"Databasical Laughter"
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Overall Concept

Like our previous project, "A Phone Survey Saga," this piece utilizes the database format to organize various portrayals of laughter and the definition thereof. We also integrated some of the associative ideas from our first project, "HEXAGON." However, instead of associating different parts of grammatical structure, we juxtaposed different media: audio, text, images, and video.

The database, as discussed in Lev Manovich's paper, has been a very useful organizational tool in collecting and displaying a collection of a myriad of narratives. Here, we have two types of audio: one is a conglomeration of laughs, whereas the other probes into people's answers to the question, "What is laughter?" In text, we see the definition of laughter from dictionaries and medical sources, going a bit deeper into hysteria. As a source of laughter, we can read random jokes, from a plethora of sources. The video continuously plays a laughing reaction of several everyday people. On the bottom of the screen, the images depict different forms of the laugh, from caricatures and stick figures to photographs and a diagram of the mental mechanism behind this physical function. The juxtaposition of the media explorations create a dynamic environment for the users to explore the basics and elaborations upon the simple "ha ha ha."

Development and Implementation of Project

The user interface was created using Adobe Photoshop and Macromedia Flash. First, the background image was generated with Adobe Photoshop. Due to our desire to create a very easy explorative piece, we made the image very simple, with a few painted adornments to enhance the labeling of the media. The bulk of the project then emphasizes the elucidation of laughter through text, audio, images, and video.

For the image portion of the interface, various visual photographs and pictures were taken from a Google search. One audio track is spliced and mixed from the audio for the current video. This video was primarily filmed for a friend's birthday party; a picture of him making an odd face was shown to various strangers, whose responses ranged from pure confusion to embarrassed titters to outlandish guffaws. A bit of maniacal laughter is also thrown in there from a friend reflecting on a tissue box.

Intending to make two videos, we interviewed several people, asking "What is laughter?" However, we were not able to edit or implant the video for this series of interviews, and therefore included it solely on the audio track. The video portion of the interface also does not have any sound; however, we feel that the animated images contribute to the piece in a wholly separate manner than the pure audio.

We used Flash to put all of these elements together.   Two videos were inserted so that they loop as the interface is displayed. The texts are scrollable so that the user can have control over what he/she sees. The audio tracks can be heard by clicking on buttons on the interface. These buttons change color as the mouse hovers over them. Images can be seen when the user moves his mouse over the image area.

Envisioned User Experience
This project depicts the various layers associated with the idea of laughter, from its definition and the act of laughing to facial expressions and medical terms associated with laughter. The connotations and portrayals are fun to play around with and explore, whether the user prefers pictures, sound, words, or movies.

Each audio track, image, text or video can interpreted in various ways, and all of them have a story behind them. We hope that, as users play with our project, they can come up with their own interpretation of these individual elements and their own stories of how each of them relate to one another. In addition, users are free to construct narratives using these depictions by either sequentially connecting the four elements or freely associating within one category.

Improvements and Technical Set-backs
The project itself was severely limited in terms of time and technical knowledge; if creating a more polished interface, we would probably have organized the text so that the scrolling option is more apparent. We would have tweaked the video file so it could be played backwards or forwards, and enable the users to stop or start the video and audio components as desired. The images and text would probably have been more interesting if randomly generated. We also wanted to enable the users to add to our database with their own narratives or interpretations of laughter; however, this would require some intense technical maneuvering. Any ideas or input would be much appreciated; however, in the meantime, feel free to check out what we do have.

Questions of Narrative Addressed
This piece is more of a conglomeration of narratives than a set, linear story. People's interpretations of the piece and of laughter itself will occur through physical and mental associations. The juxtaposition of the various media, combined with each user's individual memories and experiences, will create an overall story of exploration. The users will then go on to explore the presence, definition, and varieties of laughter in their own lives. The basics of the happiest human physical action are portrayed in this piece of databasical laughter. The real narrative occurs when our users compile their own narratives based on their experiences, utilizing these pieces to define their own instances of laughing thoughts. As Jean Houston stated, "At the height of laughter, the universe is flung into a kaleidoscope of new possibilities."

Enjoy! ☺