Illusion of Technology in the Human-Computer Interactive Art

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Introduction

Human-Computer Interactive Art suffers from an obsession that has led to bipolar discourses between negative and positive utopia. This discourse, provoked by insecurity in the face of technological advance, drives the illusion of technological superiority. We cannot escape from the illusion because of the structure of technology itself.

Enframing as the Subordinate Moments

There is no neutrality or value freedom of technology, since all technical practices involve both active and receptive aspects.[1] To integrate both aspects, Martin Heidegger used the puzzling meta-language that the technology is not the technology. The activity and receptivity of technology can be distinguished by the instrumental and ontological account. The former mainly considers each individual fulfilling his human desires, including cause and effect. The latter stresses more on the ensemble in social relations. The instrumental definition of technology is not wrong, yet it is not all true. It cannot explain the disagreement of the cause and effect, and so its promise has gone awry.

Heidegger demonstrates that the technology essentially has subordinate moments, and defines it with 'enframing (*Gestell*)' that a 'world' as a meaningful structure of experience is shaped by the provocative exigencies of technological planning and control. The enframing thrusts things into the ordering, setting-upon and challenging nature. It also moves the Human-Computer Interactive Art to busy instrumental circumstances, and makes it incline to one side, so-called the tendency of technological Determinism. It means that the Human-Computer Interactive Art is enframed as a part of stockpile of available materials and personnel, and always ready for technological purposes.

The Illusion as the Inversion

The enframing incurs the illusion that operates in concealment, or appears as something it is not. Karl Marx defines that the illusion indicates not the form but the 'inversion' which is originated from a social relation. He analyzed in detail a use-value and an exchange-value of commodity. As a use-value, the form of commodity does not have a mysterious character, and it exists simply as either the result of human labor, or as an object with specific use. As soon as it takes over an exchange-value in the social relation (like a market place), an enigmatic character arises in the form of a commodity. It is the illusion that conceals a direct relation between people, that a material relation between things takes on supernatural power as an idol or divine incarnation.

To explain the illusion, Marx referred to two metaphors of 'Camera Obscura' and 'Phantasmagoria'. The former compares the illusion with an upside-down image as in an optical device, and the latter reconsiders the phantasmagoria show that produced optical illusions as a form of popular entertainment in the nineteenth century. In 1867, *Capital* Volume 1., Marx described the illusion that "there is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form (*dies phantasmagorische form*) of a relation between things".[2] The optical metaphor reflects on the spirit of the age and has relevance to the aesthetic discussion of the Human-Computer Interactive Art, since it is an artistic model for the function of illusion like the deception of the consciousness and senses, the confusing of reality and fantasy.

Artistic Evocation of Illusion

The phantasmagoria was the art of optical illusion using technology to manipulate the light and dark. It was produced chiefly by means of the magic lantern in a darkened theater.[3] The darkened theater first appeared in

Richard Wagner's opera of Bayreuth at the nineteenth century. In the concept of total art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), Wagner applies the illusion with the art that is caused by the arrangement of space for the spectators and the optic or acoustic faculties. The darkened auditorium accompanied by various visual and aural devices as well as lighting technology evoke unaccustomed and uncanny experiences. He believed that it led the audience to the universal of art whereby "the most *universal* is at that time the only real, free, the only universally *intelligible* Art-work".[4]

The Human-Computer Interactive Art is the heir of Wagner's project which frees the illusion by using technology to approach the essence of art. No doubt the essence of illusion as a false concept remains the same always, but the means of making the art an illusion are now much more powerful than the past. It even seems to get out of hand. This gap between the essence and means accelerates the illusion of technology. Human-Computer Interactive Art pertains to a false concept that the most advanced technology creates great work. Some artists sometimes find themselves not searching for an essence of art but following a fashion of technology. It is an illusion of the power of technology.

Demystification of the Illusion of Technology

The demystification of the illusion commands the self-affirmation. In practice, Rudolf Arnheim remarks a wider insight that "the stationary images allow us to explore the world in its being, while the transitory ones let us follow what takes place in sequence".[5] It is a belief that a significant art-work still exists as the epitome of human nature having an indispensable counterweight, and offers a store of lasting meaning, without which we would be helplessly exposed to the flight of transitory happenings.

As an ontological solution, Heidegger suggests the deconstruction of essence through the aesthetic meditation. He predicated that "if reflection on art does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning", we can witness a flash of it.[6] It reconciles the illusion of technology with a sign for capturing the essence, and implicates a way "to look at scientific enquiry from the perspective of the artist, but to look at from the perspective of life".[7] In the circle of art, technology, and life, what is needed is a practical thinking that sets out from our real life-process, and what has to be changed is not the technology but the illusion.

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1 The definition of technology, however, has been focused on an activity that is about technology in the usual sense of the term, i.e. devices and theirs uses. The receptive aspect reflects a mental attitude for the acceptance and adaptation of the facts including a withholding judgment until we receives it.

2 The phrase translated here as, "the fantastic form" in German is "*dies phantasmagorische form*." Marx, Karl. 1967. *Capital -A Critique of Political Economy* 1, translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: International Publishers, p.72.

3 The Magic lantern invented at the seventeenth century was an optical technology that consisted of a lamp and an arrangement of lenses to display images painted on glass.

4 Richard Wagner, 1993. *The Art-Work of Future and Other works*, translated by William Ashton Ellis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p.194.

5 Rudolf Arnheim. 2000. "The Coming and Going of Images." In *LEONARDO* 33. Cambridge: MIT press, p.168.

6 Martin Heidegger, 2003. "The Question Concerning Technology." In *Philosophy of Technology*, edited by Robert C. Scharff and Val Duesk. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, p. 264.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche. 1999. *Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.192.

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