

ART IN PRESENT MEDIA TIMES: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

This is a self-reflective and critical approach to inquiry that attempts to “lay bare” the motivations, strengths and weaknesses of the artist as well as the artwork in order to gain a better understanding of the complex set of influences and decisions that result in a digital media artwork. This paper examines the impact of technology on the artwork and identifies a number of key issues related to the function of critical reflection in this environment. Rules-of-play were a fundamental pre-requisite to the stimulation of critically reflective experience. The human interface with software and hardware was also a primary factor in reflective experience. Those with experience in visual art were more likely to engage the work in a critically reflective manner than seasoned video game players who tended to be more interested in scoring and winning. These findings and others inform our understanding of the stimulation of critical reflection in immersive environments and show how we can sensitively integrate technology with meaningful evaluative methods. This research enables artists to gain a better understanding of the medium to more fully integrate technology within a meaningful practice. Conversely, other fields will benefit from a better understanding of the stimulation of meaning in immersive spaces and gain a comprehensive view of a work that strives to contribute to our culture on a deeper level than as simple entertainment.

INTRODUCTION

The Indian traditional practice of creating work, exhibiting it, and then considering future works based on the input of critics, curators and peers does not work well when dealing with complex digital media projects. Media and technology has had an enormous impact on all facets of society. If one considers the world of “art” a reflection of society, then one would expect that “art” would mirror this profound change. This has been the case, especially recently, as artists become familiar with the tools of technology and begin to take advantage of what they offer. In many cases, artists do not recognize the impact a digital medium has on their output. Familiar methodologies and strategies of previous generations may no longer be relevant to contemporary practice that interfaces heavily with technology. It is often difficult or time-consuming to make changes once a digital work is complete, and often these experts are not close enough to the work to effectively identify faults, especially those that are technological in nature. More importantly, it is difficult for those on the outside to identify core behaviors that fundamentally compromise previously held notions of our relationship to the experience of art. For these reasons and others, many artists produce works that are less than they might be, or worse, abandon projects or methods of working before having a chance to thoroughly understand their strengths and weaknesses. Some in the art world go so far as to reject digital media artworks, outright. Our daily actions are composed of minute actions that are influenced by embedded ideology. The

color of shirt chosen this morning, cereal for breakfast, the preferred route to work, the television program we will watch this evening, each contain meaning no matter how insignificant. These divergent thoughts, practices and ideas come together to form our interface with the surrounding environment. We extract meaning from the interrelation of these events without considering the complexity involved. Science attempts to understand our world by stripping away context in the name of simplification. Of course, it is not fair to indict all of science in this manner, but the cultural inclination to associate science with empirical method has resulted in the dominance of this approach. Intrinsically, artists (and others) understand that the context is what shapes meaning in our interaction with the world. We are individuals, but we are part of a diverse ecosystem that is in the process of construction before our very eyes. For this reason, any attempt to understand complex phenomena, such as our relation to a work of art, must be grounded within the context of its creation.

IS THE PRESENT MEDIA DEFIANT OF ARTISTIC STRUCTURE?

Modernism could no longer be sustained and is transcended by the contextual, culturally diverse ideology of postmodernism. Originally, modernism was a transgressive, it meant to undermine and question long held notions of representation and social significance. This oppositional attitude is a value that is cherished in the arts. Man was challenged to “think anew” and release the shackles of history; it was an ideology filled with hope that our new technologies might allow us to create a better, more democratic society. Following the famous dictum “form follows function” modernism lapsed into a form of essentialism that proved its ultimate end. It became associated with the aesthetics of autonomy, claiming essential, universal characteristics associated with particular media (painting, sculpture, architecture, etc). An aesthetic preoccupation with beauty, and an elitist focus on taste defined the singular object of art. Worse, yet modernism was integrated in all aspects of society; it was a success. It became a part of the institution it was meant to critique. Photography and its challenge to the autonomy of the art object, as recognized by Benjamin, changed everything. The “aura” of the object was questioned and structuralist and post-structuralist thought interrogated our construction of meaning as an essential relationship with the object.

Postmodernism recognized diverse subjectivities, placing it in opposition to the autonomous and universal ideology of late modernism. The word “aesthetics” and its association with the study of beauty, was derided as a male, Western, hopelessly incorrect term. Indeed, the validity of the object, itself, and its role as the locus of meaning was challenged. Of course, old habits die hard, especially when ideology conflicts with economics. Art institutions and, indeed, many artists whose livelihoods are dependent on the trade of objects, were, and still are, unwilling to abandon the economic system that developed in the previous century. A disconnect has developed between an element of the art world that is engaged with cultural/critical theory and a parallel world that is quite content producing beautiful goods for sale and display. This is nothing new, as avant-garde practice often relies upon traditional practice as fodder for new ideas, but the changing subjectivities brought about by the theorization of postmodernism altered art and

culture at a fundamental level. These issues are at the core of debate of art, culture and science, today.

RELATION BETWEEN ART, CULTURE AND MEDIA

Well, here is a mixed notion relating to the present concept. Many, see little relationship between the two, while others see them as one and the same. Whether recognized or not, art-historical and socio-cultural development have always been linked; we are a function of our contemporary social system. Let's discuss art and digital media with relation to the socio-cultural climate in the next section, but it should be noted that, increasingly, there are overlaps between artistic production, art criticism, and socio-cultural critique. It stands to reason that art theory and cultural theory will often overlap, but we must endeavor to be distinct about the differences between art and culture. The common denominator influencing the discourse of these disciplines has been the postmodern shift in subjectivity from the author to the viewer. Foster describes the neoconservative as reactionary and post structural as resistant forms of postmodernism as opposite extremes of the same schizophrenic response to the changing relationship between the subject and object. Now we see that the rules of the game changed. So, now that the rules have changed, where do we go? Is art doomed to absorption by the culture industry, as Adorno feared? Or do the media play a dominant role in absorbing the major chunk of creative attitude? Art might maintain its transgressive and subversive function by either revising or rejecting aesthetics as described by Adorno.

Recognizing that the predominant strategy and role of media art might need to be reconsidered, he recommends that we look to alternative means to affect change via art. Foster isn't the only theorist reconsidering criticality in the wake of shifts in subjectivity. Aesthetics, of which beauty is but one component, is not a requirement for art, but is an "inflector" that can direct and inform meaning. Together, they shift towards a middle-ground understanding of aesthetics that eschews the polarized, all-or-nothing roles that defined previous thought. This broader understanding of the workings of meaning in art is vital at a time when the terrain of media production is fundamentally shifting.

CAN MEDIA CULTURE CHANGE INTERNALLY?

The emphasis on communication resonates with digital media art and intersects with the development of subjectivity. The media artist is valued as an organizer or instigator of communicative action. Sociability and collaboration are prime directives. Often, what is said about a work, or the dialog that surrounds an event is more important than the experience itself. He proclaims the work is differentiated from critical art practices by a focus on action. We must stop interpreting the world, stop playing walk-on parts in a script written by power. We must become its actors or co-writers. The idea is to change culture, internally, through local activity. While the ideology is laudable and many of the concepts have merit, the manifestation of the ideas is often somewhat lacking. As Foster observes, "At times, 'the death of the author' has meant not the 'birth of the reader', as Roland Barthes speculated, so much as the befuddlement

of the viewer.” A reconsideration of the relation between subject and object also characterizes the relatively recent rise of interest in “embodiment.” The subject of modernism located meaning within an autonomous object. This relationship was altered and conceived as the reading of “text” in post-structuralist postmodernism. We are beginning to recognize the weakness of such a polarized understanding of the mechanisms of meaning. Danto now talks about art as “embodied meaning.

There has been an emphasis integrating ideas from cognitive theory and an attempt to heal the so-called mind/body split. This conception of the subject object relationship has particular importance for digital media work that focuses on virtual experience. Richard Allen has called for a turn from traditional film theory, which he characterizes as too narrowly focused on theory, towards an integration of ideas from analytical philosophy and cognitive theory. Traditional film theory has emphasized doctrine, rather than attempting to understand the film experience. He calls for a consideration of the works of Benjamin and Adorno to amplify our existing understanding of film while integrating an understanding of its relation to aesthetic experience. The views that shift in subjectivity from modernism to be crucial to the understanding of technological media. A synthesis of ideas, creating a pragmatic mix of knowledge gleaned from multiple disciplines that recognize the complexity of our relationship to media. One cannot divorce history. One cannot divorce theory. Neither can one divorce science or philosophy. In this manner, our understanding is open to the integration of new findings in disparate fields. As inquiry turns from a focus on essential truths we begin to view the world as a complex sea of relationships, which create rich responses that require context for the development of meaning.

CONCLUSION/DISCUSSION

The description of the conception and development of a complex ecosystem extending well beyond the written representation of thoughts capable of distillation on paper or screen. Despite the weakness of our methods of communication, the model of research-based arts practice presented in this document provides insight into the dynamic interaction between technology and aesthetic experience. A lucid explanation has been given as how this research facilitates knowledge using the methodology of Naturalistic Inquiry. Holistically, this process situates digital media art as a part of an ecosystem that is recursive in nature, providing feedback that nourishes not only art, but also society in general. The target of media inquiry was specifically the function of critical reflection in this hybrid, video game and installation. The specific role and nature of critical reflection from an art-historical viewpoint are discussed how critical reflection is contingent upon the subjective viewpoint associated with aesthetic experience in relation to media are obvious.

How the viewpoint has shifted within the dialog of art and related this shift to the broader socio-cultural manifestations of change. Calling for a reconciliation of polarized positions, the proposed work of digital media artists might be better served by unifying the discourse of thought concerning monologic and dialogic subjectivity. This structure unifies Critical Theory

and culture studies around the common desire for interference and cultural change. In this manner, the important role of art and artists is maintained but provides new opportunities to engage society without reducing art to the anthropological study of culture. In a way that leads to an amicable understanding that the rich cultural heritage of Indian ethos has been started eroding because of the rampant inclusion of media absorptions. These are quite obvious and insidious. Well, there is a very tight rope walking, when we have to balance out between the present art form being hijacked by the glossy and techno savvy attitude of present media system. How this synthesis works out and promotes art into the new millennium is to be seen with open and critical perspectives.

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