Interaction, Participation and Networking Art

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a summary of the essay "Interaction, Participation, Networking Art and telecommunication" from Inke Arns. We explore how the spectator is involved into the artwork and how the participation of art changed in the last 50-60 years. Furthermore, this paper point out the evolution of art and which role participation plays in the art context

Keywords

Art Network Internet mass-media participation telematic collaboration Openness NetArt satellite communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Duchamp said that artwork is made entirely by those who look at it or read it. The artist, who made it, survives by their accolades or even their condemnation. These points motivated the artist of the 20th Centaury to use and evolve the concepts of interaction, participation and communication.

Generally speaking, the art movement became from a closed to an "open" work of art, from a contemplative reception to an active participation, from one author to a collective authorship.

2. The beginning of interactive art

The beginning of this active participatory happened through the Fluxus and happening movement in 1950s and 1960s. The first artworks which belong to this movement were "4'33" and "Imaginary Landscape No.4" by John Cage. Later, the artwork "Magnet TV" allowed the user first interaction with a TV and implied demand for a change in the one way structure of the (analog) mass media.

In the 1970s the concept of the conditional spectator appeared. Artists like Dan Graham, Peter Campus and Peter Weibel used closed-circuit installations to confront the spectators with their own mediated image. These interactive installations were the first installations which met the ideals of openness and participation aspired to in the 1960s.

3. Interactive media art in the 1980s and 1990s

At the 1980s and 1990s interactive art is divided in the two theories. One theory deal with interrelated social action and the other one deal with the technical defined category of human-machine communication. In last theory emancipationist approaches were scarcely to be found, and media critical approaches were even rarer in this decade.

Interactions were often used as a dialogue model, for example the "Telematic Dreaming" project. In this installation the viewer is no longer solely a recipient, but simultaneously an agent, too.

At the late 1980s telematic and telepresence began to gain importance for interactive media art. Telepresence provided a new scope for the artist and allowed the viewer parallel experiences in three different spaces at once:

- The real space in which the viewer's body is physically located

- Per tele-perception in the virtual, simulated visual space

- Per tele-action at the physical location of the "data-work"

In this context of telematic art Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz created a groundbreaking work, which is called "Hole in Space". In this installation the viewer from Los Angeles were able to talk to the viewer from the other side in New York via a satellite video connection. Richard Kriesches work series "Telematicsculpture" used the telephone network and gave arise to complex interactions with many involved viewers.

By contrast the works of Paul Searmon aim at interpersonal and intimate communication. He emphasized this concept in his already mentioned artwork "Telematic Dreaming".

The artists who begin intervening in networks in the late 1970 had the intention to reach the viewers and listeners directly without go through the usual art business and usual institutionalized art discourses. In this time the most important and closely related ideas in the context of electronic art were imaterialization, process and participation. Robert Adrian X emphasized these ideas in his project "The world in 24 hours". The aim of this project was not in creating a special object but instead establishing "communicative" occurrences between the participants. Overall almost every artistic work with computers and networks will lead to an extreme "de-materialization of the object" and immaterial artworks. According to Ascott the people who participating in, and sharing, electronic space could no longer be clearly divided into "artist" and "viewers", into "producers" and "consumers"

Besides this evolution of interactive media art there exist some other interesting satellite communication based projects, which tried to use the real-time communication possibilities of the satellite to create a new ways of dialogs. One of the first projects in this context was a telecast of a two way piano concert between America and Europe. The left hand was played by the American side and the right hand by the European side. Douglas Davis tried in the 1960s and 1970s to establish a dialogue situation with his telecast audience via telephone and a printer. His aim was to "de-mass" the mass-media such as television.

These telecommunication and satellite projects of the 1970s were geared towards openness and participation, but failed according to Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinowitz in active participation of social elements. This was because of the restricted access of technologies. For that reason they created the idea of an "Electronic Cafe". This "Electronic Cafe" was a multimedia computer and video network that connected in real time five Los Angeles districts, populated by different ethnic groups. Every user has unrestricted access to all databases, files and communication platforms like bulletin board systems.

In this scope evolved some communication platforms about the art topic. Steward Brand founded in 1985 the legendary bulletin-board system "Whole Earth Lectronic Link" (WELL). Afterwards Wolfgang Staehle created "The Thing", which contained various message boards, forums for art and an open-access flow for information. "The Ting" is based on the idea of social sculpture from Joseph Beuys. So we can interpret "The Thing" as a sculpture of that type.

Before the 1990s internet boom began, the artist continued this concept of communication platforms and combined these ideas with collective and collaborative authoring environments. So the artists were experimenting with complex collective writing projects, which raised the question about the author and reader relationship.

In the 1980s more and more collaborative authoring projects appeared. ARTEX (Artist's Electronic Exchange Network) is one of these series and was developed by the Vienna office of I.P. Sharp. ARTEX existed from 1980 to 1991 and was used by thirty-five artists worldwide. The easy-use approach of this platform amounted to a veritable revolution for collaborative working environments.

In the 1990s the Internet became more accessible and that was the beginning of an entirely new phase of collective networked "authoring projects".

4. From the large analog media to small digital media

In general, we can say the large analog media of the late 1980s transformed to small digital media of 1990s. Peter Weibel emphasized in his article, that the artist's contribution can be divided up into works, which deal with the (old) medium of radio and the other one, which uses telematic technologies.

Adrian X complained that nobody in our culture, artists included, is educated or encouraged enough to let others have a share in their creativity. Some projects like the Ponton / VanGogh TV tried to solve this problem and packed all their well-equipped media laboratories into a bus and container, with the aim to reach a new form of communicative and interpersonal networking.

Compared to this VanGogh TV Project, the opening-up of the Internet in the mid 1990s simplified a lot on the production side. So every potentially user could become a broadcaster without the need for hi-tech equipment. These networking and participatory potential offered by the Internet were particular importance, also in the Net art.

In this context more and more open and participatory (co-) writing projects appeared on the WWW. "The World's First Collaborative Sentence" from 1994 to today and the "Association Blaster" are good examples for the internet as the ideal medium for allowing active participation.

In the 1990s the open structure of the Net as well as the increasing affordability of Internet access made participation possible on an unprecedented scale. Today the forms of art and interaction moved from a closed-circuit work in the mid 20th centaury to interactive media-art installations to open processes. So we can see two forms of interaction from a future-oriented viewpoint.

- One Model is mostly the logical continuation of the Eco's concept of the "Open Work", namely evolutionary systems genuinely capable of learning and therefore of progress each time they are used.

- The second interaction model consists in connection the virtual space with the real (urban) world by using special developed interfaces. The media-façade installation "Blinkenlights" is a nice example for this progress.

I think that the future is placed very well into these two categories. We have intelligent search-algorithm, for instance the product suggestions in the Amazon e-commerce environment, which becomes better and better when we use this kind of services. The fusion of the virtual and real world is driven by services like the Google maps or mobile augmented-reality applications like Layar and Wikitude. But at the end I would like to add a third form of interaction. This third form handles the aspects of social communities, how internet user interact each other in a better and faster way. Social Coding is a good name for this kind of topic. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. are doing it in a good way. The future will be interesting, when the network technology become completely ubiquitous.

5. REFERENCES
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