

Chapter XVIII

The Challenge of Enculturation on Art

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ABSTRACT

Enculturation is the act of passing cultural ideologies from one person to the other. It is what breeds innovation instead of new creation. It is the disease of derivation, instead of the birth of creativity. This chapter assumes the practical perspective of critical anthropological distance to understand the culture of art. Such critical evaluation should illuminate the distinct characteristics that encourage patterns. In the tradition of anthropological and sociological study of existing culture, this chapter seeks to illuminate the distinguishing characteristics of contemporary art production and offer perspective on the critical creative process. It takes new media art as its case study because it serves as a cross-cultural intersection of scientific invention and artistic innovation.

BACKGROUND

There is little novelty in the concept of enculturation. It exists in a variety of disciplines and social situations. Research into specific enculturation practices, patterns, and effects ranges from the typically sociologic, Best Practices for Enculturation (Boyle, P., & Boice), to the extraordinary, Alan Bishop's Mathematical Enculturation: A Cultural Perspective on Mathematics (1991). Perhaps as part of a growth in the accessibility of information, the cross pollination of formerly

specific cultural aspects has witnessed a consistent growth in contemporary history. In kind, the interest in culture and intercultural study has grown. In Robertson's often cited *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, he writes "by now it must surely be clear to most sociologists that in contemporary sociology and social theory that there is an awakening . . . of interest in the social relevance as well as the intrinsic significance of culture and cultural change" (Robertson, 1992, p. 32).

The new media arts, although not the only artistic endeavor effected by the growth of enculturation is an excellent subject for the evaluation of this process. New media art is a distinctly acculturated art practice. It sits at the nexus between a wide, and often changing variety of artistic cultures. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this art, the new media artists often float between science and art disciplines. It is this edge at which intriguing acculturation of science and art occurs. This is what Lev Manovich (2002) described as “the computerization of culture” which “not only leads to the emergence of new cultural forms such as computer games and virtual worlds; it redefines existing ones such as photography and cinema” (p. 9).

Responding to substantial changes within two cultures is an everyday fact of the new media arts. They must be acculturated in order to exist. The culture of technology, and that of art, is the subjects and tools integrated into new media art. Again, in Manovich’s (2002) words, “the gradual computerization of culture will eventually transform all of it” (p. 6). Here, that which existed in extra-technical space of artistic endeavor, finds itself blending with the technical. Two cultures are acculturated to make a third. The resultant cultural accumulation is the focus of this chapter.

The cultural aspects, here described, are limited in scope to those characteristics best understood as part of western tradition of art making and evaluation. The reasons for limiting the scope include the popular dominance of these approaches, the author’s proximity to these cultures, and the abundance of writing about them. While it would be interesting to develop sharp contrasts, and use other cultures as a kind of touchstone, the resulting analysis would be the subject of a book, not merely an expository chapter. Instead, I invite readers to develop and investigate their own hypothesis about the relationship of art, culture and education after reading this chapter. This writing serves only as a starting point from which to begin such investigations.

BACKGROUND: RESEARCH IN MULTIPLE DISCIPLINES

Anthropological and sociological analysis of the culture of art is not a novel practice. Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* serves as an argumentative base within the social sciences for the relationship of cultural standards and art value. The book includes an analysis of the economy of cultural worth that proves relevant more than twenty years after its publication. In the introduction of his work he states “scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education.” (Bourdieu, 2007, p9). It is this observation that functions as one of the foundations for this chapter. If culture is provided by education, than an analysis of education may illuminate how the creative process is affected.

In concert with the academic, there is much written by contemporary essayists about cultures of art production and their relationship to society. One such book, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, by Greil Marcus, serves not as academic support of the focus of this chapter, but as evidence confirming the permeative character of distinct cultural ideologies. Marcus serves a history that, perhaps unintentionally, supports the claims of this chapter. As told, punk music, even in its purported efforts to develop an anarchist, anti-establishment movement works within deeply engrained cultural ideologies. Here, the master example of the punk group, the Sex Pistols, provides evidence of deep enculturation among artists working against cultural standards. Marcus’s history demonstrates the affinity between the worlds of punk musicians, Situationist manifestos, and Dadaist poetry (1990). Marcus demonstrates, through a disparate collection of artists’ mediums and ideologies, that there are common cultural threads that exist in an intersection of time and social situation (1990).

The range and variety of writing about the culture of art stands as evidence of not only

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