

Chapter Three: The Computer Mediated Text

The new media text is simultaneously non-linear and inter-textual, having its origins in modernist collage and montage aesthetic practices. A number of traditional media paths can be brought together in this new form of electronic writing. The modernist practice of visual montage can be traced to the film concepts espoused by Sergei Eisenstein in the early 20th century in Russia. Film theorist Anna Chen discusses Eisenstein's seminal work in the early development of film art, referring to him as the founding father of montage editing techniques. These foregrounded the ideological dimensions of cutting sequences of film and the meaning thus created by the formal construction of camera angles forming the frame. Editing sequences in film, utilising cutting strategies that juxtaposed images, sounds and texts to create dramatic meaning within the cinematic frame are now synthesised in the virtual editing environment of computer software non-linear editing interfaces.¹

According to Chen, traditional theatrical methods were not really transformed in the adaptation of stage productions to film by the early cinematic techniques of foundation practitioners, such as George Méliès and the Lumière brothers. Their *mise-en-scène* was passive and stationary. It was not until the revolutionary methods of Sergei Eisenstein and American D.W. Griffith that camera position, movement, and angles began to be consciously used to construct an ideological space for the viewer. In the creation of moving images, camera zooming and tracking, close ups and extreme long shots of actors and objects, and editing (montage) produced juxtaposition and meaning, a film language expressing intellectual and political statements.

...Eisenstein traced the origins of montage back to literature. Parallel montage - cutting away to simultaneous action - can be summed up simply by the literary device, 'Meanwhile, back at the ranch...' As for

¹ Lev Manovich, "Avant-garde as Software", From *New Vision to New Media*, <http://www.manovich.net/ARTICLES> [accessed 18 November, 2003].

the close up, Eisenstein cites Dickens, who opened *The Cricket on the Hearth* with a Griffith-esque close up: 'The kettle began it...'²

Meanwhile, back in Russia, the young revolutionary directors - including Pudovkin, Kuleshov and Eisenstein - studied the old masters and then resolved to step up the director's degree of control over his material:

They planned, by means of new editing methods, not only to tell stories but also to interpret and draw intellectual conclusions from them... [they] saw themselves as propagandists and teachers rather than as conventional entertainers. As such, their task was twofold: to use the film medium as a means of instructing the masses in the history and theory of their political movement; and to train a young generation of filmmakers to fulfil this task.³

As new media theorist Lev Manovich argues, imaging and audio software programs such as Adobe Photoshop, special effects programs such as Adobe After Effects, Director MX, Flash MX and SoundEdit or Pro Tools audio editing software simulate the multi-track environment codified and theorised by Eisenstein in his early stylistic and innovative film work. The convergence of media into the software environment has transformed the capabilities for digital media production. It is possible to shoot a digital film/video and post-produce the media on the desktop of a multimedia computer.

Manovich discusses the return of the word "new" in the 1990s. This term, though non-aligned with a specific media type, such as photography, electronic print, or cinema/film but used for generic media⁴ is now perhaps replaced by the term 'digital media'. It began to refer to the potential neo-avant garde practices and radical cultural innovations inherent in these forms of electronic media - CD-ROM, DVD, URL web sites, computer software games, hypertext and hypermedia applications⁵ such as cinematic, design, architectural, graphic and textual experiments. Examples are Dziga Vertov's quick cutting film techniques in *The Man with a Movie Camera* (Soviet Union, 1929), and split screen experiments.

² Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today', *Film Form*, Dennis Dobson, 1951, p195, quoted in Anna Chen op cit.

<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/chen.htm> [accessed 14 January 2005].

³ Anna Chen, "In Perspective: Sergei Eisenstein", in *The Eisenstein Collection*, Tartan Video, Faber and Faber, U.K., July 1998

<http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/chen.htm> [accessed 14 January 2005].

⁴ Lev Manovich, "Avant-garde as Software", From *New Vision to New Media*,

<http://www.manovich.net/ARTICLES> [accessed 18 November, 2003].

⁵ Manovich op cit.

Imaging programs and moving image (compositing) editing software programs, such as Adobe After Effects, re-interpret, coalesce and mingle montage film making techniques in the televisual, video and Internet spheres.⁶ The design, arrangement, composition, and assemblage of fragmentary media types in a virtual system to be uniquely explored by each player/participant, can be likened to the improvisational qualities inherent in the diasporic musical forms explored in the *blackBOX* program.

These ideas inform my creative work, whether Internet or disc based. My central concern is to acknowledge the parent media and cultures, as well as, to engage with these forms in the production of a new digital text. The software programs that I use metaphorically unleash the 'genie' from the 'lamp'. The 'genie' becomes the generically coded other. Sanskrit, Greek, and Russian (Chinese) cultures stand in for the orient, the 'foreign', as represented in orientalist styles in Western music, film and literature. However, the 'lamp' becomes the 'box' – the *jewelBOX*, the *chineseBOX*, the *pandorasBOX*, and the 'black box' of the program that I am creating. Metaphorically, the player/ participant simulates the mobile agents moving through the electronic service frameworks, entities consisting of code, data and control information⁷, migrating between different nodes in the system.

The objective of *blackBOX* is to deploy interactive media in the production of a creative work (image/text/sound) that reflects on the construction of self, representation of identity and the documentary form of the new media environment. In this process I analyse existing representations of ethnicity on the Internet, and I pay attention to the creative component in the production of a program that is self-reflexive,

⁶ Manovich op cit.

⁷ Fritz Hohl, "Time limited Blackbox Security: Protecting Mobile Agents from Malicious Hosts", in Giovanni Vigna (ed), *Mobile Agents and Security*, (Lecture notes in computer science; Vol.1419), Berlin, 1998, p92-109.

that expresses the ‘open’, ‘ambivalent’, ‘ambiguous’, and ‘fragmentary’ formal qualities of the non-sequential narrative.⁸

In the contemporary Australian context, the project of representing the dance and music culture of diasporic communities in relation to other forms of émigré music culture, namely the incorporation, appropriation, and expropriation of non-Western musical and cultural forms and Western representation of jazz, reveals ‘the West’/‘the East’ distinction as not purely a *geographical* terrain, but a cultural *locale* upon which complex desires are played out.⁹



Figure 16. *blackBOX* interface still from *chineseBOX* pathway

⁸ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s relevance for the study of race and ethnicity”, in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (Eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1996.

⁹ Hall op cit.

1. Hypertextuality/ Intertextuality

In the quest for characterisation of the non-sequential narrative, Eastgate Systems¹⁰ online journal <http://www.tekka.net/> defines the fragmentary and open ended hypertext as prefigured in medieval manuscripts and attributes to it the following characteristics:

- a. **Non-linearity**: multiple choices in the viewing order of blocks of text, illustrations, marginalia, and the links between the items.
- b. **Multi-vocality**: the several relationships that are possible between the text and the illustrations, i.e., whether illustrations provide a literal equivalent of the text, or whether they provide additional information not included in the text.
- c. **Inter-textuality**: references to other sources mentioned explicitly in the text or implied in the text.
- d. **Decenteredness**: the lack of one dominant, unifying centre and the ability of the text to offer different paths of investigation to different readers.

This online journal, a portal for creative hypertext work and criticism, argues that medieval manuscripts

...act as agents of historical and spiritual illumination, possessing a human feel and touch, with each one being a unique creation of a unique scribe and illuminator, a piece of art, and, frequently, its creator's masterpiece.¹¹

This enables them to resemble contemporary 21st century electronic Internet hypertexts, because they:

...like hypertextual Websites or electronic books, consist of composite works of different layers of texts, illustrations, marginal and interlinear glosses and annotations. Medieval Bibles, chronicles, works of the Law, and textbooks present examples of a high level of hypertextuality.¹²



¹⁰ Tekka online journal, 134 Main Street, Watertown MA 02472 USA. email: editor@tekka.net info@tekka.net voice: +1 (617) 924-9044 (800) 562-1638.

¹¹ <http://www.tekka.net> [accessed 2 October 2003].

¹² <http://www.tekka.net> [accessed 2 October 2003].

Figure 17. Russian ballerina Asja pictured in *blackBOX* interface still from *chineseBOX*

2. Aesthetics of Interactive Multimedia

Melanie Swalwell argues in her thesis *Aesthetics and Hyper/aesthetics: Rethinking the Senses in Contemporary Media Contexts*, that the ‘immersive sensory experience’ of the interactive environment of convergent media is mediated through the intelligent technological systems of the computer and has produced new kinds of artificial (virtual) engagement:

...[The] ability to provide a greater range of sensory stimuli, all at once. As a result, claims were made by promoters of various media – new and old – that consumers were ‘driving’ convergence by their demands for “more realistic and ‘immersive’ (multisensory) experiences...”¹³

Swalwell explores the implication that immersion resulted from stimulating all the senses, often to heretofore-unimagined degrees. The production of creative and experimental art draws from a multitude of disciplines and has a number of various outcomes which include cyberart, digital art, web art, information art, interactive art, active art, reactive art, and connective networked art¹⁴. However, these categories, compiled under the rubric ‘digital artifact’ and non-material art object, can be traced back to experiments in modernist avant-garde conceptual art:

...interrogating the relationship between ideas and art, conceptual art de-emphasizes the value traditionally accorded to the materiality of art objects. It focuses, rather, on examining the preconditions for how meaning emerges in art, seen as a semiotic system.¹⁵

¹³ No author given (press release) “Philips Digital Convergence Product Defines Multimedia Home Cinema”, <http://www-us.sv.philips.com/news/press>, August 1997, [accessed 18/7/00], quoted in *Aesthetics* and Melanie Swalwell, *Hyper/aesthetics: Rethinking the Senses in Contemporary Media Contexts*, PhD Thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2002, p3.

¹⁴ Gerhard Bachfischer, “A Constant Flow of Thoughts”, unpublished creative journal, Master of Interactive Multimedia, IML, University of Technology, Sydney, 2002, p12.

¹⁵ “...the ‘dematerialization’ of the art object theorized by Lucy Lippard and John Chandler in “The Dematerialization of Art”, *Art International* (February 1968) and reinscribed in Lippard’s *Six Years: The dematerialization of the Art Object*, 1966-1972 (1973), [where] “dematerialization of art” can be seen as a “strategy for repositioning art in relation to politics – not a shift from material *per se*, but a shift from an artworks value as an object of commercial exchange to its value as aesthetic and political interchange”, in Edward A. Shanken, “Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art”, *Art and Culture Papers, Electronic Art and Animation Catalog: SIGGRAPH*, 2001, p8-9.

In the late 1960s, one of the pioneers of the experimental meeting of “software”, “information technology” and “art” in the *museum* environment was Jack Burnham. His focus was the design of software to function as a testing ground for public interaction with “information systems and their devices”. His curation of the exhibition *Software, Information Technology: Its New Meaning For Art* at the Jewish Museum in New York (1970) exemplifies his project.

...Burnham conceived of “software” as parallel to the aesthetic principles, concepts, or programs that underlie the formal embodiment of the actual art objects, which in turn parallel “hardware”.¹⁶
[See “The Aesthetics of intelligent Systems”; “System Esthetics” (1968);
and “Real Time Systems” (1969)]¹⁷

Are the modernist experiments that foregrounded new media relevant to all cultures, particularly in the era of technological “have” and “have-nots”, and can they be read cross-culturally? *blackBOX* attempts to extend new media to incorporate representations of groups and content that call attention to *ethnicity* and to piece together the disparate threads of identity, as represented by the protagonist Nina’s quest for self-understanding. I have drawn upon my reading of Jacques Derrida’s theorising of the hypertext, and his recognition that montage like textuality marks or foregrounds the writing process.¹⁸ The assemblage of Nina’s cultural identity, through exploration of the program, has been designed as an inter-lacing structure, weaving together the different threads, which bind her into a multi-layered and multi-valent subject.

George P. Landow explores these ideas in his seminal text “Hypertext as Collage-Writing”, where he traces contemporary aesthetic impulses in the *hypertext* to the modernist avant garde practice of collage,

¹⁶ A. Shanken, “Art in the Information Age: Technology and Conceptual Art”, *Art and Culture Papers, Electronic Art and Animation Catalog: SIGGRAPH*, 2001, p9.

¹⁷ Jack Burnham, “Notes on Art and Information Processing”, *SOFTWARE*: 10 quoted in Edward Fry, *On the Future of Art*, Viking, New York, 1970, p119.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena* quoted in George Landow’s “Hypertext as Collage-Writing”, in Peter Lunenfeld (Ed), *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1999, p151.

in particular the painterly works of Picasso and Braque, specifically Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning* (1912).¹⁹

COLLAGE. 1. The action of gluing. *Collage d'une affiche*. State of what is glued. – Arts. *Papiers Colles*, a composition made of elements glued on a canvas (possibly integrated in the paint). *Les collages de Braque, de Picasso*. – Techn. Assemblage through adhesion...

...At this point, some of the similarities between hypertext and collage will have become obvious. Having first appropriated Jois's materials by placing them in a web, and then adding materials that they seemed to demand. I found that, like all hypertexts, it had become open-ended, a kind of Velcro-text to which various kinds of materials began attaching themselves. First, I included the discussion of Derrida and appropriation from the electronic version of my book, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992) that I used as an epigraph to this essay. I also added definitions of hypertext and a list of qualities that it shares with collage.²⁰

When the American computer scientist Vannevar Bush published his conceptualisation of "Memex" (memory extension)²¹ in his posthumous article "As We May Think" in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1945)²², could he have imagined that a version of *Memex* would prefigure and perhaps influence the formation of the contemporary Internet? "Bush was the first to realise the potential of storing items of information with built-in associative links to other data. He never actually built a real *Memex*, but the idea of such a system was a driving force in the development of hypermedia."²³ Michael K. Buckland discusses the visuality and the role of photography in the *Memex* system of document retrieval.

Bush's *Memex* draws on two main sources: His view of *associative* trails as the mechanism by which the brain works; and *photographic* and other technology available in the late 1930s. The features noted above, and other refinements such as the small camera strapped to the researcher's forehead to photograph anything he or she looked at, were more or less feasible individually with the technology of 1939,

¹⁹ George Landow, "Hypertext as Collage-Writing", in Peter Lunenfeld (Ed), *The Digital Dialectic: New Essays on New Media*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 1999, p153.

²⁰ Landow op cit, p152.

²¹ *Memex and Beyond* <http://www.cs.brown.edu/memex/> "...research, educational, and collaborative web site integrating the historical record of and current research in hypermedia. The name honors the 1945 publication of Vannevar Bush's article "As We May Think" in which he proposed a hypertext engine called the Memex..." [accessed 10 July 2005].

²² Bob Cotton, and Richard Oliver, "Media Chronofile", in *Understanding Hypermedia 2000: multimedia origins, Internet futures*, Phaidon Press, London, 1997, p22.

²³ Bob Cotton, and Richard Oliver op cit, p22.

and although combining them into a single workstation would probably not have been practical.

In 1939 Bush was, in fact, responsible for the design and construction of a document retrieval machine much faster and technologically more advanced than anything previously attempted. This prototype formed the context, the recognizable technological basis (recognizable in Cimi's drawings), and, presumably, the stimulus for his think-piece "As We May Think."²⁴

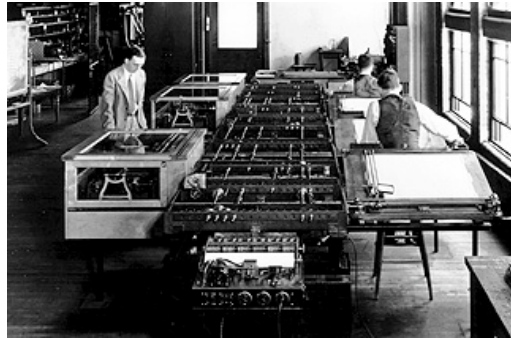


Figure 18. Vannevar Bush's *Differential Analyzer*, 1931
http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/BUSH_BERRNIER.html [accessed 2 February 2005]

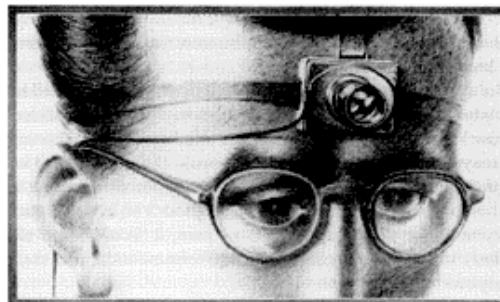


Figure 19. Vannevar Bush's *Memex* head camera
http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/BUSH_BERRNIER.html [accessed 2 February 2005]

In Vannevar Bush's words from "As We May Think" he explicates his theory of associative thinking in the human mind.

The human mind does not work that way [i.e. linearly]. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain. It has other characteristics, of course; trails that are not frequently followed are prone to fade, items are not fully permanent, memory is transitory.²⁵

²⁴Michael K. Buckland, *Emanuel Goldberg, Electronic Document Retrieval, And Vannevar Bush's Memex*, School of Library and Information Studies, University of California at Berkeley, Berkeley, CA
<http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/~buckland/goldebush.html>,
[accessed 14 January 2005].

²⁵Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think", *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945, Part 6,
<http://www.theatlanticmonthly.com/unbound/flashbks/computer/bushf.htm>
[accessed 14 January 2005].

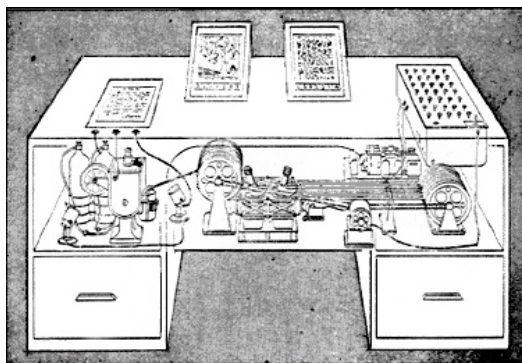


Figure 20. Vannevar Bush's *Memex*

http://www.acmi.net.au/AIC/BUSH_BERRNIER.html [accessed 2 February 2005]

In the contemporary media setting, traditional media forms such as radio drama have been significantly affected and transformed by the hypertextual structure. An example in traditional media is the program *The Wheel of Fortune*²⁶, the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) debut interactive radio drama. Audiences tuned in and had the ability to switch randomly, between key points in the narrative, the program responding to the listeners input, opening up the potential for multi-various non-sequential combinations in apprehending the radio drama program.²⁷ The objective of *blackBOX* has been to create a similar non-linear narrative that is constructed to operate using associations as a structural device in the non-sequential unfolding of the program.²⁸

These non-sequential associative links provide a structural model for new cultural forms, interactive devices and media, and are foregrounded historically in literary innovations. Professor Ross Gibson draws an analogy between the evolution of interactive media and the rise of the novel in his paper "The Rise of Digital Multimedia Systems". Investigating Ian Watt's analysis of the rise of the novel (1957), Gibson is more interested in examining the psychic, political and philosophical

²⁶ *The Wheel of Fortune* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/wheel/> authored by Nick Fisher, British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio 3 and 4, 19 and 20 September 1999. <http://www.eastgate.com/HypertextNow/archives/Fisher.html>

²⁷ *Eastgate Systems* <http://www.eastgate.com/HypertextNow/archives/Fisher.html> [accessed 14 January 2005].

²⁸ This research was inspired by the teaching program developed for Megan Heyward's *Writing and New Media* subject, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Technology, Sydney, 2004.

transformations that prefigured the development of new electronic cultural forms. Gibson argues that:

... We can gain insight into periods of psychic, political and philosophical flux by studying how aesthetic and semantic systems engage with the intellect and the *sensorium* of the user, we can understand the temper of the times. When a new form of art or popular communication arises and takes hold, it reflects changes that have recently occurred or are presently occurring in psychology and society. Equally important, the rise of a popular new cultural form not only reflects but also adds momentum to the changes that define the turbulent times ... Through this process, the novel was eventually superseded (which is not to say eliminated) by a new predominant form, cinema, which emerged at a time when individual psychologies were changing yet again, this time to absorb the modern world's kinetics (hence the name: cinema). Here was a cultural form able to represent and analyse the tumult of sensory 'attack' that assailed every individual psyche once the speedy, mechanical modes of transport, communication and commodity production became widespread during the industrial revolution.²⁹

Thus a parallel can be drawn between the psychological transformations that have evolved from contemporary technological innovations in capitalist cultures and the kinds of cultural shifts in thinking, art, literature and architecture that Marshall Berman elucidates in *All That Is Sold Melts Into Air*.³⁰ Berman's analysis details the cultural articulation of modernity and the political and demographic dimensions of this shift. These reflections on previous technological transformations and their cultural implications have interesting resonances with present day situations.

3. Tracing a digital media map

In the production of *blackBOX*, the legacy of contemporary practitioners, scholarship, and critical thinking in the field have shaped the ideas, conceptualisation, and production process. In the current Australian setting, the publication of *new media* has emerged from the seeds of public sector funding and academic research. The Australian

²⁹ Ross Gibson, "The Rise of Digital Multimedia Systems", in Ross Gibson and Ernest Edmonds (Eds), *INTERACTION: Systems, Practice and Theory*, A Creativity and Cognition Symposium, Dynamic Design Research Group, Creativity and Cognition Studio, Powerhouse Museum and University of Technology Sydney, Sydney, 16-19 November 2004. [my italics]

³⁰ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Verso, United Kingdom, 2000.

Film Commission, the Australia Council for the Arts, and the Australian Research Council to name a few, have created a fertile ground for the cross-fertilisation of traditional and new forms of interactive media and for their publication on the Internet, disc-based CD-ROM, and DVD. A digital media map of recent interactive works published and distributed in Australia clearly shows a boom during the 1990s of titles authored for an audience with interactive participation as the primary artistic mode.

The recent decision by the Australia Council for the Arts in December 2004 to dismantle the New Media Arts Board prompted heated debate regarding public funding policy for “new media art forms”, creating a lively polemic by theorists, artists, policy makers and other stake holders about the identity papers of “new media arts”. Clearly the term and genre of “new media” have to respond to the ways in which different cultural producers take up creative digital technologies to enable communication and information technology, as a means of story-telling in the production of digital film and artworks. This cultural debate raises questions of ownership, control and definition of the means of production of new media.

Like the evolution of all new technologies, historically, this particular debate reveals “new media” and “digital media” as a site of contestation. Can we speak about these new forms as a single genre, or is it more fruitful to understand them as analogous to other communication revolutions taken up by different sectors for different purposes? The following electronic conversations sourced from this contemporary debate reveals the issues addressed by some of the more prolific and high profile Australian and expatriate thinkers and producers in this field.

A public Internet posting on FibreCulture List by Geert Lovinck

From geert@xs4all.nl
Sent Monday, January 31, 2005 8:40 pm
To fibreculture@lists.myspinach.org

Subject Re: ::fibreculture:: OzCo responds to New Media Artists

(Theses written for a Future of the Arts project, but perhaps also useful within the current new media arts debate. /Geert)

Three Answers to the Question: What is Future Art?

I. Leaders of future art institutions will have to be truly multi-disciplinary and multi-platform. They will reconcile local, regional, national and global flows of creativity. Future art will be both individual and collaborative -- in collaborative ? In fact, it will be hard to distinguish the two. In order to get there, dominating prevailing categories such as 'visual arts' and 'contemporary arts' will have to be abolished. These are cold war terms, invented to compete with neighbouring forms of artistic expression. What will count is quality, aesthetics and above all, a critical approach to society. The locality will be able to synthesize interests in art as objects and the ever-growing rapidly expanding variety of networked, mediated forms of expression.

II. There is a growing tension, not to say open rivalry between art forms and their institutions. This can mainly be blamed largely on the outgoing post-war 68-generation and their greedy careerism that is now aimed at maximizing their superannuation. Their collective metamorphosis from progressive and experimental to a defensive, conservative attitude is phenomenal. Why should most of the funding these days go to opera? Can somebody please explain this? Why should techno and 'urban culture' be left to the market? There is, for instance, no philosophical ground to distinguish so-called contemporary from so-called new media art. They have so much common ground. The successful integration of 70s and 80s video art into the artistic mainstream is a good example and a hopeful sign. Perhaps Luhmann and Bourdieu can help us out here. Art struggles these days can no longer be understood in metaphysical terms because they primarily grow out of petty politics. Art can only be understood within institutional contexts. Even the market plays a secondly role. Most art historians and critics are useless to inform us [sic] about these underlying tendencies, because they are part of the existing system and only reproduce existing tensions and confusions.

III. The true potential of new media art will lie in its ability to disappear. New media arts is a Hegelian project, aimed at its own transcendence. It is not a goal in itself, even though it obviously has self-referential tendencies, like all activities in society. In the short term, new media arts sets out aims to discover the inner logic, standards and architectures of new technologies, but that process can only last for a while. The phase of experimentation will necessarily come to an end. Its findings will dissipate in society.

::posted on ::fibreculture:: mailinglist for australasian
::critical Internet theory, culture and research
::(un) subscribe info and archive: <http://www.fibreculture.org>
::please send announcements to separate mailinglist:

Document (2)

From Melinda Rackham <melinda@subtle.net>
Sent Sunday, January 30, 2005 2:39 pm
To fibreiculture@lists.myspinach.org

Subject ::fibreiculture:: ozeculture conference

the Ozeculture suggestion is a good idea and yes, education, rather than confrontation of an uninformed audience is absolutely the way to go. As a networked artist / independent content producer I wouldn't mind talking about the situation with net art and the decline of Australian online arts, and the booming situation in other countries where state or private donors are investing in them. I don't believe people don't like or don't care about media art... *its that they don't know what it is.*

Once exposed to a *genre* people start to think differently about it. It becomes familiar, un-threatening, useful, entertaining and absolutely worth keeping. We do live in a nation obsessed with border control... so networked, distributed and media art has to be on the inside of that perimeter. I have attended one Ozeculture as a participating artist, and I must say that the art sessions seemed to be attended in the majority by people I already knew....

So it's no wonder that we *independents* aren't out there informing other sectors of what we do... and maybe that has to change... and one way to do that is with the assistance of the funding organisations, ANAT, oz co, state, etc who might like to review their conference funding strategies to maximise Australian artists opportunities of appearing and promoting locally by having separate local and international funding categories.

Melinda

Dr Melinda Rackham
artist | curator | producer
www.subtle.net/empyre
-empyre- media forum

Document (3)

Online Interview with McKenzie Wark by Tatiana Pentes

From [Ken Wark <warkk@newschool.edu>](mailto:warkk@newschool.edu)
Sent Friday, December 10, 2004 2:11 am
To Tatiana.Pentes@uts.edu.au

Subject Re: some thoughts

McKenzie Wark ~~~~~A Hacker Manifesto <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/>
>>> Tatiana Pentes <Tatiana.Pentes@uts.edu.au> 12/07/04 8:28 PM

dear ken

[tatiana]---one of the things that i am exploring in my creative research is the possibility of integrating the social research into an audiovisual interactive online form.... in your opinion have researchers in the field started to produce this kind of work...can you point my cursor to some such projects?

[ken]---- I can't say I've found much along these lines, although i do like the work of Chris Csikszentmihalyi: <http://web.media.mit.edu/~csik/research/>

[tatiana]---in your own theoretical writing you speak of new kinds of existence in the communications spheres....is this [post-human] virtual engagement a third space...or do you understand this to be connected with the lived experiences of grounded cultures?

[ken]---- I never liked the term post-human. It leaves intact the assumption that there was once a humanism. It seems to me we made our pact with the nonhuman 10,000 years ago, with the beginnings of agriculture.

I do argue that we have created a third nature. Second nature was the struggle to wrest freedom from necessity by collective labor. It produces the built environment. But it also produces new necessities, new alienations. Third nature, starting with the telegraph, telephone, television -- all the way to telecommunications, tries to overcome the contradictions of second nature by building a third, based on the techniques of telesthesia -- perception at a distance. This of course brings a new series of contradictions in its wake. But just as second nature dominates nature, so third nature dominates second nature. The materiality of nature does not go away, it is just subjected to ever more abstract forms of power.

[tatiana] you are famously quoted as saying something such as...."we no longer have roots we have aerials [antennae] how has this philosophy evolved to encompass the kinds of engagements that now occur in real-time on the Internet?

[ken]---- We no longer have roots, we have aerials. We no longer have origins, we have terminals. We no longer have the family silver, just the satellite dish. The anxieties about identity, roots, authentic culture arise precisely because these things are no longer possible. Of course they were never really possible, but now even the illusion is wearing off. Modernity was a one-way ticket. There's no getting off the roller-coaster .

McKenzie Wark

As these three documents attest, the genre of new media and digital media art is being widely debated in the Australian public sphere. As editor of *RealTime* magazine Keith Gallasch reports in *Australia Council Restructure: Australia Council Unplugged*³¹ (Appendix ii), a meeting of new media and digital media artists and theorists³² heatedly debated the notion of what constitutes this form of cultural production and how it should be funded in the public sector and the future direction of public policy on 'new media'. Digital media has been taken up across all sectors of the community inter/nationally, by government, corporations, and community players including artists. It is no longer an emerging form and the discussion is perhaps more about where control and ownership of these media reside, both economically and aesthetically.

Creative digital media technologies constitute a communications revolution with the development of new cultural artefacts. They are also being used to communicate in existing traditional media forms such as radio, television, and print. The explicit and specific capacities of these convergent media are not exclusive to the creative realm of the arts. As Gallasch's article explores, new media and digital media constitute a field constantly being re-defined and re-negotiated. Gallasch's cultural commentary suggests that it has become anachronistic to refer to the production of digital content through the technologies of interactive multimedia as 'new media'. This is clear from the ways in which government policy defines its public agenda and funding. While there may be a strong negative reaction to political change by sections of the creative sector in Australia, perhaps this transformation is in response to the global culture defining the borders and boundaries between traditional media and the ways in which they are converging to generate, perhaps not a 'genre' that makes claims to "new-ness", but rather incorporates the various ways in which the parent media and art forms take up these new

³¹Keith Gallasch, "Australia Council Restructure: Australia Council Unplugged", *RealTime*, February/ March, 2005. (Appendix ii)
http://www.realtimearts.net/rt65/gallasch_ozcorestructure.html [accessed 6 June 2005]

³²Meeting convened by the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT), dLux media arts, Performance Space, Experimenta, MAAP (Media Arts Asia Pacific) and *RealTime* magazine at the Paddington (Returned Servicemans League) RSL, Sydney on January 24, 2005.

technologies in the production, creation, distribution and exhibition of digital content. Perhaps we need to refer to this convergence and the new cultural artefacts emerging from it as “digital media” as distinct from “new media”. It seems there no longer exists a specific category of digital cultural artefact, rather there are hybrid forms emerging from within the various traditional media that exploit digital potentials. Artists will continue to take up all manner of materials in the production of creative work. Inter-disciplinary and collaborative art production across genres and media will also continue. The political debate surrounding the branding of a “new media” genre in the local Australian context signals a wider debate about ownership and access to the means of production and takes place whenever the evolution of new technologies has implication for new forms of cultural production.

4. Think Piece

The gestures of the body in interactive cross-cultural storytelling

The objectives of *blackBOX* are twofold in regard to the narrative perspective. On the one hand the program is revealed through the user/player's touch and interaction with the electronic screen space. On the other hand the story uncovers the subject of the narrative through *dance* and the *movement of the human body* as a mode of expressing stories of diaspora. The program unfolds from the perspective of the protagonist Nina. The player/participant discovers her "otherness" and culture through her eyes. Nina narrates the story observing and relating her interpretation of that cultural performance. The structure of the story resembles the way in which memories surface for us in a non-sequential manner.

Cassell and McNeill argue that storytelling is structured on multiple levels, drawing together perceptions of time and space, perspective, distance between narrator and narrated, and the integration of the sequential and the non-sequential, the verbal and the nonverbal in the structuring of the narrative:

...When we add gestures to speech, we shed light on many of the same questions that have been the focus of attention by narratologists. By adding the dimension of hands in motion, we clarify the issue of perspective, in that the speakers, by way of use of their hands may convey...the issue of point of view.... Hand gestures clarify whether or not the performer is narrating as the subject herself or whether she is narrating as observer.³³

"Gesture and the Poetics of Prose" explores the idea that narrative language has a 3-D structure that is 'imagistic', both visual and kinesic and either holistic or analytic. In summary, the paper argues that narration has many properties that remain unchanged regardless of genre; storytelling is a social activity; physical gestures are as much part of narrative communication as speech; gestures provide a more complex and complete shape of the narrator's speech, because gestures are not

³³ Justine Cassell and David McNeill, "Gesture and the Poetics of Prose", *Poetics Today*, 12: 3, Porter Institute for Poetics and Semiotics, U.S.A, Fall, 1991.

merely the a translation of speech into a kinesic medium but provide something supplementary to the verbal storytelling. For example, in the exploration of *blackBOX*, the player/participant is experiencing the story through the subjective intervention of their own hand/ cursor/ mouse and thus by the sense of *touch*. Cassell and McNeill's thesis is that analysis of language combined with gesture provides a binocular vision, a new way of seeing, perceiving and understanding storytelling. I propose that physical actions accompanying speech patterns, and dramatic gestural movements in dance forms (Eastern and Western), spontaneous or choreographed, resemble the interactive design of an electronic space, a choreographed terrain for the player to explore through tactile engagement with the program using the movement of the hand/cursor/ mouse.

"Gesture and the Poetics of Prose" defines narrative as the representation of real, hyperreal, and fictitious events experienced by the subject in time and space, presupposing a 'macrostructure' from which those events are narrated. When designing an electronic text, in the interactive medium, the notion of the 'macrostructure' is provided by the architecture of the computer program and realised in the interface design, where movement from screen surface to screen surface (and the design of this experience) can be likened to the role of the narrator in traditional forms of media.

...the represented events, agents, times, and places are selected from the "paradigms" of such possible structures, in order to be combined in the "syntagma" of the discourse. No choice is innocent: all that takes place on the linear axis of the narrative produced in real time draws from and also participates in the atemporal, a linear organization that we may call simply narrative structure....³⁴

When designing a multimedia game/ program the primary mode of apprehension occurs through the *haptic* (hand) and thus the bodily activity and sense of touch (*tactility*) makes more complex the traditional delivery of the narrative experience. The material is triggered by the player/participants *responsiveness* to the programmed content. As distinct

³⁴ Cassell and McNeill op cit p378.

from reading a text or apprehending a performance, the player/participant must learn a set of preconceived strategies/devices designed by the program makers before there can be meaningful engagement with the cultural artefact.

...In the case of primary learning, the child learns at the same time to speak the language (which is only ever presented in action, in his own or other people's speech) and to think *in* (rather than with) the language... *Belief* is thus an inherent part of belonging to a field. In its most accomplished form – that is, the most naïve form... That is why one can not enter into this magic circle by an instantaneous decision of the will, but by birth or by a slow process of co-option and initiation which is equivalent to a second birth... Practical belief is not a 'state of mind', still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines ('beliefs'), but rather a state of the body... Enacted belief, instilled by childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an automation that 'leads' the mind unconsciously along with it', and as a repository for the most precious values, is the form par excellence of the 'blind or symbolic thought' (*cogitatio caeca vel symbolica*)... The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is...³⁵

If the body is an amalgam of the traces of its enacted past, its physical, psychological and spiritual experiences, then these experiences are resurrected and ordered in the construction of narrative text. I am interested in how this understanding of the body can inform the production of narrative, and its implications for the development of interactive storytelling in the digital environment, particularly in representing physical performance.

Malcolm Le Grice argues in "A Non-Linear Tradition – Experimental Digital Cinema"³⁶ that 'interactivity' and 'non-linearity' is not separated in the realisation of new digital cinema. In the search for a precursor to 'interactivity', he identifies the player/participant's ability to *modify* the cultural artefact as *genuinely new territory*. However, 'non-linearity' is prefigured in oral myth, cinematic and literary structures that break with 'single-track', 'single-resolution narrative' as exemplified in experimental film, video, and writing genres. Le Grice identifies the

³⁵ Cassell and McNeill op cit p378.

³⁶ Malcolm Le Grice, *Experimental Cinema In The Digital Age*, British Film Institute, London, 2001.

technological ability to edit moving-image in a non-linear environment and networking³⁷ have enabled the production of specific interactive cultural objects: online documentary, information websites, commercial and art CD-ROMs, DVD, and computer programs. Additionally, it is the ‘responsiveness’ of the program to the player/participant and the development of narrative options that have transformed the possibilities of narrativity in the digital environment.

Le Grice also asks the big question, is linearity synonymous with narrative? Are there forms of sequential structures that are linear but not narrative? Can concepts of dramaturgy be applied to linear structures that are non-narrative? He answers this by identifying two broad directions in experimental cinema that relate to non-linearity: (1) abstraction (anti-narrative), in the form of non-representational imagery or work derived from ‘painting’ and ‘music’, based on colour and shape, movement and rhythm, and works resisting narrative, for example, the theoretical writings of Fernand Leger or Dziga Vertov, which are radical interventions, aesthetic, ideological, and political, and (2) the break with dominant narrative forms, for example, those incorporating photographic representations which refuse depiction of physical space adhering to perspectival conventions, where the narrative coherence is conveyed by sequential connections to represent temporal events and their ‘causal’ relationships. Thus the story or plot may become a schema made up of the events of ‘causal’ sequence.

...The narration...may re-order the disclosure of these events, through representation by recollection, premonition, or separate exclusive viewpoints – flashback, jump cut, parallel action – and may incorporate the represented subjectivity of the narrator or the subjectivity of the reader. Both plot and narration may conform to structures of dramaturgy – the controlled psychological effect of phasing the release of information to create intrigue, suspense, apprehension and pleasure in resolution.³⁸

³⁷ Lev Manovich, “New media versus cyberculture”, in “New Media from Borges to HTML”, (commissioned for *The New Media* reader, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, MIT Press, 2002.

³⁸ Le Grice op cit p291.

The argument is that these narrative devices *structure* for the viewer/ audience the experience of the cultural object. The identification of the audience with the characters' *point of view* is part of the ideological inevitability of the filmmaking process. Interactive media and the technological ability to pre-program non-sequential participation and responsiveness within the program have opened up the potential for representation of multiple perspectives and points of view, different relationships of engagement with the digital data, the foregrounding of tactile response with computer interaction, and the expression of text on screen and sound, music, and the spoken word, which have been absent in traditional film and video practices.

This situation has produced a different kind of engagement with the digital material. This engagement is at a fundamental level 'physical' and is distinguished from other kinds of sensorial experiences by the ability of the programmer/ program maker to relinquish absolute control over the apprehension of the program and the spatial relationship of the data on the screen. The unfolding of the material is designed from the assemblage of 'fragments' with which the player/participant can engage, enhancing the juxtapositions created in the montage, producing meaning and creating 'motivation'. Le Grice argues that film experiments, once acts of resistance, have formed new formal models, foregrounding the kinds of screen events experienced in interactive media, such as mathematical systems, randomness, musical analogy, unconstrained subjectivity, "creating conditions which counteract and create alternatives to narrative structure."³⁹ He traces a lineage of non-narrative but representational work from Dadaist and Surrealist films such as Rene Claire's *Entr'acte* (1924), Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L'Age d'or* (1930) and Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1928). He also points to the coincidence of this cultural production with the emergence of psychoanalysis in works such as Alain Resnais' *Last Year At Marienbad* (1961), and Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). These films

³⁹ Le Grice op cit p294.

employ 'spiral', 'matrix', 'psycho-associative' devices, and the exploration of 'verticality' as distinct from the horizontal trajectory of conventional narrative.

Psychoanalysis itself questions the way in which linearity in the narrative is capable of representing the underlying causal structures. Its reference to dreams and free association are both instances where dominant forms of causal representation are *loosened* or dissolved to permit the cross-reference between layers of memory in turn to create different connective hierarchies.⁴⁰

The cultural conditions of modernity, producing creative and political movements that sought to disrupt one single spatial/ temporal viewpoint, or a single unifying form (eg. experimental cinema), begins to enable the articulation of difference from within their dominant cultures. In the digital and interactive media domain, this remains the key challenge; how can developers create 'content' that can be comprehended across cultural divides? Instead of a radical intervention, these discussions produce multiple viewpoints and perspectives. They attempt 'authoring' or content development that is comprehensible beyond the local environment and across cultures.

⁴⁰ Le Grice op cit p295.