

Art flows through the information society

This annotated bibliography seeks to investigate current interpretations of the role, influence, obstacles, and potential for database art in within our societal data archive. These sources point out our cultural demand for hyperlinked information - from a postmodern suspicion of the individual. The archive is no longer acceptable when offered from a single point of view, instead, relativity and interdisciplinarity are embraced for the complete presentation of a theme. Then, how can an engineered stream of information champion the historically abrupt data flows of art?

Our society of information can be considered a complex system, a digital archive, a distributed memory - cooperating towards an ideal organizational pattern. Virtuality allows us to recognize institutional structures and aesthetic hierarchies, contributing to dilute their overshadowing subjectivity. Multiple authorship creates our acceptable reality - the intersection of information within.

This interdisciplinary study of art is not without problems. Wolff calls contemporary attempts intertextuality, the investigation of connections rather than interrelations. Posthuman society considers our existence simply as patterns of information. This view of the world is reinforced by our contemporary understanding of the physical structure of the universe - building blocks governed by rules - the cellular automata that Wolfram calls a new kind of science.

Manovich examines stagnation during development of signification for the visual - the lack of rich and precise systems of description - in our society where iconography and index-symbol-icon are hopelessly overwhelmed. Reduced granularity for the recording of our history should create a new democratic experience of the world. Our ability to organize, archive, filter, and search the digital archive emerges only after the system is empowered to structure its own description.

Unfortunately, existing power structures have the capacity to distract and distort historic and cultural reality. Hypertextuality allows the expansion of their contributions through endless deferral rather than reflective content. Established disciplines have the greatest interest in this distraction, because their ideological power and concrete structure are considered no more attractive than the single individual.

Modern digital archives do have the potential to create new forms and revitalize the old forms of cultures past. By moving the archive from the observing to the observed, our self-organizing system - the posthuman - can create new possibilities for the representation of visual arts. Our digital archives will grow and adapt, with an infinitely expanding boundary of reduced granularity, learning to thrive through the cooperation and interrelation between visual, textual, and social process.

The following annotations on database art review its role in society, concepts influential to its creation, challenges to its development, and present opportunities for its future scholarship.

Database art and the society that created it

Hayles, N. Katherine. How we became posthuman: virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Hayles presents the emergence of the posthuman view as an informational-material entity that is reinforced by our understanding of structures in the physical world. The concept that 'because we are essentially information, we can do away with our body' has deep value in the information society. Along with the development of the posthuman, cultural perception has evolved to view all material objects as patterns of information, it has become 'virtuality.' These concepts allow Hayles to show there are 'no essential differences ... between bodily existence and computer simulation.' Hayles examines how our society has great faith in the future of knowledge work contributing to the future of humanity.

Brouwer, Joke and Arjen Mulder. "Information is alive." Information is alive. Proc. of Dutch Electronic Art Festival on Data Knitting, Eds. Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton. Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAi Publishers, 2003. 4-7.

Brouwer and Mulder share their understanding for the world in terms of the digital database, its opportunities and limitations. Our culture is described as an information society that is a digital archive, rather than an society that uses digital archives - the posthuman perspective. Society absorbs everything into 'data flows,' eliminating external points for objective reflection, allowing only relativity between flows. Their postmodern theory points to our digital archives as 'unstable, plastic, living entities' that have transformed the linear stories and rituals of past oral cultures. Brouwer and Mulder strengthen the foundation for understanding society and art as a data stream.

Cilliers, Paul. "Self-organisation in complex systems." Complexity and postmodernism: understanding complex systems. New York: Routledge, 1998. 89-111.

Cilliers evaluates the structure of the self-organizing system as one determined through environmental interaction. The internal structure must adapt dynamically and increase in complexity. A complex system must have a distributed memory, and thus a history, that allows for the opportunity to learn and forget. In order for a complex system to continue, it must 'incorporate and include rather than falsify and ignore.' Cilliers recommends an organic growth model that requires a move away from the categorization created by selfish structures.

Taylor, Jeff. "New media and cultural representation." Information society: new media, ethics, and postmodernism. Proc. of New Visions of the Post-industrial Society, 1994, Ed. Karamjit S. Gill. New York: Springer, 1996. 257-275.

From a posthuman position, Taylor declares the death of the metanarrative in favor of complex systems that describe cultural and historic reality at the intersection of text and discourse. This attraction can be witnessed through the embrace of hypertextuality as 'a way to

look into one or more possible futures' that is an 'endless deferral of signification' created by intertextuality. Taylor points out the great potential for cultural dilution through this fragmentation in the hands of reflexive corporate culture. Taylor's position supports the role of artists in the data stream of society.

Challenges in developing database art

Wolff, Janet. "Excess and inhibition: interdisciplinarity in the study of art." Cultural studies. Eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, New York: Routledge, 1992. 706-718.

Wolff criticizes the established interdisciplinary process for the study of art. She claims an excess textuality in art studies, the verbocentrism used to describe visual data. The refusal to engage visual data reinforces aesthetic hierarchies that do not provide objectivity. Established disciplines continue to exert institutional and ideological power over these studies, and are responsible for this intertextuality between the literary and visual. Wolff presents reasons why cross disciplinary goals have historically been neglected by the academic community.

Doruff, Sher. "Collaborative Culture." Making art of databases. Proc. of European Culture 2000 Interfacing Realities master class series., Eds. Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton. Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAi Publishers, 2003. 70-99.

Doruff introduces the posthuman view of collaborative culture. By marginalizing contributions of the individual author or artist, a new flourish of artistic expression will be possible through inter-authorship and inner-diversity. These inter-disciplinary groups could build and use media to create and reflect upon a new type of critical discourse and social interaction. These learning systems must be able to think on three levels: media interaction, control, and cooperation. Doruff points out why and how media must be integrated into a collaborative learning environment.

Landow, George. "Reconfiguring the author." Hypertext 2.0. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 90-114.

Landow describes the tendency of people in collaborative writing and collaborative authorship to embrace working with others with a deep suspicion due to aesthetic differences and emotional responses of the individual that may be suppressed. He relates that information technology, from Gutenberg to the web has hindered the recognition of collaborative authorship. This hinderance is created by the structure of funding and disciplinary politics. Science disciplines have learned to adjust, while those practicing humanities value their own assumptions as 'eternal verities' that create stagnation. Landow contrasts the way the humanities and scientific communities have embraced collaboration towards a shared goal.

Opportunities for future scholarship

Daniel, Sharon. "Collaborative systems: evolving databases and the 'conditions of possibility' -- artificial life models of agency in on-line interactive art." AI & Society 14 (2000): 196-213.

Daniel shows how on-line interactive art database and agency create networks of exchange between its defined attributes and structure that allow complex systems to emerge. These systems are capable of growth and development, structured to coexist, and can host their own complex system. These interactive systems allow new 'conditions of possibility' through the distributed memory of the database aesthetic. Daniel suggests a chance for our societal data stream to expand its horizons through the collaborative roles of its individuals.

Manovich, Lev. "Metadating the Image." Making art of databases. Proc. of European Culture 2000 Interfacing Realities master class series., Eds. Joke Brouwer, Arjen Mulder, and Susan Charlton. Rotterdam: V2_Publishing/NAi Publishers, 2003. 12-25.

Our information society struggles to interact with visual data. Manovich describes the paradigm for metadating the image as new structure, new interface, new image, and new scale. Highlighting the evidence that our society only finds significance in an image only through its relationships in a database, a creative opportunity for its description emerges. The historical compression of narratives is no longer needed because of the reduced granularity and limitless capacity of databases. Manovich considers these abilities as a new way to approach the representation of reality and its intersection with human, social, and subjective experience. He offers new opportunities to advance the role of visual data by exploring a language to describe it.

Evaluated but not included

Baetens, Jan. "Back to Basics? A Critique of Cyberhybrid-hype." The future of cultural studies: essays in honour of Joris Vlasselaers. Eds. J Vlasselaers, Jan Baetens, and José Lambert, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000. 287-294.

Bender, Gretchen, and Timothy Druckrey. Culture on the brink: ideologies of technology. Seattle: Bay Press, 1994.

Black, Michael. "Consensus and Authenticity in Representation: Simulation as participative theatre." Information society: new media, ethics, and postmodernism. Proc. of New Visions of the Post-industrial Society, 1994, Ed. Karamjit S. Gill. New York: Springer, 1996. 276-286.

Castells, Manuel. The rise of the network society. Volume 1, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Clifford, James. "On collecting art and culture." The Cultural studies reader. During, Simon, New York: Routledge, 1993. 49-73.

- Éri, István, and Béla Végh. Dictionarium museologicum. Budapest: Hungarian Esperanto Association, 1986.
- Feenberg, Andrew. Questioning technology. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Gorayska, Barbara, and Jacob L. Mey. "Cognitive Technology." Information society: new media, ethics, and postmodernism. Proc. of New Visions of the Post-industrial Society, 1994, Ed. Karamjit S. Gill. New York: Springer, 1996. 287-294.
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- Leopoldseder, Hannes, Christine Schöpf, and Gerfried Stocker. Ars Electronica, 1979-2004: the network for art, technology and society : the first 25 years. Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2004.
- Lovejoy, Margot. Digital currents: art in the electronic age. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Manovich, Lev. The language of new media. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002.
- Rabinovitz, Lauren, and Abraham Geil. Memory bytes: history, technology, and digital culture. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.
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