

bethgranter@yahoo.co.uk

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This essay is accompanied by a website on the CD entitled 'nu.art'.

Please open the file 'index.htm' in a web browser.

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Curating New Media Art

ABSTRACT

This study examines issues surrounding the curating of new media art, looking at pressures on curators to honour concepts in the art they hope to display, alongside practical issues of promotion, dealing with art museum management, preservation and archiving of the work. This is done through examining three new media art projects as case studies: 'Desert Rain' by Blast Theory, 'Desktop Subversibles' by Jonah Brucker-Cohen and 'Uncomfortable Proximity' by Harwood@Mongrel. The case studies are followed by a critical analysis of the curation of a new media art show, 'nu.art' which was organised to support this paper. The curation of this art show is documented in a website which accompanies this paper on CD.

INTRODUCTION

In this study I aim to gain a fuller understanding of new media art-specific curatorial processes and practices, through a critical analysis of new media art pieces that have been exhibited, and through the practical experience of curating a new media art show myself. Curatorial questions which I hope to answer at least in part, have been pointed to at the BALTIC seminar as those needing further research,

“the practicalities of how curators deal with media and technology – how the work is getting made, how it is getting shown, how it is getting distributed and how it is out in the world. There is a great need, as far as institutions are concerned, to look at the issue of installation and consider the questions that arise when you put a computer in a gallery” (Cook, 2002:13).

The deviations made by curators in their presentation of new media art pieces from the ideal scenarios imagined by their artists show clear examples of the conflicts that arise during the curation of new media art. Artist Vuc Cosic expresses his concern that “curatorial decisions are usually made in such a way that they are there to justify the hardware investment and are not the reflection of any understanding” (Cosic in Cook, 2002:14). In analysing some pressures on new media art curators through describing my personal experience of curating an exhibition, I hope to promote understanding between artists and curators. Looking at theories behind new media art pieces should also draw attention to how certain aspects of new media art mean that new forms of presentation are often necessary in order to retain the original concept of the art itself as intended by the artist. The possible effects of exhibiting new media art, or preserving it, adds another responsibility to the role of the curator. How this curation forms part of the art piece itself or detracts from the art piece is also worthy of investigation.

In focusing on three examples of new media art pieces that have been created with the intention to be exhibited publicly, I hope to critique the roles played by the artists and curators concerned, and the relationships between them. I will introduce each piece against a background of the artist’s philosophy, informed by other pieces by the same artist, artist statements, or artists who have a similar ethos behind their work. The specific art show or website in which the piece was/is shown will be described, with as much information as possible provided about the role played by the curator/s, and about any curator-artist conflicts or collaborations. This paper hopes to provide insight into the

process of curating specifically new media art, bringing light to issues which may be particular to this genre of curating.

The three projects I have chosen are:

1. “Desert Rain” by Blast Theory
(http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_desertrain.html, 2000)
2. “Uncomfortable Proximity” by Harwood@Mongrel
(<http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/mongrel/>, 2000)
3. “Desktop Subversibles” by Jonah Brucker-Cohen (<http://www.coin-operated.com/ds>, 2003).

These specific projects were chosen for their notoriety within the international new media art scene, the complexity or originality of the theories surrounding them, and, as a result of both, the availability of publications and sources of online information relating to the projects.

Having examined these curatorial processes, I will act as new media art curator myself, putting on a one day exhibition of new media art works at a local studio. In the last part of this paper, each curatorial decision towards putting the ‘nu.art’ show on will be discussed critically, including the sourcing of the pieces, the means by which the pieces are shown, methods used to publicise the event and finally its documentation. The handed in project part of this dissertation will consist of this documentation in the form of an interactive catalogue of the exhibition, viewable via standard web browsers and also including the project diary as an appendix. The result of this is that each of the artworks is actually curated twice – once for the physical show and again in its documentation. This situation is not specific to this exhibition.

The relationship between an exhibition’s on-site and online manifestation has been discussed previously, without focusing too heavily on the artwork itself, by Reesa Greenberg in her paper which concentrates on the “interplay between exhibiting an art object as information and displaying the art work as icon” (Greenberg, 2003), using research exhibitions as case studies. The distribution of new media artwork and its

accompanying information across on-site and online spaces in relation to the aforementioned specific exhibitions will be examined.

The demand for installation photographs to be archived online (Greenberg, 2003) has also been honoured in the nu.art website. Of the study of the curation of art exhibits, Greenberg states that,

“Placing the art object in space, designing its surround, ordering the sequence in which it is encountered, adding supplemental material, all are choices that contribute to the experience and interpretation of an exhibition and the construction of a museum’s identity. An easy way of assessing the differences between how museums edit images on site and on a web-site is to look at exhibitions based on a single artwork” (Greenberg, 2003)

It is this method of analysis that the following case studies of the curation of exhibitions will be based on, taking specific new media artworks and discussing how concepts taken from the artworks are expressed (or concealed) through their curation, online and on-site.

DESERT RAIN

The first case in this study, 'Desert Rain', is a project by Brighton based collective Blast Theory, whose work in general "explores interactivity and the relationship between real and virtual space with a particular focus on the social and political aspects of technology" (Blast Theory, <http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/about.html>, 2000). The group collaborated with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham. The Mixed Reality Lab is a research group which explores "the concept of mixed reality boundaries as a way of joining [physical and virtual space] to produce new types of collaborative environment" (Mixed Reality Lab, <http://www.mrl.nott.ac.uk/>). These research objectives were realised in the Desert Rain project, which places participants in a virtual reality game scenario [see appendix figure 1]:

"Standing on a footplate and zipped into a cubicle, each of the six team members explores motels, deserts and underground bunkers, communicating with each other within the virtual world... a world projected onto a screen of falling water. You have 30 minutes to find the target, complete the mission, and get to the final room, where others may have a very different idea of what actually happened out there" (Blast Theory, http://blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_deserrain.html).

Giving reference to "Jean Baudrillard's assertion that the Gulf War did not take place" (Blast Theory, <http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/events/rain/docs/concept.html>), Desert Rain problematises the effects of mediation on the public's understanding of war coverage, using the heavily mediated Gulf War as a setting for the virtual reality collaborative game installation (Blast Theory, <http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/events/rain/docs/concept.html>).

The surface used to view the virtual world, which has been described as a 'hypersurface' (Giannachi, 2005: 95), in this case is a plane of water. This innovative mode of presentation of a virtual world allowed objects and even people to pass *through* the hypersurface, thereby directly questioning one's assumptions about the distinctions and connections between the real and the mediated, virtual world. During the Desert Rain experience, performers cross through the rain curtain, suddenly breaking through the interface on which the experience had up to that point been based, bringing the interactivity into the realm of the physical. This juxtaposition of the real and the imaginary, "as a means of defining them" (Blast Theory,

<http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/events/rain/docs/concept.html>), is complemented by having the actors perform fictional characters, so that even what is physically ‘real’ is still only partly truth.

The decision to use the medium of water in this way is a curatorial decision, even if made by the artists themselves, that reflects perfectly the theoretical component of the artwork being projected onto it and performed through it, indeed it is part of the artwork itself (Blast Theory, <http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/events/rain/docs/concept.html>). Additionally, the direction of the projection onto the ‘rain curtain’ comes from behind the curtain, towards the viewer. This installation layout decision was made in order to raise “the idea that information shifts according to where one looks from” as the projection is only visible from certain angles (Blast Theory, <http://www.crg.cs.nott.ac.uk/events/rain/docs/concept.html>). Desert Rain is a courageous project in that it places a large responsibility on the spatial aspects of the installation to convey the concepts of the artwork.

“the space and arrangement of the work and the way you present it is fundamental in influencing how it is received and understood” (Banovich in Cook, 2002:47).

Rather than simply thinking about *what* is being projected, the *way* it is projected contributes greatly to the experience. Desert Rain is not simply an experimental virtual reality computer game – Blast Theory go beyond this through their use of cleverly thought out curation. This example of one project expresses how digital, virtual elements can combine with physical and performative elements in a piece of art which could not convey the same messages if it relied on just one of these aspects.

Desert Rain is documented in great detail on the Blast Theory website, alongside other Blast Theory projects and information (<http://blasttheory.co.uk>). Every possible aspect that could be of interest appears to be covered. The pages dedicated to the Desert Rain project include set up images, images of the installation in action, theory statements, associated research documentation, details of awards and press coverage and a journalist-friendly summary of the project. A documentation video of the installation in action is presented alongside the original interview clip videos that were shown to participants as part of the experience, bringing a small aspect of the installation to the website viewer’s own monitor. The documentation video shows how these interview clips fitted into the

game scenario – participants viewed them through a television screen in a room set up to be exactly the same as that shown in the clips. Obviously, without having gone through the whole of the Desert Rain experience, and viewing the clips in that setting, the website viewers who stream these same clips through to their home monitors can only gain a partial understanding of the artwork. Relying so heavily on the influence of physical curation decisions on-site means that it would be impossible to replicate the project online, and the Blast Theory website does not attempt this. Instead, extreme attention to detail is paid in its documentation so that the website functions as an informative complement to the installation.

Although it is currently not possible to experience Desert Rain, the detailed documentation would allow it to be reinstated at any point in the future, or for the methodology to be applied to an alternative virtual world setting than the Gulf War.

“In regular attacks on aspects of contemporary art, some critics/reviewers assert that art can only achieve meaning over time – that time will somehow tell. In my experience, however, it is possible for art to create meaning in the present without resorting to propaganda or reportage. It means thinking of time as a continuous present tense and leaving posterity to construct its own, rather than our, readings. I regard permanence, therefore, as problematic, and in effect, provisional.” (McGonagle, 1997: 48)

The potential lifetime of this piece, is then, infinite, despite its lack of physical permanence. This longevity is owed in part to Desert Rain’s documentation, which forms a part of its curation.

UNCOMFORTABLE PROXIMITY

'Mongrel' is the name of the art group created by new media artist Harwood, which developed the web-project 'Uncomfortable Proximity' with the Tate gallery. The Tate commissioned Harwood to create a new media art piece for the gallery website, a venture which was curated by Matthew Gansallo in June 2000 (Gansallo in Cook, 2002:62). This curator was interested in the politics of the internet which might be expressed in its art:

“Many artists have been interested in the Internet precisely because it has a decentralised power-base and falls outside existing networks of institutions and their legitimising structures. If this is still the case, how does an institution like the Tate take up a role?” (Gansallo in Cook, 2002:62)

Harwood went on to create a piece of networked art which survived as a kind of parasite on the host pages of the Tate Online. Mimicking the design and layout of the official Tate Online web pages, Harwood created an alternative source of information about the Tate's history, organisation and exhibitions. Harwood aimed to expose the exclusivity of the Tate's exhibit history, to remind us of its associations with the slave trade and to shake the bourgeois foundations that the museum was built upon.

“The museum became, and is still, a technical solution to the problem of displaying wealth and power without the attendant risks of social disorder” (Harwood, <http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/mongrel/home/siteguide.htm#newsite>).

This was a theme which was agreed upon with the Tate's hired curator: an open admission of past flaws in its organisation, potentially a public confession with which to render future accusations superfluous. (Fuller, 2000) The Mongrel site expresses the politics and ethics held by Mongrel through its reworking of the official Tate website. By exposing the dark underbelly of the Tate's history uncovering the elitism central to traditional art museum curatorial practice, in a piece of art which is then to be displayed by such a monumental institution as the Tate, Uncomfortable Proximity may indeed hit a little too close to home.

The final mode of practice by which Harwood exhibited the work was to cause some furore. When the Mongrel site was launched, it was programmed so that each visitor to the official Tate website had a one in five chance of being presented with the alternative, Tate Mongrel site, without their consent (Fuller, 2000). A large part of the artwork itself occurred in the experience as the user slowly realises that they have been placed not

outside the Tate looking in, but *inside* one of its artworks. The feelings which result from having been tricked into experiencing Harwood's piece may inspire further explorations of the Mongrel site, or an agitated rush to return to the safety of the official Tate pages. It was the marketing department of the Tate which found this mode of exhibiting the work unacceptable (Gansallo in Cook, 2002:68). Because the Tate is funded in part by private enterprises, which would be likely to have issues with being associated with the distasteful practices of the Tate exposed by the Mongrel site, the experience was restricted to an optional one, delimited under the 'net art' section of the official Tate website. Of course the Mongrel project as it had been released by Harwood in its intrusive form, could not have existed as a permanent addition to the Tate Online site. Few artworks are exhibited publicly in a permanent collection by galleries (Ride in Cook, 2002:80), and Harwood must have expected the work to be archived eventually. However, whatever institutional politics determined when the piece should be reduced to its unobtrusive form, it would be unavoidable that when this happened, an aspect of the artwork would be lost. Archiving network art will always involve a loss from or a change to the original piece, as their context, their online environments, create intrinsic qualities in the artworks which are extremely difficult to replicate elsewhere (Gansallo in Cook, 2002:71).

Alongside the archived web pages which made up *Uncomfortable Proximity*, its curator also commissioned two critical essays by Matthew Fuller to accompany the piece on the Tate Online site. Available only through the 'contextualised route' of the official Tate pages (and not linked directly from the Mongrel version), the essays describe the commission as "a little politicised blemish [which] is calculated to provide a counterpoint to its overall perfection of composition" (Fuller, 2000). In commissioning these essays, the curator has backed up the effects of the artwork, revealing a likely motive for the contract from the Tate and thereby removing its authoritative power.

Uncomfortable Proximity was curated again online when it was included in a collection of net art projects on the 'Pixel Plunder?' website – a venture by media arts collective, Year Zero One (<http://www.year01.com/plunder>). In contrast to its other setting within the 'Net Art' section on the conservative Tate Online site, *Uncomfortable*

Proximity now finds itself embedded within the avant-garde site that is Pixel Plunder?, introduced alongside the site's radical mission statement,

“Access to Pixel Plunder? should be unlimited and total. All net art should be free. Mistrust authority – promote decentralisation. Pixel Plunder? should be judged by the net art, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race or position” (Pixel Plunder, <http://www.year01.com/plunder>).

Here, it was also accompanied by an additional essay from art critic Fuller, which allows a description of the theories behind a number of works, including Uncomfortable Proximity, in more detail, without having to discuss placement on the Tate website in a defensive manner (Fuller, <http://www.year01.com/plunder/essay.html>).

DESKTOP SUBVERSIBLES

The last case in this study, Desktop Subversibles ('DS'), is a project by Jonah Brucker-Cohen, produced in the Human Connectedness Group for Media Lab Europe in 2003. Brucker-Cohen's work focuses on "subverting existing relationships to human/networked interfaces by building new real-world inputs to networks, redefining how information is used and experienced, and shifting virtual processes into physical forms through networked devices and experiences" (Brucker-Cohen, <http://www.coin-operated.com/ds>, 2003).

DS is described by the artist as "a collection of background subversion and awareness applications for the desktop" (<http://www.coin-operated.com/ds>). This suite of applications functions to monitor and map out everyday operations and movements occurring on users' personal computers, thereby producing the artform.

"As computers and the desktop metaphor reach virtual ubiquity in our daily lives, they also become objects we take for granted in daily use. The Desktop Subversibles application suite exploits this ubiquity by focusing on standard desktop activities like copy/paste, mouse movements, and clicks by adding networked and physical outputs to highlight these mundane activities' collective and collaborative potential. Desktop Subversibles capitalizes on the ubiquity of our interactions with computer desktops to convey awareness of activity and a sense of shared network space among the members of an online and physical community" (Brucker-Cohen, <http://www.coin-operated.com/ds>, 2003).

The first part of the DS project is called 'Mouse Traces'. This program combines input taken from two users' mouse cursor movements on the desktop, and outputs the result as a graphical representation of coloured lines, viewable by both users. Part of the concept behind this is to draw attention to "background connectedness and awareness between two people across a distance"

(Agamanolis, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~stefan/hc/projects/desktopsubversibles>). The second part of the project is 'ClipIt!', "a networked sticky-note application that provides ambient glimpses of the copy and paste activity of other users" (Agamanolis, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~stefan/hc/projects/desktopsubversibles>). This means that all users running the program have a section of their screen on which can be seen the contents of other people's clipboards, who are also running the program. The third part is 'Mouse Miles', "a networked collective mileage indicator manifested in physical space" (Agamanolis, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~stefan/hc/projects/desktopsubversibles/>). This

piece takes input from all users who are running the program on their personal computers around the world, connected through the internet, and measures the distance travelled by each mouse. The total of all these distances is then output in the form of the movement of a physical object.

The art in the first two parts of the project is manifest on each users' monitor, whereas in Mouse Miles, although users worldwide contribute to the making of the art (which in a sense could be described as being part of the art itself), the art where the data is output is located in a specific physical location, potentially a gallery space. Similarly, the last part of the project, 'Clicks', takes input from users of the application who are connected to the internet, and outputs this data as an audio art piece at a specific physical location. 'Clicks', "a distributed mouse click collector rendered as sound in public space" (Agamanolis, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~stefan/hc/projects/desktopsubversibles/>), works by assigning a unique tone to each connected user so each time they click their mouse button, their note is played at the exhibition location, creating a sound installation controlled from various locations. The theory behind this is to show how the sounds produced could serve as "an indicator of computer use on a potentially global scale" (Agamanolis, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~stefan/hc/projects/desktopsubversibles/>).

DS was curated online by 'Turbulence.org' in 2003. Turbulence is one of the most well known net art curators, having commissioned, exhibited and archived over 90 original works since 1996 (<http://turbulence.org/about/about.html>). The DS commission takes the form of a 'spotlight' on the artist's work on the Turbulence website. The site hosting each downloadable program file however, remains that of the artist: coin-operated.com, and Turbulence's 'spotlight' page merely provides links to these. Currently, each of these links is broken, as the work is no longer available for use. Such a situation might sometimes be intended by the artist, as some new media art pieces are not meant to be permanently available (Slater, 2006). However, the familiar '404 error – page not found' which confronts us on trying to experience the DS piece today, is likely to cause disappointment and frustration. One might expect an experienced new media art curation site such as Turbulence to foresee such problems and to re-edit this spotlight page to direct to a more friendly explanation of why the piece is no longer available to

the public. Alternatively, a statement of why this work, in its entirety, was not archived by Turbulence in the first place would seem appropriate.

DS also featured on the Italian site 'Noema' in its gallery section (<http://www.noemalab.org/sections/gallery.html>). As with Turbulence however, the page dedicated to DS, although relatively informative about each piece in the project, does not host the programs it talks about. In order to experience the piece, you are again re-directed to the coin-operated.com site, where you once again discover the programs are no longer available.

The permanence (or lack of permanence) of new media art was designated the topic of discussion for July 2006 by the BALTIC mailing list (Cook, 2006). Josephine Slater writes,

“one can say of certain net art pieces that the existence of the work is now more in the shape of the data trail it left at the time; You could argue then that media works often end up existing more as an after-image in other (still medial) indexes of their prior existence. Some kind of meta-medial permanence, referring back to a now non-existent origin” (Slater, 2006).

Contact with Brucker-Cohen himself revealed (via personal email) that the removal of DS from public access was unintentional and a result of the loss of access to essential equipment. Specifically, the server which ran the programs was originally provided by research group 'Media Lab Europe', under which Brucker-Cohen worked, and this was shut down due to the dissolution of the group in 2004. The physical output installation of MouseMiles at Media Lab Europe had existed in the form of a train which moved around a track in response to mouse movements from displaced networked users. The artist pointed to the importance of the physical installation part of the piece in an interview for 'Digital Visions', a new media art discussion site run by members of the University of British Columbia (Chu, http://www.ontherundesign.com/Artists/Johan_Brucker-Cohen.html). In the case of MouseMiles, only part of the art could be experienced through running the program on your home computer and watching your contributed miles clock up on the counter. Whether there was some feedback provided to users, perhaps in the form of a webcam showing the moving train, is unclear. The existence of a physical moving object in offline space which responded to people's everyday desktop behaviours was meant to point to the physical potential of the collective energies input from users on a network.

The installation, alongside the online program, was intended to be much more permanent. This is a case of curation failing the artist, albeit possibly unavoidably as the likely cause was lack of funding.

nu.art

“To title is to entitle” (Ferguson, 1997).

In the curation of a new media art exhibition, naming the show can be one of the first steps taken towards its organisation. ‘nu.art’ was the title I chose for the new media art show that I curated. The name was intended to echo the language used in chat rooms and on mobile phone text messaging, by using the word ‘nu’ to mean ‘new’, removing all capital letters, and using a full stop instead of a space between words to mimic website address (e.g. ‘.com’) or file name (e.g. ‘.doc’) conventions. The name is also a reference to net.art, a term which arose through dialogue about network based new media artwork and classic net artists such as Vuc Cosic (net.art, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Net.art>, last accessed August 2006). The work displayed in the nu.art show might be influenced by net.art but does not itself rely on networks, so the term was adjusted to fit this specific exhibition’s work.

The first step in the curatorial process was to find artists with pieces ready to exhibit, or who were willing to create new pieces for the show. For this, I adopted an “invitation-response strategy: ...an invitation is accompanied by the assumption that the artist will undertake research, that some sort of new and specific knowledge will be applied to the local scenario” (Mercury In Retrograde, 2006).

Since it seemed reasonable to assume that new media artists, being familiar with modern technology, would have a regular online presence, initial searching was done online. Calls for submissions were posted on the online networking site ‘MySpace’ from my personal profile site as well as from that of street art collective ‘Grafik Warfare’ (‘GW’), of which I am a member. This was done through the use of repeated bulletin board posts, reaching an audience of over 400 people. Additional emails were sent to personal contacts, including members of the GW collective. This resulted in some positive responses from GW members, specifically John Harrison (‘What What’) and Ashab Martin (‘Defacto’). I called a meeting to discuss potential projects and to ask how the art was intended to be shown by the artists. This meeting also resulted in gaining further contacts with new media artists, including Peter Bennett, Neil Antcliff, Steve Glashier and GW member Richard Fraser (‘Kero’). Further discussions with each artist were conducted via email, telephone calls and text messages.

Venue

Finding a suitable venue was not possible before or after completing discussions with the artists, but these processes had to occur alongside one another. The options for curatorial models of practice have been defined as either being site responsive or site specific (Mercury In Retrograde, 2006). Site specific practice would apply to curators operating from a pre defined gallery setting who must find artists with work to suit their venue. A problem with such 'context-constructivist' curating is that, "while a stage can take on its own character, it can also overpower and confuse the nature of the work within" (Mercury In Retrograde, 2006). Hence I attempted to begin research into locally available artistic projects which could work together before defining a setting for them.

Finding artists with a history of creating interesting and original new media artwork came first. Before they could begin to visualise what they wanted to exhibit, and how, however, a number of the artists voiced that they were interested in what other pieces were being shown, what kind of venue it would be, and how much space would be available for their artwork. Voluntary group meetings were organised to allow the artists to discuss their projects and gain insight into the context that their work would finally be situated in. Approaching potential venues revealed that gallery managers wanted to know in detail what I was intending to exhibit in their space before they would consider allowing it to be rented out for the show. This resulted in a 'catch 22' situation which required some curatorial decisions to disregard some creative ideals. For example, one project whose artist I was in contact with, had to be dropped from the exhibition as the work was deemed to require too much space and equipment. Preliminary ideas around building an arcade game type box in which to display one of the pieces was also not taken on board as it was decided this idea, although imaginative, did not particularly reflect any of the concepts behind the artworks, and would be a cumbersome distraction more than anything else. Additionally, the individuals offering the manual labour required to build this had proved unreliable in the past. Although preliminary ideas from the artists provided information about the content of their pieces, the way these would be exhibited spatially could not be worked out until a venue was decided on. A number of potential venues were deemed to be too expensive, such as the Fringe Basement gallery,

which lets its space out for a minimum of £140 per day (personal correspondence). Other options that were considered included the Gardner Arts Centre gallery space, Middle St Gallery and Snoopers' Paradise Photography exhibition space. These were either unavailable for the desired dates or the available space was too small.

Eventually, taking advantage of my own social network of contacts, a friend of a friend offered his photography studio for my use. Aside from being free of charge, the space was made accessible to myself and the artists 24 hours a day, for the whole week leading up to the exhibition day. This flexibility allowed the artists to set up their pieces when it suited them, thereby not stifling creativity through the pressure of time constraints. The venue, part of a modern office block in Morley St, is in an easy to find location in central Brighton. One benefit of not using a traditional exhibition space was that the space was completely free of outside influence (e.g. from sponsors or museum directors).

“Festivals can easily and rapidly construct a context around work as can small art organisations or agencies like DA2 which aren't a building. But a big organisation, whose identity is so massive, and who see themselves as being a repository of authority – it's very hard for them to be flexible” (Ride in Cook, 2002:80)

This was written in response to a discussion of the conflicts between curators of Harwood@Mongrel's 'Uncomfortable Proximity' and museum management at the Tate gallery.

One negative aspect is that the show did not benefit from promotion through standard museum procedures and was not automatically visible to members of the local art community who are connected to specific art venues. The fact that the space I chose was free, however, meant that I had extra resources to fund promotion, with complete control over (and responsibility for) how and where the show would be promoted.

Promotion

Flyers were created to advertise the show which were given out online and offline at social gatherings and left at various art galleries and cafes [see appendix figure 2]. Extra online advertising took place in the two days before the exhibition through the posting of flyers on people's MySpace profiles through its comment system. The flyer contained minimal information but directed people to a website which explained in greater detail examples of the artwork which would be shown [see appendix figure 3]. Also on the website was a map showing the location of the show [see appendix figure 4]. The event was also advertised on the homepage of Grafik Warfare, reaching an audience generally interested in local art, and by GW artists specifically. On the day of the exhibition, posters were placed in the surrounding area directing people to the show.

nu.art ARTIST PROFILES

John Harrison

John Harrison, who works alongside his twin brother under artist signature 'What What', has a number of collaborative narrative projects in process on his own site, 'Start A Story' (<http://www.startastory.com>). Some of these works involve users downloading and printing off templates which they fill in with their own artwork and text, scan, and email the results to the site, where they are uploaded by Harrison for display at a later date. This process involves a significant amount of personal effort and equipment (a scanner and printer are needed) by the user in order to contribute to a project. One example is the 'Flow Chart Adventure', which has a comic-book style layout and text prompts for each section to encourage participation.

“The flow chart divides up the story structure and allows the contributor to draw, write or both” (Harrison, 2006, <http://www.startastory.com/projects.html>).

Harrison expressed that this project could benefit from being shown in an offline, gallery setting, as users might be more likely to contribute. Indeed, in the space of the six hours that the exhibition was open for, over twenty visitors took part in the Flow Chart Adventure, doubling the total entries received by the project. So that visitors were aware of the purpose of their involvement and of the context that their work would be shown in

(on a computer monitor), I suggested that Harrison create a stand-alone application to display previous submissions to the project. This gallery of scanned in, emailed submissions was presented on an Apple Mac iBook G4, alongside prints of empty templates [see appendix figure 5] and drawing materials. No further instructions were provided, so the way people chose to express themselves through this project was not directed any more than it would have been had they downloaded and completed the template in their own home. One environmental difference though, is that at the gallery they were completing the flow chart in a public space, often alongside friends and family, whereas originally they would have completed them alone. This shared, and sometimes performative, aspect of the experience in the gallery would of course differ from the experience of home users, but does not detract from the experience of creating a narrative to contribute to a collection of narratives for the eventual exhibition online.

As well as the Flow Chart Adventure, Harrison decided to collaborate with Richard Fraser on a project made specifically for the nu.art show. Using Harrison's theoretical focus on creativity, collaboration and narrative, and Fraser's interactivity and programming expertise, together they created 'Scroll Story'. This consisted of a simplified version of Harrison's 5x5 project, which involved 25 contributors who were each allocated a square on a 5x5 grid and instructed to illustrate their square whilst considering how it connected to neighbouring squares (<http://www.startastory.com/project/fivebyfive.html>). The Scroll Story took this idea of connected images and converted it to an interactive linear form. This piece can be described as a 'hypertext':

"Hypertextualities are fluid in that they dissolve the separation of the roles of subject (viewer) and object (work of art). They are similarly open, because they allow the viewer to move towards the completion of the work of art while also permitting future viewers to continue to expand and enrich it" (Giannachi, 2005:13).

With increased usability features and programming, Scroll Story allowed for the instant submission of illustrations in the gallery. Two illustrations were created by Harrison to start the story off and provide a visual example of how the program could be used. A very basic digital painting program was created by Fraser, with functions such as

brush size, paint colour, text and preset basic shapes to insert. This was designed to be useable by anybody, irrespective of previous design program experience. Scroll Story functioned as a scrolling line of illustrations side by side, which were projected on to a wall in the gallery. On a platform in front of the projection was a laptop with a mouse, and visitors were instructed to 'click to contribute a painting'. On clicking, visitors were brought to the painting program, but instead of a blank artboard, the edge of the last painting in the scroll story remains. Users may choose to collaborate by extending the image and continuing the story, or to paint over the connecting section with their own separate, individual painting.

The curatorial decision to project Scroll Story allowed visitors to see their own artwork actually on the walls of an art exhibition, in the knowledge that visitors after them would also see their contribution. Through this artwork, they are also able to leave behind their own artwork which would last after they had themselves left. Merely running Scroll Story on a laptop might not have had this effect due to preconceived expectations of where art should be shown, i.e., on the walls of a gallery. The frame provided by a window frame which surrounded this projection further echoed traditional gallery presentation of artwork, providing more focus to the piece for observers.

Users and observers might not realise that the art of Scroll Story is not only in the images contributed by the user, but is embodied in the very experience of contributing, and also in the experience of observing others using the program in a gallery setting. As with other pieces in the show which involved a performative element, this scenario could be described as a 'double theatre', "with one spectacle being activated by the viewer/performer 'inside' the work of art and the other being observed by the viewer/spectator 'outside' the installation" (Giannachi, 2005:33).

It was often the case that users of Scroll Story seemed to lose themselves in the act of painting their picture, giving the impression that they were unaware of being observed by an audience.

Harrison was encouraged by the number of people who submitted paintings to Scroll Story on the day of the exhibition (over thirty), but was disappointed by the few connections between images. The experience gained from this exhibition could inform future showings of the piece. For example, its collaborative focus could be communicated

to the user more clearly, to encourage users to paint connecting images. This was also the only piece in the show which encountered technical difficulties. When trying to ‘undo’ an action from within the painting part of the program, error messages appeared and technical assistance had to be provided to re-start the program. Two users’ paintings were lost through this process, and future users had to be warned not to try to use the ‘undo’ shortcut (Ctrl-Z) if they made a mistake. Since this piece was created specifically for the nu.art show, this was the first time it had been fully tested by members of the public. Again, the experience gained was seen as a benefit by Fraser, who was then able to focus his programming attention on the specific bugs which came to light at the exhibition.

Richard Fraser

Fraser’s personal project was ‘Crazymum Oracle’. This was the first of many interactive online games which make up Fraser’s ‘Crazymum.com’ bizarre comedy site. Inspired by online discussion forum topics about religion and prophets, Fraser decided to invent the character ‘Mrs Frasee’, who seemed to answer anybody’s prayers. Introducing her as the new saviour on the forum, Mrs Frasee inadvertently gained a group of followers who, with little information, believed her to be a reality. Fraser’s parody of religious icons and successful mockery of religious devotees’ susceptibility to trickery inspired him to create the Crazymum Oracle program, and the Crazymum site. Crazymum Oracle is an animation of a peculiar looking creature with an elephant’s trunk, spoons for arms and wasps for hair, sitting on top of a pile of debris while seemingly random sounds of popping and squawking eerily emanate from the scene. Users are invited to “Ask crazymum a question!” in the text input space.

“The artist offers him the world designed by him and the user takes it up, no longer in a position of passive viewer but of active scrutinizer” (Franke in Druckrey, 1999: 79).

On doing so, the character answers in a text bubble with a generally nonsensical string of words, which have little to do with the question that was asked. The absurdity of the answers given by this prophet point to the absurdity inherent in organised religion and its prophets.

The interactivity of the piece becomes clearer when certain words, relating to the visuals, are input by the user through the keyboard. These answers, although responding with relevant words, are still completely meaningless. So, whilst providing visitors to the gallery with an apparently two way conversation, they are then confronted with the realisation that whatever they say has little impact on the direction they receive. Experiencing frustration at the lack of communication between themselves and the character they engage with, in the gallery they are able to join forces with other visitors to think up questions which might trigger some kind of meaningful response.

Although previously only distributed online, the Crazymum Oracle does not rely on the internet to function. The program requires a single user's input and the response is instant. The piece was presented on a G4 iBook, placed on a pedestal in the nu.art gallery space. The pedestal presents whatever is placed on top as a valid art piece, an angle which in the case of such an unusual creation, if seen on a home computer amongst the distractions of home or office surroundings, might be overlooked. This piece did not require projection as the laptop provided the complete interface necessary and allowed the whole experience to be presented neatly on an exhibition pedestal, again in line with audience preconceptions of traditional methods of professional art presentation.

Neil Antcliff

'Foundry' is the pseudonym used by Neil Antcliff for his artistic projects. Another associate of Grafik Warfare, Foundry prepared two short animations for the nu.art show. The Foundry animations were constructed through cutting and pasting from internet found graphics, personally recorded video clips and scanned in images from outdated textbooks. Layering these into animation program Macromedia Flash MX leads to innovative video editing techniques to create different viewing experiences. Playing with audience expectations of quality, resolution, smooth moving images, Foundry exaggerates pixelation and noise in his films, using low frame rates and compressing file sizes, whilst keeping the content complex and fast moving. Foundry's work aims to exaggerate the limitations of technology and can be placed within the genre of 'dirt style' art. Dirt Style is a term initially coined by new media art site Rhizome.org and "refers to works that use outdated technologies (read: old as dirt) to either resist the concept of

technological progress, to spark nostalgia, or to reinvent outmoded processes by using them in new ways” (Ladd, 2005).

Foundry wanted the presentation of his animations in the exhibition to echo these concepts, so it was decided that his piece should be projected using the oldest projector available and directly on to the textured gallery wall, rather than using a smooth projection screen. Additionally, the distortion caused by placing the projector at a 45 degree angle to the wall was seen as a benefit to the piece. Foundry provided two quicktime video clips which were played alternately through iTunes on a full screen, loop setting, throughout the show. His artist statement [see appendix] was also presented in a rough fashion, printed on thick sketchbook paper and fixed to the wall with visible masking tape, the edges of the projected video overlapping the informative section of the piece. In this way, the connection between Foundry’s theory and his videos is emphasised. In the same way as traditional museums might spotlight a sculpture to convey the ‘aura’ of a piece of art, the projections here act as a “vehicle to construct an iconic effect” (Greenberg, 2003).

Steve Glashier

‘Cherry Heart’, another audio-visual piece in the show, is a music video created by Steve Glashier from Nothing-To-See-Here productions for Brighton based indie band ‘Deadzilla’. The film depicts the story of a young woman’s interaction with an unknown other, that occurs through the medium of her webcam. Her conversations and performances are seen by us, the viewer, as if broadcast directly from her to us, and the identity of the real object of her attention is unknown and maybe even irrelevant. The strip-tease she puts on in the video clarifies that she is indeed performing for whoever’s gaze is behind the camera. The film ends with a shot of her screen as she logs out of the MSN Messenger program, and we see that her screen name and email address contain the words ‘cherry heart’. The film subverts people’s understanding of reality and truth, as it appears to be made of real life web cam clips, edited together into a single music video, but is actually an act, created specifically for this piece. To further the myth of Cherry Heart, Glashier created a home page for the fictional character with the webcam video embedded and advertised this virally across the internet [see appendix figure 6]. This

resulted in many viewers believing the myth and emailing the Cherry Heart email address from the video. Some emails received were obscene in their nature and the email account was eventually closed.

What is novel about this piece are the promotional methods employed locally during its release, and it is mainly these which directed the curatorial decisions taken to present it at the nu.art exhibition. During the Brighton Arts Festival in June 2006, the film was converted to '.3gp' file format in order to allow playback on compatible mobile phones. It was then bluetoothed anonymously to random members of the public at festival venues. This kind of promotional scheme which sends files to others' devices when it has not been invited to do so, is akin to email spamming, and is called 'bluejacking'. Since many people would have initially viewed the video on their mobile phone screens, Cherry Heart was shown in the exhibition on a mobile phone which was set to play the video when an audience member pressed a button. To entice the audience into doing so, high resolution printed screen shots from the film were displayed alongside the phone [see appendix figure 7]. In order to minimise sound bleeding into other pieces, the Cherry Heart video needed an audience member to press the play button, causing the video to play only once, rather than leaving the phone permanently on a loop setting. This allowed the volume to be set relatively high, as disruption of other pieces by this piece would only occur sporadically.

The phone itself was mounted onto a thin white artist's canvas on the wall, mimicking the medium of traditional artworks in order to juxtapose this blank canvas with the everyday experienced multimedia object, the mobile phone. Presenting the video in this way, on a canvas, defines it as artwork in the mind of the audience, whilst the phone challenges ideas of where we might experience art, with its associations with everyday objects that we use outside of a gallery space.

Peter Bennett

'Pete Cube' was the most technically advanced piece in the show. Developed by MA student Peter Bennett, this comprised a specially constructed interactive tactile interface alongside projected stereoscopic imaging (3D visuals) which responded to user activity. The concept behind the piece was to provide visual representations of audio activity

which would be created by the user whilst they negotiated a unique 'instrument'. The tactile interface, the Pete Cubes, are wooden blocks, one of which has light sensors on each side and the other has a pressure sensitive button on each side. These sensors, when triggered, output their response into a Max/MSP program so that certain pre recorded sounds are emitted by a speaker. Simultaneously, a visual representation of the soundwaves being output by the speaker appears on the projection screen as if the soundwaves are coming out from the specific sensor which was triggered.

No instructions are given to users as to how to use the Pete Cubes, so onlookers are able to see the learning experience of the user as they attempt to create some kind of melody or regular response from the cubes, often using both cubes simultaneously, one in each hand. A number of 3D glasses were provided for users which cause the visualisation to appear almost as real as the cubes in their hands, bringing them closer to the virtual musical instruments almost to a point where they might forget that they are manipulating a physical object as they lose themselves in the interaction. Designed to be used by one person at a time, interesting collaborations occurred spontaneously at the nu.art exhibition. Perhaps an effect of the collaborative themes of other pieces in the show, audience members tended to automatically participate in pairs or groups whilst interacting with the Pete Cubes. For example, sometimes two people would take a cube each and try to create a collaborative music performance for themselves, each other and/or onlookers. Indeed, it was interesting to see that many onlookers wore the 3D glasses to watch the visualisations of the sounds rather than only wearing them when they themselves were using the cubes.

SOUND

One concern of the curation was that sounds between pieces would be disruptive to other pieces, however, setting each volume relatively low made it possible to focus on the sounds coming from the particular piece being observed. Interestingly though, one audience member who was sat at the opposite corner from the Foundry piece, expressed that they had understood the PeteCube piece to be influencing the Foundry visuals. Of course, this was not the case. Their interpretation of an imagined connection between the pieces shows how these separate installations were received by some audience members concurrently. This unexpected effect of bringing these pieces together for the show could be seen to have had a positive impact on the experience of audience members, as themes between the pieces were interpreted as being so connected that divisions between pieces were sometimes unclear. Because many new media art pieces incorporate aspects of sound art, the curation of new media art with respect to audio issues specifically is an area which might benefit from future studies.

DOCUMENTATION

In the nu.art exhibition, apart from the Foundry statement's display described earlier, artist statements were presented by mounting them on thin white canvas, mirroring the display of Glashier's mobile phone piece, and having the same effect, of defining the statements as artworks in themselves.

“Within art centres, exhibitions and one-off projects it has become normal to provide a place for reflection, work and action. Visitors to shows have got so used to these parallel structures that a whole set of codes have evolved alongside the exhibition of artwork alone. ... So it is clear that many group exhibitions propose parallel back-up systems to aid the ‘public’ in its understanding... There developed a need to help people join in the understanding... along with an obligation to help them de-code the potential utility of art in relation to a way of looking at the world beyond representation and personal spirituality” (Gillick, 1997: 67).

The statements were a mixture of personal biographies and descriptions of their associated project, depending on what each artist wanted to express. These were either written by the artist themselves and edited by myself, or written completely by me, depending on if the artist provided any informative content [see appendix figure 8] A version of each of these statements was also incorporated into the nu.art website.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to examine issues surrounding the curating of new media art. Some of these issues, such as dealing with conflicts between how an artist would like to present their work and how a curator would like to (or has to as a result of managerial pressure), are not unique to new media art, but would have existed in the curatorial process surrounding any controversial art throughout history. Alternatively, the genre of 'new media', disputed as its borders may be, is associated with types of technology which demand a new way of thinking around how and where to present art defined as such.

“The problems posed by the production, collection, storage, playback facilities of these [new media art] works are absolutely novel when compared to those of paintings, drawings, sculptures, and-maybe-photographs up to now housed in museums. This applies to equipment, layout of rooms, audience participation...” (Claus in Druckrey, 1999:181)

These problems have been addressed in some way throughout this paper. The fact that many new media artworks require some form of interaction, means that in these cases there is a demand for a kind of interface through which this interaction may occur. Whether this interface takes the form of a touch-screen monitor, a footpad accompanied by a projection, a monitor and keyboard or some other, novel interface, should depend on, and reflect, the specific artwork's concepts.

The open attitude which was taken in the initial stages of organising the nu.art exhibition hoped to allow artists to fully realise their artistic concepts without outside influence. By removing the demand for pieces to be connected by specific themes, the only restriction was that pieces should use, in their formation or as part of the installation, some form of 'new' technology. Currently, curation of new media art often involves a great deal of input from the artists themselves, as shown in the case study of Desert Rain and Desktop Subversibles, where it seemed the artists were fully responsible for any display and gathering of documentation of the work which occurred. It may be that new media artists have become used to taking on these curatorial roles more than traditional artists have done in the past, and this may be due to there being a lack of support for new media art and its curators in the art field in general. Without having had time to build up schools of thought and education with which to inform and create new media art curators, the art is already being made, and perhaps currently the artists feel that they are the only

ones who understand it, making them reluctant to hand over a self contained piece of work to be presented by an unfamiliar curator.

“you have to understand the work, the ideas, the intention of the artist and then find a specific way to exhibit it without forcing a curatorial idea on it, but to try to communicate these ideas through the way you exhibit the work” (Banovich in Cook, 2002:52).

Introductory meetings with and between the artists of the nu.art show allowed collective understanding of the concepts behind each piece to develop, and spontaneous collaborative developments also occurred as a result of these meetings. One possible benefit of there not being a single tried and tested way to curate new media art, is the freedom this provides to curators. All but one of the nu.art pieces had never been publicly exhibited before, so there was a great opportunity to try novel modes of presentation, such as displaying a video on a mobile phone.

Duchamp is renowned for his controversial ‘Readymade’ projects. This kind of instructional artwork relates to current new media work as both demand participation from the audience.

“Marcel Duchamp suggested that fifty percent of a work of art was in any case done by its audience. This is obviously an appallingly low estimate. The aim of all artists should be to up this percentage” (Fuller, <http://www.year01.com/plunder/essay.html>).

New media artists such as Harrison are creating work which accomplishes this, in projects such as Flow Chart Story and Scroll Story. Additionally, because new media artworks in general often have an interactive basis, audiences are being transformed into artists, performers in their own right. In a new media art exhibition, proper curation can provide very new experiences to visitors, generating innovative spaces for creativity inside the art show.

Putting on the exhibition myself has given me insight into the many aspects of curating new media art, especially issues which arise when organising a one day event and methods needed to ensure works have a complementary effect when they are placed in the same environment. Future studies could benefit from looking more deeply into sound issues and differences which might occur when curating more permanent exhibitions, within or outside conventional gallery spaces.

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