to broaden one's mind by changing ones position and perception.

Life is a frequent travel - travelling more consciously, being aware of the various options and perspectives supports to better navigate (through) the world. Every traveller needs this ability to be able to open up to the new and unknown in foreign situations.

***Has the change in available technology and especially change in capacities of computers had influence on your art diachronically?***

At school I learned with the program Turbo Pascal a general understanding of the computer, but I discovered the capacities of computer for netart or for an interactive installation later as a student at the University of the Arts Berlin. At that time I was fascinated by possibilities, but in my case it was never the technic which made the idea. There was always the idea first. My ideas

are settled in between digital and analog. The engagement with interactive technology made me sensitive of interactive processes: Meanwhile the visible technology in the art-piece itself became less important. Technology is still a tool, but I could solve the longing for interactive situations also in an analog way. Technology is important in the process of realizing the artwork, but not within the artwork itself.

***How do you develop an idea like the one for Freequent Traveller; what was the very first notion about (internationality? space? identity? place as in the place one is immediately in to experience something?) and how did it develop from there?***

*Freequent Traveller* came into my mind while laying in a hammock. Reading books about rhythm and the healthy movement of swinging in a hammock. I wanted to make an artwork which gives people a physical immersion of the body - maybe because at that time I kind of lost the connection to my body in front of the computer screen and found it back in the movement of the hammock. The installation grew out of the lack of real physical experiences and sensations in the digital world. *Freequent Traveller* is explorative, sensuous and playful.

*Freequent Traveller* was originally produced as a playful but sensitive research element for a questionnaire concerning issues of mobility, home and identity. How much technology do we need? What's home for you? What's the aim of travelling for you? What do we really need? *Freequent Traveller* puts the subject in a state of moving and being moved. It's a catalyst for interaction between people and for rethinking our needs and actual living situation. The inspirations for *Freequent Traveller*, were archaic immersive rituals, the HIBYE nomadic work of Martí Guixé, The *Viridian Neologue Contest*, developed by Bruce Sterling and Natalie Jeremijenko, and John Thackara.

The terms *Freequent Traveller* relates to frequency and periodicity, while free emphasizes the state of being elated. Traveller is used as a metaphor for our life-long journey. Using *Freequent Traveller* means to make a journey.

Have also a look onto the project website and material:

***website freequent traveller***

<http://www.sushu.de/free>

***pictures***

<http://www.sushu.de/free/pictures.html>

***movie***

[http://www.sushu.de/free/mart\\_ft\\_2006.mp4](http://www.sushu.de/free/mart_ft_2006.mp4)

***paper***

[http://www.sushu.de/free/PDArt\\_Su\\_Schuricht.pdf](http://www.sushu.de/free/PDArt_Su_Schuricht.pdf)

***STATIC***

[http://static.londonconsortium.com/issue04/pdf/schuricht\\_freequent.pdf](http://static.londonconsortium.com/issue04/pdf/schuricht_freequent.pdf)

***What are the strategies employed to encourage the participant to participate? In the project description, you explain that the user is from the beginning subconsciously in control, and the interface is not hidden, so it's obvious to the participant what they are to do? Are there other, less plain strategies?***

***While the basics of how to interact with the work were quite clear, there was much choice in how the participants interacted with one another –anything from cocooning inside it to sharing it with others, and the in-betweens of pushing people within. How do you find the participants interacting with one another ended up affecting their interaction with the work?***

The underlining strategy is rooted in the installation itself and the atmosphere created by the swinging of the hammock and the visual feedback of the texts projected in correlating waves. People are immediately stimulated to lay down in the hammock or interact by swinging another person or even just observe the scene, as it is truly hypnotic and calming. The installation can be enjoyed immediately even without understanding the complex system and computer program behind and further more the hacked technology behind is revealed as openly as possible to create curiosity. (Mouse-construction) The hammock has been chosen purposefully as it creates a situation of peace and contemplation, though one is passive and active at the same time. The hardware components are simple, plain mechanics. The visibility of this simplicity is part of the aesthetics of the installation. A computer mouse is deconstructed and reconstructed, but instead of a ball, there is twine going through. The twine is fixed to the end of the hammock, transmitting the amplitude and frequency.

*Freequent traveller* can be seen as a comment on too complicated interactive installations of that time which often couldn't be understood intuitively without technological expertise, causing frustration and lack of patience to expire the artwork. *Freequent traveller* is a catalyst to sensually start to re-thinking our way of life in modern times, setting the mind into a moving state of flow. One of the main ideas is also to bring people closer to themselves but also to others.

***Place is obviously fundamental to Freequent Traveller. In addition to the hammock moving in one place, the participants within it are moving mentally to elsewhere, or have a sensation of other places. How does the fact that the work itself travels from place to place add to this?***

The participant of *Freequent Traveller* doesn't cover a real distance, the user moves at the very same spot, moves in the mind, while the interaction is an embodied and unconscious experience. Lying in the hammock this swinging motion is synchronized with the sentences animated across the projection screen. The hammock's movement is translated into animated type in real time. Analogous to the pendulum-like movements of the hammock itself, the animations are based on sine waves. The user is immersed in the stimulating synchronous loop of her/ his own physical motion and perceived visual dynamics.

The text consists of statements from artists, friends and visitors of freequent traveller from all over the world about mobility, home and identity and it emphasizes a global awareness. The text is entered beforehand. The text-passages also contain contemplations by the artist and excerpts from collected interviews and conversations with the audience of this travelling installation. The content is frequently updated.

***Do you think the participant perceives the work in a way of a narrative, in achieving a certain state, or is it a more floating, browsing in a not-going-anywhere-in-time sort of way -experience***

*Both. In describing the concept of Frequent Traveller, I quote John Thackara: "Being embodied is our nature as earth-born creatures. The danger in our infatuation with digital communication is that we feel compelled to reduce all human knowledge and experience that we have by virtue of having bodies."*

A central component of the work is rhythm. On one hand this is a physical rhythm and on the other a metaphorical one—an ebb and flow of themes and events. All indigenous cultures have rituals that include repetitive motion to get into an elevated and engrossed state of mind. At the same time this rhythmic activity increases the activity of the brain. The feedback loop created by the soft, swinging motion of the hammock linked to the dynamics of the animated text imbues the consciousness with a mild form of intoxication one can happily submit to. Using Frequent Traveller makes the participant happy!

*Frequent Traveller* makes use of this method to transport the visitor into a state of mind beyond the everyday providing the possibility to engage in the universal themes but at the same time reflecting personal needs of home, mobility and identity. Thoughts of fellow participants from different backgrounds and cultures become unobtrusively visible, raising a local and global awareness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Life is a frequent travel - travelling more consciously, being aware of the various options and perspectives supports to better navigate (through) the world.

*Frequent Traveller* makes its users look at their surrounding from a fresh perspective. It is a catalyst for starting to re-think our way of life in today's times. To lie in the hammock and sway through the text helps set the mind into a moving state of flow.

The participant is from the beginning subconsciously in full control. Participants use a computer without being aware of it. During usage, the installation becomes intuitively accessible: They can play by making the text pause, submit to it, step in or step out. The piece does not conceal its interface but reveals it as part of its appearance; its transparency often creates a surprising effect of becoming aware of her/ his action in relation to the construction. In *Frequent Traveller* bodily motion and technology, the analogue and the digital coalesce. It becomes another exploration of the question: How much technology, which technologies, and which tools do we really need? Besides it brings strangers playfully together – it's a tool, which creates a special relaxed and social atmosphere to make people feel comfortable talking about personal issues.

Being elevated and set into a symbolic state of dislocatedness people might feel confronted with themes such as constituting a transnational society, global information exchange, the loss of the notion of place, the breaking of boundaries.

*Frequent Traveller* recognizes the problematic, sometimes uncomfortable atmosphere of the melting of personal and public situations and provides an adaptable sensitive tool for engagement with individuals in public space.

Supporting a rhythm based feeling of pleasure, the hammock offers a flexible, personally adaptable space in a situation of exposedness to the public while being in a receptively, emotional therefore also vulnerable state.

The exhibition context creates a situation, where the text messages are viewed by everybody. Closing the hammock however, visitors can create a cocoon like space, where they experience the text messages in a more intimate atmosphere.

*Examples of the projected text passages (a selection)*

“What technologies or tools - official - nomadic - domestic - objects - stories - to interact in person, face-to-face, stories instead of objects – meet somebody like you” *Yui*

“After spending a week in the woods on a corporate Outward Bound trip, with almost nothing - My trip changed my whole way of thinking, as far as what ‘being connected’ means. I no longer need the ‘stuff’ I thought kept me connected to home, and office. Today's technology keeps me as connected as I choose to be.” *Senior Project Manager*

“How much technology do we need? Unfortunately ‘need’ and ‘have to live with’ are irretrievably mixed up. The world is so full of technology and inter-mingled systems that we can't just throw them away. But I'm confident we are moving away from the idea that tech is a good thing by itself. Most of us feel far from in control. We're filling up the world with amazing devices and systems - on top of the natural and human ones that were already here - only to discover that these complex systems seem to be out of control: too complex to understand, let alone to shape, or redirect. But things may seem out of control - but they are not out of our hands.” *John Thackara*

“For me, much interesting about the dream - I sometimes think that kind of the dreams, is it same for people who are living in different area - Japanese, German, British, African, whoever? Because, I've always slept as Japanese, so I never know. Do you know what I mean? ” *Masa*  
“I am a frequent traveller in the images stored in my memories. I continuously capture them. But it is impossible. I only can look and look and again look. Words, Images, Emotions, People, Voices – What does it mean? I don't know. I'm not able to understand the travel. I can only look and again, look and love it.” *Mauro*

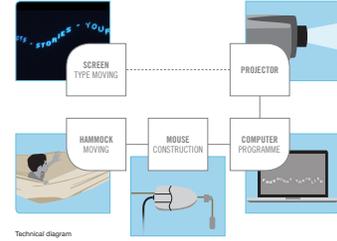
*Frequent Traveller* was developed in collaboration with Tobias Schmidt. I also want to thank Ralph Schoenfeld and Reinhard Ludwig for their support.

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2006 ParticipART (POC 06), MART, Museum of Modern Art, Trento and Rovereto, Italy



Technical diagram



Example of projected text passages

## Frequent traveller

Frequent traveller is an interactive installation by the Berlin based artist Susanne Schuricht, developed in collaboration with Tobias Schmidt as programmer. Frequent traveller is a catalyst for interaction between people and for rethinking our needs and actual living situation. The interface consists of a hammock, whose movement is tracked by a custom-made hardware interface. While relaxing in the hammock, you animate text on a projection wall by your motion. The dynamics of these visuals depend on the motion of the hammock. The texts are about mobility, home and identity. With every exhibition the content grows, filled with more statements and thoughts of the user. [PROCEEDINGS INTERVIEW](#)

show  
Frequent traveller, 2001  
Installation

## Implementation

The installation consists of two parts: an interface and an application interpreting the incoming data from the movement of the hammock and animating the text material. The interface consists of a hammock, whose movements is traced by a custom-made hardware interface - no bitmap-tracking, just plain and obvious mechanics. A computer mouse is deconstructed and again new constructed. Instead of a ball, there is a wheel going through... An application then translates in real time the hammock's movement into animated type. The interface reads the amplitude and frequency of your movement in the hammock. With that interface the user is also able to follow the mechanics of the movement. The hardware components are simple, plain mechanics. The visibility of this simplicity is part of the aesthetics of the installation.