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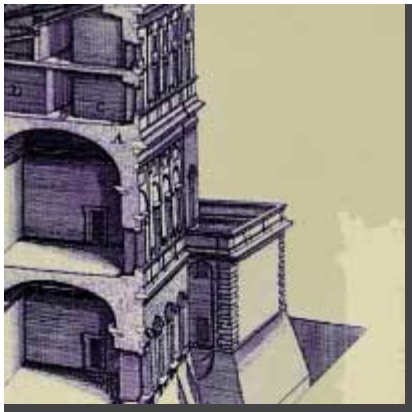


Report on Sins of Change

Sheila A. Malone on Jun 14 2000 **issue 14**

Media Arts in Transition, again presented by The Walker Art Center and The Kitchen at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 6-8, 2000

What is sin? Media in transition
Perverted Media: Pride, Envy, Wrath/Anger
Insufficient Media: Sloth
Excessive Media: Avarice/Greed, Gluttony, Lust

For three days artists, curators, theorists, teachers, and students examined, discussed, and questioned where new media is today. We know it's in the museums, after all this conference was at the Walker Art Center, and attended, represented, and created by experts in the field of New Media. But what is the nature of transition in relationship to New Media? The following highlights of each panel are an attempt to answer that question, or at least to expand the notions of media arts in transition.

Keynote Speaker

Pierre Levy, professor in the department of Communication and Leisure at the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivieres. He is a philosopher and author of Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace, Becoming Virtual: Reality in the Digital Age.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PIERRE LEVY

According to Steve Dietz, curator of New Media, Walker Art Center, "Pierre Levy is the great sinner of all sinners." As a sinner, Pierre Levy, opened the conference putting forth a thesis on the subject of the evolution of humans and media. His sin was perhaps the use of the evolution theory as a vehicle for his own idea. Sarah Diamond, Director at The Banff Center for the Arts, was one of the first to throw stones at the great sinner. In less than 24 hours she would have her chance in the hot seat. The crowd was restless and anxious to challenge Pierre on his ideas- perhaps this is the nature of any emerging new media- there is no collective theory that everyone agrees with, there are no easy definitions of where new media is today and where it will be tomorrow. But even defining where new media has come from seemed problematic - at least to the audience it did.

Pierre Levy's accelerated evolutionary outline:

DNA-NervousSystem-Language-Writing-Alphabet-Print-Cyberspace.

DNA: Forms of circular processes and biological shapes. Learning of the scale of the evolutionary process.

Nervous System: Pragmatic and Perceptive forms, Experience learning and memory of the scale of individual sentient beings.

Language: Forms of meaning and language existing only in the humanworld; music, dance, images, masks, gods, rituals, myths, clothing, gastronomy, Learning at the scale of humankind.

Writing: Autonomous (technical) memory of language. Complexity, quantitative, augmentation, and accumulation of cultural forms. Multiplication of "genres."

Alphabet: Universilization of writing.

Print: technical self-reproduction of the alphabet and images.

Cyberspace: Ubiquity of sounds, images, texts, virtual worlds, and all cultural signs in a universal interconnected noosphere. Autonomous action of writing (software.)

Sarah Diamond asked "where's the body?" a sudden tremor was felt through the audience as the probing of Pierre began.

Pierre graciously smiled, laughing a bit, at this amazingly passionate controversy stirred up by his presenting these ideas. As he searched his lexicon to translate his thoughts he began asking the audience for translations from French to English. His attempt to select words carefully did not placate the non-believers. Steve Dietz was right. Pierre Levy left the stage as the great sinner. And the crowd ate it up.

PRIDE: Media into Art
Pride and vanity are competitive. If someone else's pride really bothers you,
you have a lot of pride.

Moderator: Bruce Jenkins, Curator Harvard Film Archives
Panelists:
Sara Diamond, Artistic Director, Banff Centre for the Arts
Lynn Hershman, artist
Lev Manovich, Professor, Digital Arts, University of California San Diego

Pride could be seen as the great sin of the 20th century, but to the panelists, who took it in stride, reveal their own pride and themselves to the audience.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PRIDE

Lynn Hershman, could be called a great sinner of the gallery- for she embraces transition and change, continually experimenting with technology, and form, breaking the boundaries of the status quo. Lynn Hershman discussed her history of breaking rules and creating art on the edge of the legitimate art scene. Her early work in installation blurred the boundaries of the gallery walls. Her work in video opened doors to new media aesthetics. And her most recent work reveals the effect of virtual space on the viewer and artist alike.

Sara Diamond, jumped into the hot seat quickly by chanting a short mantra, "resist the temptation of Pierre, resist the temptation of Pierre, resist the temptation of Pierre." She goes on to explain her reasons for resisting Pierre, "my finger wagging has as much to do with the head long rush to play shotgun up the aisle marriage brokering between art and science without framing a rigorous debate of the nature of sciences, the theories of sciences, and their multiplicities and assumptions." And so Sarah Diamond becomes the spokesperson for the close examination of the evolutionary problem of arts and sciences.

But her subject to speak on was really about the topic of "Media into Art." She explains her position to new media and her concerns with, "...the death of video art by installation art, film, television, the web, the net, and so on. The image that keeps blasting through is the pink and glowing triangle of the seventies and eighties, (PRIDE?) the emergence of the multi-point communications system or process through internet practice as triangulation, and the triumph of inversion of the pyramid: the many to one and the one to many simultaneously." She uses this triangle metaphor to suggest three key points; continuity and stability that has retained, stemming from the days of independent video and video art,

1. the flow of information: as seen in one to many and many to one, in the

communities of the seventies
2. the community as a means of production and expression: collectively driven production
3. formal sense: the process of finding perspective within the triangle of the frame: western perspective - moved into the practice of film making- this was challenged by the works

of video artists."

COVETOUSNESS: De(Institutionalizing) Media
getting your "fair share" or a bit more

Moderator: Bill Horrigan, Curator of Media Arts, Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University
Panelists:
Dirk De Wit, Independent Curator, Brussels, Belgium
Chrissie Iles, Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art
Benjamin Weil, Media Arts Curator, SFMoMA, and founding curator, ada'web

HIGHLIGHTS OF COVETOUSNESS

Unfortunately, this is the one panel I missed, having coveted lunch at Ruby's cafe acrossfrom Loring Park next to the famous feminist bookstore, Amazon Bookstore, which is not the same as Amazon Books on-line. Another moment of corporate America squeezing the little guy- the independent run bookstore is an endangered species. I bought and coveted two books, some loud bumperstickers. I then explored the sculpture garden across from the Walker. The temperature that morning was 32° with slight flurries- by the time I returned to the Walker the temperature was in the 40's!

SLOTH: The Politics of Access
drifting completely into the sleep of complacency

Moderator: Neil Sieling, Mod TV
Panelists:
Robert Atkins, research Fellow, Studio for Creative Inquiry, Carnegie Mellon University
Kathy Rae Huffman, Professor, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Esther Robinson, Creative Capitol

HIGHLIGHTS OF SLOTH

According to SLOTH panelist, Robert Atkins, "The top five strategies for overcoming SLOTH:

* 5) don't be deluded into thinking that technological barriers are going to continue to fall rather than to climb, given the ever increasing incorporazation of media: case study of a discussion about open source streaming on the net time list.
* 4) do focus your energy on the technology that is beginning to arrive: bandwidths that are available and operating systems that may be lesser, multi-use gadgets such as palm pilots, cell phones etc...
* 3) don't lose sight of the difference between quantity of access for producers and quality of programming for audiences:
* 2) Do think HYBRID: hybrid not just in terms of hardware and software but also in terms of everything, all the old distinctions are dead, i.e. the lines between private and public funding.
* 1) Don't censor yourself, don't wimp out, and don't think anyone knows more than you do, they just have more confidence in their ignorance."

A Dialogue with Bill T. Jones and Paul Kaiser

HIGHLIGHTS OF A DIALOGUE

The showing of "Ghostcatching" and the discussion of collaboration was definitely a highlight of the entire conference. Bill T. Jones' passion is the key element in his collaboration. Paul Kaiser explained the process of capturing the ever beautiful and phenomenal Bill T. Jones in motion. Paul was asked why his animation stayed fairly realistic with details like gravity and light sources, etc. His reply was that if you abstract too far you lose the beauty of the place that comes from the body. Bill went on

to explain that his beauty or atleast the beauty of his dance has three sources, his head, heart and sex. And the three together make poetry. Paul Kaiser brings up the interesting and sad idea that digital media can be a means for recording the movement of dancers, as an archive, a way of preserving Dance because the AIDS epidemic has had a tremendous impact on the Dance World. (as well as all of the performing arts.)

ANGER AND GLUTTONY (Two for One) LASTNIGHT LARA CROFT SAVED MY LIFE
Reaction to the problems of others. Impatience with the faults of others.

Moderator: Pierre Levy
Panelists:
Craig Baldwin, artist
Jessica Bronson, artist
Jordan Crandall, artist
Krisztina de Chatel, choreographer and founder of Dance Company
Krisztinade Chatel

HIGHLIGHTS OF ANGER AND GLUTTONY

Jessica Bronson presented documentation of some of her work, including a video installation based on all the different ways Hollywood has made snow in films, naming all the toxic materials. She described her work as drawing from technology, pleasure, spectacle, and dystopia.

Craig Baldwin puts a zing in the air by talking about the discourse of new media and how narrow it has become. He references the guerrilla group RTMark. He rants about media cannibals and media necrophiliacs. Ideas of revolution are offered up as quenching the emptiness of new and mainstream media.

Krisztina de Chatel showed and spoke about the video footage of her dance piece inspired and literally chronicling the movements of animated game character Lara Croft in TombRaider. While a boy sits in view of the audience playing Tomb Raider the game is projected onto the backdrop creating the scene, environment, and even the hierarchy and architecture for the dancers' movements. Art about Video games.

ENVY: Can the Center Hold? (net.art per se)
Envy resents the good others receive or even might receive. Envy is almost indistinguishable from pride at times.

Moderator: Simon Biggs, artist
Panelists:
Vuk Cosic, artist
Natalie Jeremijenko, artist
Olia Lialina, artist

HIGHLIGHTS OF ENVY

How does net art get into the museum?

Peering out from the glowing ephemeral lights of their laptops, these net artists are in a museum. As if hiding or taking cover behind the computer the audience squints deeply to see the faces of these faceless artists known only in the virtual world as bytes of information.

We sit entranced by the flicker of the panelists, Vuc Cosic shows an ASCII version of Deep Throat- even as ASCII, Deep Throat still reads as porn. There is a visual obstacle in viewing ASCII. But the result is that the forbidden, classic and even mundane become mysterious.

Natalie Jeremijenko offers her ideas about corporate art making, her small young child clutches at her lavalier, demanding to be heard.

Olia Lialina scrolls and clicks through her hypertext piece called "My Boyfriend Came Back From The War." Her exploration through hypertext as storytelling blurs the lines

between event and nonevent, between story and history, between website and art.

LUST: ARTIFICE and INTERFACE
Lust is the self-destructive drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth. Sex, power, or image can be used well, but they tend to go out of control.

Moderator: Diane Gromala, Director, New Media Lab, University of Washington
Panelists:
Scott Bukatman, Professor of Cinema Studies, Stanford University
Matthew Causey, Performance Technology Research Laboratory, GeorgiaTech, Atlanta, and the Samuel Beckett Centre, Trinity College, Dublin,Ireland

HIGHLIGHTS OF LUST

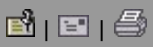
Exploring performative dimensions of new media, Diane Gromala, discusses ideas around "seeing and being seen." Drawing upon ideas from Judith Butler, Lacan, Peggy Phelan, Gromala makes arguments about the resignification of the system and of art.

Matthew Causey reveals his search for the sublime and the uncanny through performance and technology. The Source texts his group uses, i.e. Faust, are chosen because of their explorations of technological reproduction within the text or story itself.

Scott Bukatman opens his discourse by lamenting about the lack of time-based media being included in 20th century Art History Classes - perhaps he is only referring to Stanford, could this be true? Or simply a sign of the times? He then introduces his paper, "Terminal Identity" where he draws freely on comparing American Broadway Musicals with Science Fiction and Comic Strip Heroes. He humorously paints the images of caped crusaders tapping down 42nd street.

Evening Performance: Negativland: True/False Tour 2000 at the First Avenue Nightclub

I find my long lost pal from undergraduate school (we were both disillusioned theatre students) and spend the evening drinking coffee, figuring out what went wrong with postmodernism, and how we survived the 90's with so much media in transition.



::CrossReference

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:: The Man Behind The Bunny: Interview with Eduardo Kac - May 15 2001

:: Report on Sins of Change - Jun 14 2000

:: The New Performer - Jan 20 2000

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