

Chapter 7.2

The Intersection of Gender, Information Technology, and Art

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INTRODUCTION

The interdisciplinary field of art and technology is now well established in artistic and academic communities (Wilson, 2001). However, this article will focus on how the combination of technology and art can be used to facilitate the expression of thoughts, the experience of ideas and the explorations of concepts dealing with gender. A research project called the Art of Decision, which focuses on women in decision making, is used as a means of investigating the ways in which creative technologies can illuminate aspects of gender studies.

BACKGROUND

Creative Technologies

In the context of the research presented here, information technology (IT) is defined very broadly as an entire array of mechanical and electronic devices that aid in the storage, retrieval, communication and management of information. It includes all computing technologies and mobile and fixed communication technologies, but it is not restricted to those areas. Smart materials that change attributes on the basis of input stimuli and that can be used to present and display informa-

tion or react to information, holographic systems, sensors, audio technologies, image technologies, video technologies and many more are all of interest. In this article, the term “creative technology” is used to describe the combination of these types of technologies with artistic practices and methods or the use of these technologies in an artistic manner or in a mode that follows a particular artistic aesthetic. The use of technology for artistic expression is widespread, and while very many works of art can be of a political nature, the concept of using art and technology in the construction of purpose-built systems for exploring gender questions is novel.

Gender

Gender is a complex category of analysis that defies simple definition. It can be viewed as the result of socialization—the emphasis of 1970s/1980s second-wave feminist theorists (Nicholson, 1997) or more currently of performance, of the repetition of doing gender, “the repeated inculcation of a norm” (Salih, 1993, p. 139). This article endorses the view of gender as a result of the interaction between biology and the social environment—what Anne Fausto Sterling calls the “complex web” (Sterling, 2000). It endorses her repudiation of the sex-gender or nature-nurture divide that she claims fails to “appreciate the degree to which culture is a partner in producing body systems ...” (Sterling, 2005, p. 1516). This entry also reflects the view of Caroline Ramazanoglu, who takes “gender to include: sexuality and reproduction; sexual difference, embodiment, the social constitution of male, female, ... masculinity and femininity” (Ramazanoglu, 2002, p. 5). Finally, it appreciates the views of Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, who hold a multifaceted view of gender that includes gender as a “feature of subjectivity,” as “cultural understandings and representations of what it is like to be a man or a woman” and “as a social variable structuring the pathways of those so classified within society” (Alsop et al.,

2002, p. 3). What must be emphasized in all these definitions is that gender intersects and interacts with other factors of identity, such as class, race or sexual orientation.

A definition of gender must include a theory of power. Gender is not a neutral concept, but rather, different degrees and kinds of power attach itself to genders in specific ways. Again, it is important to understand the power of gender as it intersects with all the other human differences. For example, in its simplest form, the traditional white male middle-class gender speaks of political power.

Power, however, is important in other ways. It is integral to the joining of creative technologies and gender, and in this context is defined as the power to produce, authorize and impart knowledge. Often, traditional science and technology have assumed the air of impartiality and objectivity, which gave them the veneer of having produced “authoritative knowledge.” Joining gender to art and technology is to problematize questions of objectivity, authority and knowledge production.

Using new creative media in an exploration of gender and power opens up new possibilities for studying that relationship. This is of particular importance in an age that often considers it trendy to speak of postfeminism, of the “idea that feminism has had its day” (Davis, 2004, p. 140). It is in this context that this article argues that the joining of gender and art and technology through the use of feminist methodology can invigorate a discussion about gender and allow for the presentation of material on gender in new and exciting ways.

THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, IT, AND ART

The use of creative technologies with its flexibility, crossing of boundaries, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity lend themselves to feminist inquiry and provide a space to develop feminist

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