

IDEOLOGIES OF INTERACTIVITY: FREEDOM, CHOICE AND CREATIVITY

By Catherine Richards & Kim Sawchuk

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Catherine:

Ideologies of Interactivity” outlines and examines the term interactivity- a key reference point in the media arts, popular culture and technical discourses to describe the interplay between “an individual and an artificial intelligence system.” (Popper, 8)

Kim :

The terminology of interactivity functions, as Kenneth Burke writes, as a “terministic screen” that selects and deflects particular attributes of any phenomenon. (45)

Catherine:

The contributors to the panel and the publication that will result, were requested to think through the language of freedom, choice and creativity frequently deployed in discussions of the topic.

Kim:

In this rhetoric, interactivity is said to increase participation between viewers and the work. This is promoted as an enhancement of choice and hence individual freedom/for the user/spectator. Because of this, interactive works are often said to be more accessible than other forms of art thereby countering the elitism attributed to modern art.

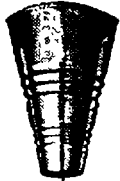
Catherine

This project examines these premises and opens up the term interactivity to include considerations of power and control as they are related to aesthetic issues. We have resurrected that unfashionable term ideology in our title, not as a means to reduce aesthetics to politics or politics to class or economics, but as a reminder of the inextricable connection between aesthetics and power.

Kim:

And here power is not merely understood in its repressive sense, but as Michel Foucault argues, for its productive capacities as form of organization of space and time: technological environments design interaction and circumscribe choice. But choice is not the only issue. Artists projects that have an explicitly interactive element may map out its micrological functionings in late-capitalist cul-

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ture rather than serving classically modernist ends tied to a specific set of cultural values that echo a neo-liberal agenda at the level of the body, within the economic spheres of consumption and production, and at the political level of events.

Catherine:

In interrogating the promises of freedom, choice and creativity, the participants in "The Ideology of Interactivity" ponder the following questions, questions that form the backbone of this project: the connection between interactivity and architectural projects (Brian Massumi: philosopher); the fashioning of interactivity in the electronic arts through an examination of the presuppositions built into computer software (Douglas Back: media artist); the role of the artists working within the digital media environment and the conceptualization of the artist in these practices, from the perspective of an artist in the field (Catherine Richards: media artist; writer); artists' projects that take surveillance as their conceptual basis as a way of discussing the dynamics of power and seduction (Kim Sawchuk: media theorist); and finally the use of digital technologies that are participatory for ends other than assuring greater efficiency in a productivist culture. (Laura Trippi: curator)

Kim:

The panel "Ideologies of Interactivity: freedom, choice and creativity" is the first event in a future series sponsored by the Cottage Collective. The series is designed to initiate creative exchanges between artists, educators, curators and critics working in the media arts in Canada.

Catherine:

The goal of this collaborative venture is to pinpoint contentious issues in media arts; respond quickly to ongoing changes in the field; document the history of media arts projects; research past and present writings and theories pertinent to the area; and finally, create a supportive but critical environment for inspired thought and production from an interdisciplinary point of view.

Kim:

But as well, we are concerned to sponsor initiatives by artists from the perspective of local production where artists work within very tight economies of scale and often without the institutional or economic resources they need to realize these projects- despite the hype.

Catherine:

The Cottage Papers will play with different combinations: mixtures of virtual and real presence; the confrontation of prepared pieces and spontaneous interactions; and finally, experimentation with the dissemination of results that can take the form of working papers, web pages, books, panels, and perhaps in the future, a CD ROM.

Kim:

While we are interested in creating a supportive working environment for artists working with new media, we are guided by the principal that new technologies do not necessarily entail displacing less technologically oriented methods of information exchange or tried and true methods of collective action. We are working counter to naive evolutionary theories of technological development and diffusion and an over-investment in the "rhetoric of the electronic sublime." The rhetoric of the technology makes it seem as if this will all take place without human intervention. Although new technologies may facilitate discussion and exchange amongst artists and writers, their organization still takes thought and effort and financing: the virtual is connected with these very pressing material issues.

Catherine:

Process is integral to the evolution of these issues. We are striving to build intensity, trust and commitment amongst the participants in this panel and in our future work.

Kim:

For more information on the Cottage Collective or the publication that will result from this project please contact: SAW Gallery 67 Nichol Street, Ottawa. 613-236-6181.

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References:

Burke, Kenneth, "Terministic Screens," *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

Foucault, Michel, *Power/Knowledge: selected writings and other interviews*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

Popper, Frank, *Art of the Electronic Age* (New York: Harry Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 1993).