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Drunk Descending a Barstool

Description

Drunk Descending a Barstool (hereafter DDBS) is an interactive installation piece focused on a life size naturalistic wire sculpture of a nondescript young male. Over the course of an evening the statue/ sculpture and the stool "he" sits on crumples like a collapsing toy [fig. 1] This collapsing of the figure is in response to the calculated average BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) of the patrons in the establishment. Beginning in an upright position, the more intoxicated the crowd gets the more crumpled and disfigured the sculpture becomes.

The aim of the piece is to display an amplified interpretation of the state of his compatriots (the crowd). Drinking, in addition to affecting an individuals behavior, cognitive state, and presentation, also affects their ability to accurately asses these qualities. The posture of the sculpture is to be exaggerated beyond that which would be seen in someone under the same influence as deducted by the piece (more details below). This exaggeration serves as a counterpoint to an inebriated individual's underestimation of their current state.

While alcohol use has a set of serious related topics, the intention of the is to be neutrally reflective, if not a touch comical. Bringing to the site (a bar or pub) an explicit dialect on serious issues that might include drunk driving, domestic abuse, or health implications, would reflect poorly on the typical guests' understanding of the environment as a social and recreational space in addition to a disinclination of establishment owners to allow the piece to be installed. While its easy to argue that a place of alcohol consumption is the perfect arena to discuss its negative effects, the pragmatic aspects related to successfully executing such an explicit piece are beyond the scope of this project.

That said, if an individual becomes more aware of how their drinking might affect their immediate appearance I feel that would be more than enough of a socially beneficial role for the art. In the event that it's eventually distorted and slovenly forms simply provide some entertainment for the establishment's patrons, that too would be beneficial. Otherwise I'd hope that the *Drunk Descending a Barstool* would prove to be at least an ignorable occupation of space. In this sense it simply plays the role of ageless barfly.

Details

Drunk Descending a Barstool can be roughly split into three pieces, the input, the computational, and the output. The input involves a touch screen to be used along side standard order tracking screens/software. Information about open and closed tabs and drinks purchased is entered via this screen by the establishment's bartenders. This information, along with the passage of time is used by a computer to calculate a rough estimate for the average BAC of the patrons. Finally this value is used to control the sculpture by releasing or increasing the tension in it's internal cables.

Gathering data on the BAC of the establishment patrons presents a number of problems. The final approach, while not the most accurate, is still perfectly viable for the indirect translation of the sculpture's stature. The most direct and accurate way (aside from blood tests), having continual breathalyzers is of course inconvenient and problematic. Even if kept anonymous, there still lies the potential for abuse. Using a bar's actual order tracking software to keep track of drinks would be nice, but the the potential for gaining access to and modifying the code for such a system would simply not be worth the cost.

The final solution involves having a separate touch screen that a tender can use to increment and decrement drinkers as they open and close tabs and simply add drinks to the running total as they're purchased. While 'good enough' this method has several problems. Foremost it relies on open tabs. Patrons that return repeatedly and pay on the spot with cash could be left out of the averaging, or potentially added as multiple drinkers if served by multiple bar tenders. While minor, it also creates more work for the bar tenders who in the later evening will already be rushed. Despite these issues, I feel it's the easiest and most effective method for getting the minimum required data set necessary to properly estimate a groups BAC.

This data along with the passage of time is utilized by the computer to calculate an average BAC. For this calculation alcoholic content per drink is based on a previously calculated average of the drinks purchased in the past based on old serving data at the place of business, and the weight of the generic drinker will be based on the average middle aged person's weight in the establishment's city or town. This BAC is then translated into a percentage value where .00 is 0% and .08 or more is 100%.

The construction of the segmented human sculpture which uses this percentage is akin to a collapsable toy. Tension of internal cords acts to hold its forms together. As tension is released, the sculpture collapses in on itself. The percentage calculated by the computer is used to control motors in the sculpture's base that control the tension of the internal cables. As the crowds BAC approaches .08 the tension is relaxed and the figure crumples in on itself.

While .08 is the legal limit for operation of a motor vehicle in the united states, it's hardly the upper limit of a group of friends out for a night of heavy drinking. The point of keeping the upper for the piece at .08 is in line with my desire to amplify a reflection of the crowd's behavior and, in exaggerating alcohol's effect, serve as a counter to an affected individual's personal assessments.