

## Your Participation Not Required

Machinic Performances

Harry Smoak (qc/ca)

Concordia University  
Ph.D. student  
harrycs@harrysmoak.com

This presentation draws from a behaviorist perspective of artistic activities in relation to theories of cultural development. Insights found here, the author will argue, may be profitably introduced into current discussions considering how new technologies create new problems for research practices regarded experimentally. Proceeding thusly, the author will consider the relevance of this kind of experimentalism for developing new techniques of cultural production, in particular the development of a 'speculative rhetoric' for new media (here considered generously). A number of recent examples will be considered, including those drawn from the author's own artistic work revolving around dynamical and computational media systems.

What follows is a related and previously unpublished statement which coincided with *Your Participation Not Required* (2010):

### **Art has no value.**

What is experience? Experience is that which impinges upon us. What is spontaneous/extra/excess comes from experience, exceeding our concepts, presenting a perceptual discontinuity. This direct experience of difference may actualize an idea, as suggested by Deleuze, by providing the impetus for the invention of new ways of thinking. Or, as is the more probable case, it is subsumed by a kind of "rage to order." In part this is what allows us to be free in certain senses of that word.

Sensory experience is not all-important. Perceptual beliefs are habits or dispositions towards certain patterns of response behavior. These beliefs need not arise from the senses for their causal efficacy. Meaning cannot be dependent on an individual cognitive act alone, however tenacious the will to believe. Nor is value strictly bound with what human actors in particular construct. The usual arguments for and against this form of relativism and its concomitant anthropocentrism contains two assumptions that need to be

dealt with. The first is an assumption that only humans create meaning in the world. The second stems from the view that the only actors are human. Each (theoretically) excludes nonhuman processes from the co-structuring of meaning.

#### **Art has absolutely nothing to do with making the invisible visible.**

Definition alone is not adequate to make an idea clear. A concept must be examined through its relation with practical endeavors. Ideas ought to be tested practically in the course of experience. The thinking in thought has been called an event-disruption, nonsense, excess. What can the new media arts do for thought? A promise of new media lies in our ability to manipulate new forms in order to observe unexpected results. In order to understand something, it must have consequences for ordinary, everyday experience. For thought to move there must first be a living doubt – a hunch that something could or ought to be different. Such a doubt can arise from recalcitrant experience that does not conform with our perceptual expectations, including the private observation of our own behavior. Doubting is not knowing what to believe. It is oriented towards the future. It is logically and historically the first step to an hypothesis which then has to be tested experimentally. This is not always good, or beautiful.

#### **Art has not gotten the philosophy, or the science, it deserves.**

The cultural historian Morse Peckham long ago urged us to concentrate on the “semiotic transformation” of what happens, since “the meaning of a sign is the response to that sign or, to be a touch more precise, is the determination of the appropriate response.” From this proposition Peckham derives three important corollaries that are worth quoting at length here:

(1) Theoretically any sign can elicit all responses [...]; all interpretations are equally valid. (2) Theoretically all signs can, in an individual organism, elicit but a single response. Indeed, in instances of extreme psychosis, that is exactly what can and does happen. Yet behavior that can be subsumed by these two corollaries is extremely rare. (3) Sign response is controlled, and ultimately can be controlled only by force.

If instructions for performance fail to control and stabilize behavior, and if force fails, there is no other recourse than to rhetorical seduction. In contemporary times, this amounts to a reorganization of labor alongside the deployment of technologies for the mobilization and control of affect. Rhetorical seduction (including verbal as well as non-verbal signs) is the only way to circumvent force. The science of this speculative rhetoric, prefigured over a century ago by Charles Sanders Peirce, has yet to be developed.

#### **Art is our least and greatest hope.**

The recent performative turn, a move away from representation and towards a process-oriented view of interpreting events has, for the cultural moment,

established momentum in a wide ranging group of disciplines within the institutions as a way of conceiving and analyzing knowledge production. I have come to agree with an alternative implication that signs are less performative than regulatory, and failing that, persuasive. For my purposes now, it is enough to say that rather than view something called Art as a separate and unique or institutionally bound cultural activity, I have found it useful to think, with Peckham, of artistic behavior as another important mode of behavior *in general*, one that is particularly well suited to meet the demands of a lively world.

#### **References**

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