list of the foundation's collections, it serves as a catalogue for the video distribution program, it provides students, instructors and scholars with a research tool for audiovisual art, and it gives a general overview of artists and artworks from the 1960s to the present.

Compared to other video databases,[18] the *imai Online Catalogue* has the crucial advantage of allowing users to view every video in its full length. While other databases only show selected sequences, often lasting less than one minute, or only provide complete access to a limited number of users, the *imai Online Catalogue* allows users to access all information free of charge and does not require prior registration. All videos can be played in their full length with a small-format QuickTime frame; metadata and additional documents provide further information about the video and the artist, and search functions (by artist, title, year and keyword) allow users to browse the extensive database. The Online Catalogue differs from other databases precisely in that it is not just a collection of facts but actually gives users the option of viewing audiovisual works in their full length, which is what makes it an important institution for conducting online research about video art in a visually concrete way. This sort of comprehensive online publication that does not merely quote from the works in question requires a legal basis. As a rule, when museums, institutions, or private collectors buy a video work, they also acquire the right to screen it exclusively in their premises, effectively prohibiting its online publication. The imai foundation, however, in its capacity as a distributor of video works, has signed legal agreements with the artists listed in its database that permit the presentation of their videos via the imai website. The *imai Online Catalogue* nevertheless deliberately refrains from showing videos in the kind of high-resolution and full-screen mode that Internet users have come to expect, instead opting for a preview quality that is designed to protect the artworks against illegal distribution.

This restriction reveals the discrepancy that exists between the aim of making video art accessible online on the one hand and the artists' legitimate wish to protect themselves from copyright infringements on the other. When artists decide to make their works available in good quality on popular platforms, as many have done in recent times, they are simply exercising their discretion as copyright holders. An institution such as the imai archive, however, must choose modes of online presentation that do not interfere with a work's characteristic features, especially since many of them may now be considered historical. On the one hand, transferring a video archive into a public terrain such as the Internet affords the possibility of reaching a range of viewers that is larger than, and different from, the sort that one would find in the controlled environment of a museum, and of allowing them a greater degree of flexibility. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that such tech-

nological innovations mean that online viewers necessarily adopt a mode of perception that is quite different from the way the artwork in question was originally displayed. Much has been made of the fact that the aesthetic impact of video art is very much dependent on its modalities of presentation (see, for example, Schubinger, 2009; Blase and Weibel, 2010). Even though the *imai Online Catalogue* mostly consists of single-channel videos whose instruments of presentation do not have definite sculptural qualities (unlike video sculptures and installations), one could still legitimately ask whether a screening that is not based on the technology that was prevalent when the video was first made does not effectively preclude an authentic reception.[19] This would mean that all videos from the 1970s, the 1980s, and even the 1990s should not be made available on the Internet as a matter of principle. However, this distinctly historicist attitude is countered by a host of other curatorial opinions whose influence can be observed (among other places) in several exhibitions where videos are displayed on almost standardized neutral black monitors, in a "black framing" (Amman, 2009: 217ff.). The *imai Online Catalogue*'s reduced viewing window accommodates such considerations and thus constitutes a compromise that enables an online presence of historic videos while simultaneously making it clear that their display on the Internet cannot be considered an equivalent to the original version.

The mode of display is, without a doubt, of crucial relevance where the works in question convey a message that relies on the nature and disposition of the television broadcast and the video recording or of the television set and monitor box. The *imai Online Catalogue* features some such examples: Douglas Davids, in his video *The Last Nine Minutes* (1977), refers to a spatial investigation inside the monitor box; Mike Hentz in *Green-Phase* (1978/80) experiments with the ambiguity of the monitor screen, even breaking it towards the end of his performance; Franziska Megert's video *Off* (1989) consists of electronic residual signals from CRT televisions, and Michael Langoth's video *Retracer* (1991) requires a conventional television set as a frame, because the events taking place on the screen are sucked into such a television by a zoom in the video (see Fig. 9.5 in color section). Where works like these are presented on a flat screen that is connected to the Internet, this will inevitably entail a loss of visual perception and authenticity that the viewer must compensate for by relying on his or her context sensitivity and abstracting from the present conditions of reception. Within the imai collection, however, such cases are relatively rare and it was therefore decided to integrate them into the catalogue for reasons of documentation.

Presently, the archival character of the *imai Online Catalogue* is very much in the foreground (see Fig. 9.6 in color section). The imai team has managed to establish a point of contact by way of the Internet that enables those inter-

ested to tour the video art archive which had previously received little attention and could not be visited at an actual location.

Viewers may now enjoy the flexibility of selecting videos based on their individual preferences, and of beginning, interrupting, resuming, and repeating the playback at any time that suits them (see Fig. 9.7 in color section). In 2008, imai launched the "video art kitchen" series which represented a first step towards providing online visitors with thematically arranged, "curated" compilations of videos from its archival collection.[20] These collections gather video works under diverse headings such as scratch videos, gender, dance, and audiovisuality, and do not only help viewers orientate themselves within the immense archival collection, but also accentuate contents and motifs that have been prominent in video art throughout the past decades. In this sense, the "video art kitchen" constitutes an experimental contribution to the project of probing the *imai Online Catalogue*'s exhibition potential, while remaining within its previously established framework.

It was observed above that the dematerialization of video art as well as the technical options for displaying it – which must be customized accordingly – are pivotal for inspiring a reflection on adequate modes of Internet presentations. It is possible that the reception of this genre requires a more subjective, private kind of "seeing," since it has been shown that in conventional exhibition contexts, spectators find it difficult to direct their attention towards the entire (and often unknown) duration of a video artwork (Graham and Cook, 2010: 100-103). The media lounges that have recently become popular in museums and exhibitions are rooted in the idea of showing video art in a private, pleasant atmosphere. Internet galleries and archives may have precisely this advantage of providing the comfort of bringing art into one's "own living room," the premise being that it is easier to focus on time-based artworks in one's own four walls than in a public space. But the opposing view, according to which the Internet induces people to consume a confusing wealth of information and images in a restless and superficial manner, is equally prevalent. The recent launchings of Google museums and online art fairs underpin the idea that a physical encounter with, and perception of, the original artwork is of secondary importance, and that consequently its online copy becomes a veritable replacement on account of its constant viewing and unlimited accessibility.

Although online presentations are becoming ever more popular, video art archives such as the *imai Online Catalogue* must perform a complex balancing act if they are to satisfy their users' wish for a maximum of high-quality information and simultaneously meet the necessary standards regarding copyright law and the authenticity of artworks. Bringing video art to Internet portals prompts many questions, especially where the archival character is

replaced by an exhibition format involving full-screen displays in high resolution. These questions have yet to be conclusively answered. Is it admissible for all videos – no matter which period they belong to – to homogenously appear on the computer screen, whose appearance and material character is rooted in contemporary technological culture? What sorts of transformations occur where playback parameters such as contrast, brightness, color, and volume are no longer determined by artists and curators but are subjectively determined by the viewer? How can, where larger screen displays are available, original specifications regarding format and basic settings be guaranteed every time the video is viewed? Will it be possible in the future to provide not just single-channel videos but also video installations with an adequate mode of online presentation? In theory, the web-based distribution of video art presents a great opportunity for drawing attention to an artistic genre that, on account of its difficult accessibility, has long been neglected by scholars and museums alike. In practice, however, it remains necessary to develop viable database models for video art so that an adequate interface design and innovative software may respond to the specifics of historical and contemporary video art.

NOTES

1 More and more installations whose architecture was conceived in the white cube are thus seen out in the city dialoguing with the environment and exposed to all interactions and mutations, depending on the projection sites.

2 The term ["accordage"] was borrowed from Daniel Stern (1985) by Raymond Bellour to define the relation of the spectator to the film. See Bellour (2002).

3 The DVD was produced as part of a larger research project that also included a database on films shot between 1896 and 1973, which is available at http://vads. ahds.ac.uk/resources/CF.html.

4 The following quotation from Bergson's *Matter and Memory* was projected at the entrance of the installation: "Images are perceived when senses are open to them. These images react to each other in accordance with laws I call laws of nature and, as a perfect knowledge of laws would probably allow us to calculate and foresee what will happen in each of these images. The future of the images must be contained in their present."

5 I would like to deeply thank Silvia Neuhaus, Patrick Heilman, Christine Burgin, and Cory Mathews for generously providing valuable and essential information and documents without which this text would not have been possible.

6 Even if some details of the original technical equipment are not clear, comparing the documentation I was able to find, I may suppose that, in 1977, the sound system was composed by custom sound synthesis electronic circuits, an amplifier, and the large horn-like loudspeaker Neuhaus mentions. In a proposal submitted in March 1974 to the Rockfeller Foundation, and conserved in its archive ("Subway Vent. A proposal for a sound installation for Times Square," 1974, p. 5, folder entitled "Hear.Inc. 2 1975-1978," box R1672, series 200R, Record Group A81, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York) Neuhaus described the project technologies (Max Neuhaus, "Electronic components and sub-assemblies; Loudspeaker – Klipsch model K-D-FB; Amplifier – Bozak CMA-1-120") and mentioned the "Design of sound generating unit" suggesting the design of specific electronics for the installation. One of Neuhaus' *drawings* (Neuhaus, 1983: 17) shows that this resonance system was originally located at the left side of the triangular-shaped chamber's base. It remains unclear if other speakers were used: in one photograph (Fig. 9.4), it is possible to see also two high-frequency horns. Some images of the equipment installation are included in a video by John Sanborn and Kit Fitzgerald (1982, http://www. max-neuhaus.info/neuhaus-tsq.htm) and in the poster for *Times Square*.

7 Christine Burgin, email to the author, 17 June 2010.

8 During my research, detailed technical specifications were not found. The information about the technical equipment, the monitoring system and the maintenance program (unless otherwise specified) is the result of several email

exchanges (8-28 February 2011) with Patrick Heilman, Dia Foundation's digital media specialist, who worked with Neuhaus after the donation of *Times Square* to the Dia Foundation. The information about the project designed in 2000 is drawn from Neuhaus's equipment block diagram and a quotation form by audio consultant David Andrews dated 18 July 2000.

9   The RFC-1/B is programmed to call every day and also to report on four possible modes of system failure: "loss of signal from the loudspeaker," "opening of the locked door to the cage," "loss of AC power," and "change in the loudness level of the loudspeaker" (letter by David M. Andrews to Christine Burgin, 14 May 2002). The equipment block diagram shows that, in the first project, Neuhaus thought to use another system: a Sine System DAI-1.

10 A new, more resistant formulation of speakers was chosen by the artist, who personally retuned the installation on this occasion as well, because this altered the installation's sounds.

11 Christine Burgin, email to the author, 17 June 2010.

12 This fact, on the other side, could also be the reason for the lack of detailed documentation on both the 1977 and the current installation. We could also suppose that, in the future, when the technologies used to produce and display the work may become obsolete, replacing them without the artist's intervention may be problematic.

13 This case seems antithetical to the examples of relocation or refabrication of site-specific artworks from the 1960s and 1970s on the occasion of important exhibitions which took place in the last decades (Kwon, 2002: 33-43): site and ways of exhibition remained unaltered.

14 Two books have recently been published that explore the exhibiting of video and media art: Amman (2009); Graham and Cook (2010).

15 See http://www.imaionline.de/onlinekatalog.

16 McLuhan first adumbrated this idea in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, published in 1962, and subsequently expanded on it in *The Global Village* (1989) (McLuhan and Powers, 1989).

17 Ira Schneider published a filmic documentation of the exhibition which can be viewed in the imai Online Catalogue.

18 For a comparison of online archives of media art, see Blome (2009).

19 Christoph Blase remarks: "In actual fact one could say that playing vintage videos on modern screens is almost tantamount to falsifying the artwork." (Blase, 2010: 380).

20 See http://www.imaionline.de/videoartkitchen.

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On Curating New Media Art

Sarah Cook

INTRODUCTION

> The constant navel-gazing on the part of curators into the terminological
> black-hole that is 'contemporary curating' tends to produce more discus-
> sion about its undecidability and fluidity, rather than precipitating any
> serious theoretical crisis or professional rupture (Charlesworth, 2007:
> 93).

An untested observation about the existing scholarship of curatorial practice
suggests that the majority of articles about curating and the curatorial profes-
sion (considering those mostly published in the mainstream contemporary
art press but also those found in the academic press) concerns the work of
freelancers and what their large-scale temporary shows mean for the state of
contemporary art (O'Neill, 2007). In other words, what is published gener-
ally focuses on "power people" in the art world – "über-curators" akin to the
Harald Szeemans or Hans-Ulrich Obrists of the world – and "experimental"
exhibitions such as Obrist's *Utopia Station* at the Venice Biennale in 2003. By
contrast, discussions about curating *new media art* in particular have tend-
ed to focus on the changing role of the institutional curator and the issues
brought up by the necessary tasks of a museum, from collection to exhibition
to preservation. The first type of curating might generally be characterized by
its equation of curating to DJ-ing or editorializing, and celebrated for its inno-
vative and opinionated ways of showing work to the public (*The New York Times*
memorably described one freelancer-curated show as being "on the nebulous
topic of nonplaces" (Armin, 2010)). Institutionally based curating tends, on
the other hand, to exemplify the mandates and characteristics of the institu-
tion in which it takes place – the shows look like their host museum, reflecting

its values and speaking to its identified audiences (such as, for example, the well-considered reinstallations of the permanent collection at Tate Modern in London).

The new-media-curating mailing list, which I coedit in my work with the online resource for curators of media art, CRUMB, has wondered aloud about this, populated as the list is, with commentators who are both institutionally based and freelance.[1] Is there a difference between institutional and freelance curating when it comes to new media art? Is the scholarship around the exhibition of new media art more prevalent in the field of museology than it is in curatorial studies? Or is it that the field of curatorial studies is more resistant to addressing the challenges to exhibition practice that new media art throws up?

In our book *Rethinking Curating. Art After New Media* (Graham and Cook, 2010) we deliberately addressed this latter point, and considered how the practice of curating new media art suggests new ways to curate art, considering exhibitions which were museum-based as well as ones which were extra-institutional (or even self-institutionalized). We also sought to foster debate around curatorial models beyond the traditional group show or exhibition. Yet, although we feel we made a contribution to the discussion, a distinction still remains between how the curating of new media art has been described mostly with reference to institutional issues, while the practice of curating contemporary art has been theorized predominantly with reference to extra-institutional practice and, in its way, has largely ignored media art.

Does this matter? What is important is that in the scholarship surrounding the field of media art (of which this book is a part) much attention has been given to significant recurring institutional issues which urgently need to be addressed if we are to overcome the historic gap between new media art and contemporary art: why do museums not collect new media art? Why do museums rarely show new media art? What are the difficulties associated with exhibiting new media art in museums in terms of marketing, education, or audience development? One can add to that list of practical questions other more theoretical ones, which have also repeatedly been discussed on the CRUMB mailing list: What words do we use to describe media art? Is "new media art" still a category worth maintaining? What other terminology can we use to describe the range of art practice we now encounter in this age after new media?

In *Rethinking Curating* we suggest considering the behaviors, or significant characteristics of the exhibition, of the work, alongside (and sometimes instead of) its medium: Is the work time-based, or is it lens-based art, or interactive or participatory? These categories and taxonomies have been cause for much debate. While some argue that the discussion that inevitably results from this concern with categorization (loosely paraphrased as, "why is new

media art still not yet a part of Art?") is the beginning of the end, the categories themselves do serve a purpose in pointing out the leading edges of the field.[2]

If we take as a given my untested assumption that curatorial scholarship (of contemporary art) revolves around the freelancer and the one-off event, and that museology (of new media art) is based on institutional practices and collections, we have the beginnings of the vexed path we have to follow to find answers to the question of how to curate art after new media. In museums, new acquisitions to the collection have to be categorized and usually vetted by committees of specialized interest (contemporary, modern, photography, drawing, Mexican, European, Canadian, Indian, etc.). New media art exhibitions, by contrast, have often been deeply temporary affairs in interstitial spaces – online as much as in real space, often in relation to residencies or festivals (one need only think of the myriad of festivals which have brought emerging art forms like new media to the public's attention such as Transmediale in Berlin or Wunderbar, the festival for participatory performance art practices in Newcastle, UK).[3] And, of course, on the rare occasions when new media art is collected, it poses the greatest challenges to existing museological categories (see chapter 8.3).

In scholarship, which seeks to find commonalities across a diverse range of practice, too often this is glossed over in search of one "way" to curate, the so-called silver bullet. But that demands unhelpful generalizations. Like all socio-political subjects, it is nearly impossible to speak of art exhibitions, art history, or the curatorial without either close readings of the art works involved, or the conditions of art's institutional setting. Yet, two problems seem recurrent, or perhaps inescapable, when looking back over a decade or more of curating media art: first, that art's temporary exhibition is predominantly a "drive-by event" viewed by curators undertaking some kind of mad "novelty hustle" (what we might call the temporal question) and second, that those exhibitions, and the curators who curate them, are continually trying to escape the tyranny of the overarching theme (what we might call the subjective question). In looking at both of these questions, could the practicalities of the commissioning process be part of the answer?

THE DRIVE-BY EVENT / THE NOVELTY HUSTLE / THE TEMPORAL QUESTION

While we were working on the exhibition here in Berlin, Maurizio [Cattelan] said that curating a biennial is like pointing a gun at your head and smiling at the same time, and waiting for someone else to come and pull the trigger... [...] We need to think how biennials can become more flexible structures and understand what they can offer to artists that galleries

and museums can't. By looking for new venues for the exhibition in order to connect the Biennial to a different idea of space, we are trying to say that when you reconsider the contents you have to reconsider the format too. It would be good to leave something functioning after the exhibition, but we're not equipped for that yet. After all, a biennial is still a one-night stand. (Massimiliano Gioni in Robecchi, 2005).

Curators of contemporary art are fundamentally concerned with the new, and with that concern comes a pressure to create exhibitions and events that demonstrate this newness. Work rarely enters the museum straight from the studio – it is shown somewhere else first. These temporal events and exhibitions (unless staged by the museum seeking to collect the work, for the sole purpose of documenting it and allowing their trustees to see it in situ) are often, though not always, in off-site, non-museum events, curated by adjunct curators, freelancers, or curators on contract (for example, the Glasgow International, an annual three-week-long city-wide visual arts event, has a full-time year-round festival producer but a "seconded" or short-term contracted curator).

Audiences at these events are also themselves engaged in a kind of "drive-by" viewing, in the words of Michelle Kasprzak (Cook, 2012), or what curator Barbara London memorably described as "the novelty hustle" (Cook, 2010: 64) – trying to see as much work as possible, and see it first, to bring it back to their institution. This is the same whether you are a curator visiting documenta or the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival (DEAF). Often these events are so large, or so short-run, that it is difficult if not impossible to give works the attention they deserve. There is a widely acknowledged fatigue with this, but few solutions have been suggested. In the words of one newspaper journalist at documenta,

> The quantity of work depending on the projected, moving image requires an inordinate degree of audience commitment and stamina [...] It cannot be given full attention in this context, unless one moves to Kassel for a week. I could spend six-and-a-bit hours watching walrus hunts and ice-cutting in the Arctic, but not on multiple monitors ranged along a busy corridor (Searle, 2002).

New media art, including web-based art, has long been exhibited in short-term exhibitions, often in a ghetto of their own making of recurrent dedicated festivals, such as ISEA (which changes city each iteration) or PixelAche (originally in Helsinki but now spread out across Finland).[4] This has been as much a consideration of funding opportunities as led by the internationally-networked qualities of the art itself, as artist and curator Olia Lialina has pointed out,

On-line galleries only store facts and demonstrate that a phenomenon exists. They neither create a space, nor really serve it. The same applies to festivals and competitions. Even if they are intelligently organised they are not events in net life. Mostly they are […] the easiest and trendiest way to save money given to media events. Now that everybody knows the Internet is our paradise on earth, the long-awaited world without borders, visas, flights or hotels, it is the best way to make your event international (Lialina, 1998).

A longer look back, to say 1960 through 2000 would show that the new media arts, particularly networked, electronic works including net art, have been subject to many "ways" of exhibition – from their initial inclusion in museum-based exhibitions in the 1970s (such as *Software* and *Information*[5]) to their addition to exciting and global newly-founded festivals in the 1980s (such as the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam or Ars Electronica in Linz), to the creation of explicit online platforms for its presentation, such as servers and lists in the 1990s (The Thing, Rhizome) and then again their inclusion in museum exhibitions in the 2000s (such as *010101* or the Whitney Biennial[6]) (Cook, 2004). Given that new media art has changed forms, and continues to, across this time period, it is difficult to generalize the ways in which it has been shown (as fads for mobile technology projects are outstripped by apps, or by screen-based data visualizations, or participatory performances...[7]).

It is in fact only from the year 2000 onwards, with the unrelenting rise of contemporary art biennials and festivals the world over, that the festival has become the most widely accepted, or default, mode for new media art's distribution. This may not even be a new media or digital arts specific festival, such as, for instance, the one-night-only, dusk-til-dawn "Nuit Blanche" manifestation in Minneapolis, Northern Spark, which is rife with digitally-inflected public art projects such as David Rueter's project of wifi-transmitting and -receiving synchronized flashing bike lights (*The Kuramoto Model / 1000 fireflies*) which were given out to a thousand of the city's many cyclists. New media art's "festivalization" remains a key characteristic of its exhibition, just as the widespread adoption of technology suggests that the more social and temporary nature of arts festivals is the default mode for an encounter with networked culture.

One example, which I can report on first hand, is the Abandon Normal Devices Festival (AND), which has taken place in the Northwest of England, swapping locations between Liverpool, Manchester, and across Lancashire and Cumbria each year. In the 2011 AND Festival in Liverpool I curated, with the collaboration of Jean Gagnon, a small group exhibition which was on view only for the five days of the festival – an extended weekend. The exhibition,

Q.E.D., sought to bring together work which appeared to be the result or documentation of some kind of experimental process on the part of the artist (see Fig. 10.1 in color section). This artistic output, read as evidence, suggested how artists engage in scientific forms of hypothesis and enactment. The exhibition was curated not only for the context of the festival (which had a theme about belief structures) but also for the audience attending the biennial three-day conference on media art histories.[8] More than a few curators commented to me that the exhibition did not look like a new media art show, nor did it look like a festival exhibition. I can only assume this is because for this particular constellation of audience members I deliberately combined works of an historical nature (such as Norman White and Laura Kikauka's documentation in drawings, schematics, photography, and video of *Them Fuckin' Robots*, 1988) and new commissions (Alexandra Daisy Ginsberg and Sascha Pohflepp's project to model the world through an installation which investigated live and in real-time the weather forecast, or Scott Roger's two-part glass object and virtual animation piece investigating fluid dynamics). Alongside this I included works which were recent but not widely known either in contemporary art or new media art circles (such as Joe Winter's geological-like whiteboard "paintings" and prints from his project *Xerox Astronomy*, 2008, or Michel de Broin's *Braking Matter*, 2006) or well-realized works which were the result of extended research investigations on the part of the artists (such as Ulrike Kubatta's hyperreal documentary performance work about the women's space program at NASA, or Axel Straschnoy's collaboration with researchers at Carnegie Mellon University to make art by robots for robots).[9]

The curatorial conceit, that I could show documentation resulting from a pseudo-scientific artistic practice, helped get around the usual tropes of a "new media art show" that it should be full of functioning prototypes or novel technological experiences facilitated by the artist present alongside. There were plenty of those kinds of works elsewhere in the festival – from John O'Shea's pig's bladder football project to Kurt Hentschläger's sensory-deprivation immersive installation *Zee* in the main galleries at FACT. The fact that the exhibition *Q.E.D.* was on view for a short time period, and attendant to a conference, meant the works could be "reference points" for a longer-lasting and bigger discussion rather than have to be fully developed theses in and of themselves.

It has been suggested that in contemporary art festivals, such as the Venice Biennial, it is often the case that the freelance curator gains credibility (and has their name in the largest type on the poster) but that the art is easily forgotten (or, as mentioned above, impossible to take in). By contrast, in new media art festivals, it has often been the case that the works are prototyped and open for participation with a minimum of mediation, with the presence of the artist

there enhancing or troubleshooting its presentation, and therefore is a manifestation of a less explicit form of curating (curating as project management or event-production). I would suggest that it is in the combination of older and new works in the same exhibition around a tightly defined curatorial concept, that it is possible to get around the "novelty hustle" and build shows which, regardless of their short-runs (5 days or 2 weeks) offer to a drive-by audience a more sustained meditation on art.

But with the tightly controlled curatorial concept comes our second prevalent problem in the curating of new media art...

THE TYRANNY OF THE THEME SHOW

Once taxonomies begin to settle in, the truly avant-garde begin to move on (Lichty, 2004).

The common danger in curating exhibitions for biennials and festivals is that curators feel they have to know about and comment on the whole world – current affairs, philosophy, politics, cultural studies, etc. – and not just art, in order to make their exhibitions timely and relevant. For example, the much discussed "platforms" of documenta 11, where the exhibition was considered just the final and not most important manifestation of the curatorial ideas at play, is evidence of a tactic adopted to deal with this increased workload (and increased demand on the international art fair/event that it be truly global in relevance). Yet that necessity – of tying art to debates taking place within a wider community than arts makers – fits quite well with new media, which is increasingly part of a larger cultural transformation.

So if new media, or technology itself, is no longer enough of a hook for an exhibition, then comes the need for a more general encompassing theme to collect works around. Yet then, is the tyranny of the theme just another way to get around the problem of "naming," so common with media art? Looking back to a debate on the new-media-curating discussion list in 2004 offers a series of thoughts still relevant today. A number of them are excerpted here:

The taxonomies that new media art curators, academics, artists and critics are dealing with go much deeper than the structuring logic of a museum's collection or exhibition programming schedule, they permeate the entire culture industry such as ... grant awarding bodies, and more visibly they shape or determine the structures of art schools and graduate programs within research universities so that the definitions of new media art are made or shaped before the art is even produced. Secondly,

new media art as a category for collection, exhibition, archiving has been for the most part institutionally created. Unlike other 'avant gardes' or emerging media (photography, video, film), 'new media art' has been institutionally embraced within the same generation of its introduction, by embrace, I mean included in major biennials, have become a funding category [...], and now with the fact that you can earn an MFA in net. art, created its own dept. within the academy. So unlike earlier moments when definitions were usually connected to individual artists' practices, new media art has sort of, in my estimation, been reversed engineered so to speak (Sutton, 2004).

What I think has been interesting – and important – about net art in particular and 'new media' in general has been how much it has been self-defined and self-propelled. With the history of ISEA and Ars Electronica and numerous other festivals, I don't know what 'new media as a category for collecting, exhibition, archiving has been for the most part institutionally created' even means. Perhaps it is my U.S. set of blinkers, but I think it is the lack of acceptance that defines the institutional response to net art and new media art, not its reverse engineering. I think the initial problem was that so many important new media artists were being thrown into the 'visual arts' and 'media arts' pools for review and hardly ever getting funding. Creating new media categories – at least in the United States but arguably elsewhere – was an attempt to respond to work not create it or force it in a direction (Dietz, 2004).

[...] What [an earlier post not included here] denounces as a 'hierarchical system of selection, promotion, official recognition, award – something that once again cuts out the truly collective/anonymous/networked/feedbacked nature of creativity and production,' is – if you ask me – curatorial practice that 'has to' make choices, selections, and create public attention for artistic practices. to assume that this automatically and unavoidably 'cuts out the truly collective/anonymous/networked/feedbacked nature of creativity and production' seems a bit short-sighted, considering the effort that has been made, not only by transmediale, to include a variety of art and creative practices (Broeckmann, 2004).

I note now that the Arts Council in the UK removed all the categories of funding that they used to have, and now you have to define your own funding requirements. This of course does something similar to Ars Electronica's move [of abolishing prize categories] – it forces the artist to consider their own position in relation to everything else, not just in

relation to the small bubble that the funders/commissioners give them an opportunity to slip into. I would hope that this will make people look at art rather than at technology for antecedents and references, but who knows (Pope, 2004).

In 2005, just after this debate took place, Steve Dietz and I co-curated an exhibition called *The Art Formerly Known As New Media* at the Banff Centre in Canada.[10] We were drawing, for our checklist, on a long list of alumni to the then Banff New Media Institute – artists who had participated in residencies, workshops, summits, and conferences on a range of themes pertinent to the new media field over the previous decade (from 1995). These themes ranged from data visualization to immersion, from artificial intelligence, to what constitutes identity online. It occurred to us that a retrospective view of the history of new media art had to be very deliberate in its move away from the media and technology part of its definition. After all, all technologies were once new. What seemed more important was selecting works where the artists continued to interrogate these larger, more resonant themes within their work. For instance, we included Catherine Richard's work *Shroud/Chrysalis II* (2005), an installation including a woven copper blanket and a low glass table in a white room, in which visitors to the exhibition are invited to lie down and be wrapped up, to temporarily insulate them from the surrounding electromagnetic spectrum. Faraday cages were once new media; what remains pertinent today is the problem of living our lives continually "plugged in."

The Art Formerly Known As New Media may have been a way to move the theme of the show away from newness and technology towards other themes, such as embodiment or agency. In the years since this exhibition this tactic of the new media art group show clustered around a theme, continues to be prevalent, and has resulted in a kind of tyranny, and chase – which festival will work with which theme first? Once a theme, such as biotechnology or environmental response, has been claimed by a festival, and all the best work on that theme shown there, does that mean that other festivals and exhibitions cannot take it on?

Of course this is a silly way to think about curating. An exhibition at one museum about the ready-made will likely not stop another curator at another museum mount an exhibition about ready-mades.[11] Working in a field where there are three kinds of newness on the go at once – new technologies as both tool and medium, new methods of making art or processes, and new ideas to manifest in those works – does mean that one has to be curatorially creative and led by real ideas of interest to resist the urge to just pick one theme and try to make everything fit into it. In other words, being led by the content of the works themselves is going to make for a stronger exhibition experience than grouping

things together because they all *could* be understood under a larger umbrella theme, such as the environmental crisis to cite one. In contemporary art, media and methods are increasingly varied, and history has shown that most exhibitions which are solely medium-based tend towards the uninteresting.

THE ALLURE OF COMMISSIONING

Many exhibitions have taken place within and without museums, but have they made the situation of how to curate media art any clearer, if the characteristics and behaviors of the work (and the requirements of the audience in their engagement with that work) have also moved forward? Exhibition history is a growing field of study but still underdeveloped in the histories of media art. Yet as Paul O'Neill has written, given the changing media at play in art, and the different roles played by the artist, the audience, and the curator, there is no one solution for curators.

> In the new curatorial rhetoric the emphasis is on flexibility, temporality, mobility, interactivity, performativity and connectivity. This new found urgency to seek a common language is exemplified by the number of international curators who have treated them [exhibitions/biennials] as a collective activity, using them as a means to explore the processes of art production through temporary mediation systems rather than presenting art and its exhibition as a finished product (O'Neill, 2005: 7).

This concern to show work in progress, or the usually hidden process of making art, is familiar to curators of new media who have always had cause to do so, where audiences have often played a big role in bringing the artwork into existence or completed the experience of the work. Which brings us back to the question of categories and what exactly it is we are trying to curate, whether in a museum, festival or other context. Media art curator Jacob Lillemose has commented that,

> I often hear Danish museum directors ask for a list of categories because it would make them feel more comfortable with digital art; it frames digital art in accordance with the principles of non-digital art. However, I think they misunderstand the challenges and do themselves an unintentional disservice. Digital art demands new ways of institutional thinking about art works both in terms of curating and preservation; it's difficult, sure, but also a chance for the institution to develop (Lillemose in Graham, 2004).

The curating of work in progress means getting involved in the creation of the work "further up the idea stream," in the words of curator Scott Burnham (Cook, 2009). Which perhaps is why commissioning has become the common function of both the new media art curator and the extra-institutional free-lance curator. A 2011 article in *Art Journal* pointed out that curators often talk of the "projects" they are working on, as that allows a myriad of outcomes, from exhibition to publication. A debate on the CRUMB list in 2010 addressed this aspect of the curatorial role, wondering if commissioning can help towards new curatorial models for new media art. Some excerpts follow.

> I have always found commissioning to be a very dialogical process. The conversation one starts with an artist (as a curator) can go on for a year or more before anything goes into production. Sometimes things fall into place quickly, but in my experience at least, this does not happen very often. Especially in relation to variable media… the production phase is also highly dialogical; as various logistics, contexts and ideas shift and develop throughout that process. Very little is rigidly defined by the artist or the curator at the outset. If there is anything I am likely to define (when playing the role of curator), it is context. Though even this is likely to be dynamic. Parameters can change or opportunities arise… (Dipple, 2010).

> Depending on your institutional setting you may, as a curator, have more or less so called 'power'. I find it hard to discuss power relations in the abstract. Power is always exercised in an institutional context. [...] But my attitude has always been to give freedom to the artist in the first place as they know more and are the specialist in terms of technology; but it also is giving them responsibility. The only aspect that always gets in the way is financial resources. But if you establish the financial framework right off the bat, rarely is it a major problem after (Gagnon, 2010).

> New media art certainly seems a natural for commissions since there is (or was) not such a large body of extant work to 'shop' for. And new media production is naturally technical, involved, and labor intensive. Sometimes the curator or gallery/museum tech staff know as much or more about different aspects of the technology as the artist (not always, but sometimes). This means that close collaboration is necessary, and it also results in the dynamic you mention, where the collaborative boundary between curator and artist is blurred. On the one hand, this appears to be a good thing; breaking down the old curatorial model where the artist is asked politely to drop off their work at the loading dock and disappear until opening night (to paraphrase Robert Storr) (Rinehart, 2010).

Establishing a framework for the art project with the artist in advance, getting involved in the different stages of the production of the work, and keeping discussion open about how the work is going to be exhibited, are all activities which take important time on the part of the curator And the more time taken in the curating of a project, the more collaborative with the artist it is, the less likely it is that the curating will be "sloppy" in the style of the all-out, huge, temporary theme show, where, often for reasons of space, time, budget, and marketing pressures, one-size-fits-all is the only method available.

IN CONCLUSION

The unofficial CRUMB motto is that once you have curated new media art you never curate art the same way again. Which is another way of restating the lessons above – that once you have collaborated with artists, including commissioning their work, you might be less keen on the curatorial model of practice which seems to only result in a big themed show seen by a drive-by audience. Other practical and theoretical problems with the way art is received will no doubt come to replace those two mentioned so far. For instance, a common complaint, written nearly a decade ago, is still the case today:

> Perhaps critics, print magazines and newspapers would consider writing/ printing/commissioning more articles about 'one-person shows,' individual web sites or single 'projects,' rather than round-table discussions or those articles covering entire festivals, biennials, etc. (although there are great exceptions, the latter type of articles is the one most often ending with the 'So, is it art?' question, because you can't possibly develop a full, well-argued critical judgement of one art project when covering a whole festival) (Broegger, 2003).

This comment rightfully suggests that the curator's role also has to encompass the scholarship around media arts (its history, and its key works, understood in a monographic form) if we want to help evolve better ways to show the work.

What other lessons have we learned from curators dealing with new media arts in the field in the last ten years? First is that in the last decade the art has changed a lot and as such defining the roles and responsibilities of the curator remains a case-specific activity. Artworks made ten years ago have been almost completely forgotten (or, in the case of net-based art, left to molder online while software and operating systems are upgraded rendering their coding obsolete) while earlier histories (twenty or more years) of media art, including time-based and lens-based practices, are gradually being excavated,

and restaged and reshown. How do we keep the recent memory of art alive? Can freelance curators – those who are non-institutional, non-collecting, not-museum-based – help, through their practice, to extend the future relevance of recent media art? How can we take the best of a freelance curator's attitude to engage with new art forms and new themes, and mix that with the institutional curator's responsibilities to scholarship and preservation? Perhaps the time has come for curators to ensure that the considered exhibition, or the single art commission, extends beyond the "drive-by" "one-night-stand" of a festival or biennial, and speaks to ideas beyond the obvious and beyond the tyranny of the overarching theme.

NOTES

1   See http://www.crumbweb.org.
2   This is an ever-evolving area of inquiry; for its most recent significant entry see Quaranta (2010).
3   Transmediale, see http://www.transmediale.de. Wunderbar, see http://www. wunderbarfestival.co.uk. For a considered look at the place of new media art within the history of the Venice Biennale, see Franco (2012).
4   Recent iterations of the ISEA (the Inter-Society for Electronic Art) festival have been held in Istanbul and Albuquerque, see http://www.isea2012org. After ten years of programming, PixelAche has changed its director and its format and largely abandoned the festival model in favor of year-round, community-based programming related to new media culture, under the strand Pixelversity, see http://www.pixelache.ac.
5   *Software: Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* took place at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1970, curated by Jack Burnham; *Information* took place at the Museum of Modern Art also in 1970, curated by Kynaston McShine.
6   *010101: Art in Technological Times* took place at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2001 instigated by David Ross and curated across four departments of the museum; the 2000 edition of the Whitney Biennial attracted attention for its inclusion of net-based art practices, see Graham and Cook (2010).
7   On the former, see the discussions from the eyeo festival, held in 2012 in Minneapolis – http://www.eyeo.com. On the latter, see Benford and Giannachi (2011).
8   Rewire: The fourth international conference on the histories of media art, science, and technology was hosted by FACT at Liverpool John Moore's University, see http://www.mediaarthistory.org.
9   The exhibition *Q.E.D.* took place in Liverpool in 2011 and is documented online with the gallery guide available to download from http://archive-2011.andfestival. org.uk/event/qed.
10 *The Art Formerly Known As New Media*, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, Canada, 2005. See the catalogue for the exhibition available in Cook and Diamond (2011).
11 Obviously many museum exhibitions are based around collections which are distinct to the museum.

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