

NEW MEDIA EDUCATION IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

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I would like to look at new media education from the point of view of psychological, professional and social problems.

Is artistic imagination influenced by the medium of expression? Is imagination renewed with new media? I mean new media in general – new technology, new tools? Is talent specific to a medium or is it universal? If we call anybody talented, then his talent will appear anyway, despite technological or social conditions, or not?



Net-Poetry 2, 1997, Nelli Rohtvee, Internet-project, <http://lizard.artun.ee/~nelli/nellinet/net1.html>

I will deal with the issues related to psychological, professional and social matters in art and art education in relation to new media.

1. Psychological problems

One question deals with the identity of the artist in relation to creative means. To what extent is the artist's imagination and thought process "new" because he or she is dealing with new media? Can we say that the artist's thinking renews itself after the emergence of new means of expression, that technology influences artistic expression? Can one say that if someone is talented, then there is no difference in what medium he or she uses? Is talent medium specific or is it universal? Can a talented person break through in any circumstances or does every talent require a certain configuration of conditions and means to blossom?

The artist's chosen medium influences how the artist understands himself. Art mediums are different from the point of view of the self-presentation of the artist, the difference being in how they "take in" and represent the author. Some means and mediums are better for observing and picturing the outer world and others are more as means of contemplation and self-observation. From time to time some

means of use of art mediums take on the parameters of mania or art form. A certain trend and movement emerges during which a floating manifestation is taken by groups of artists and it spreads as a virus.

One could notice manic manifestations in the 1990s when new media and digital technology entered the art scene. Artists were excited and the amount of production was unprecedented. Some works that surprised 10–15 years ago seem ridiculous. But some works that seemed ordinary and too simple with their “boring human problems” seem exciting now. They have stored the time and the people, showing us that irrespective of time and medium art deals with human existential questions.

Elation about the medium is natural when artists are excited about the nature of creative means. Subjective excitement about new means is similar to enjoyment that comes with new clothes, books, a car or a house. It is a time when things seem new, reality seems new and the whole life seems new. This is what factually takes place: the medium, the means and the creative environment that artists use does not only change them and how they see themselves, but also how they see the world.

Here we can recall McLuhan, who wrote that every society and time has its dominant medium – audible, written or visual. Mediums influence how people think of themselves and the world. When people started reading books, an opportunity rose to escape the earlier collective world, where they were connected by sound and sight. Books and new media at the time pulled them from the physical world to the imaginative and mental world.

In this sense art mediums are a means of interpreting the world and one’s self. Using them, artists describe who they are and what the world around them is like. Artistic mediums can be seen as a shield, a screen of sorts and a tunnel, through which the artist sees the external world. The ambivalent function of the medium is obvious as a means of self-reflection – art as a mirror and a window. From this point of view we can describe almost any medium in art history: artists used these mediums to reflect themselves and view the external world.

Still, it seems that the most important parameter of an artist’s identity is motivation, the willingness to be seen in action in his or her own field. To possess skills to say something is always possible, while to obtain willingness to say something is not. It either is or is not. Maybe this is “talent”, without which it is impossible to describe the author? The author’s motivation is this “author’s blood” that makes it possible to separate those who are creators and those who are not.

2. Professional problems

Eternal questions: how qualified should the artist be in technically implementing the medium? How much should he know how to use software and have computer skills to work as an artist and author of new media?

We can ask the same about traditional art. How good of a drawer must a painter be to be a good painter? We can also ask: how much skills and knowledge must a new media artist have so that he could be called a new media professional, a “very good” professional?

How much does an artist have to have skills to express freely and forget the “weight” of technology? It is a question without an answer, the scale is not set. And the criteria are certainly not objective. The usage

of skills is led by the artist's mental preparation, which leads the "dosing" of skills depending on creative needs.

The notion of "new media professional" is kind of pointless, but it could also be seen in a narrower meaning, without ascribing expertise the person in every sub-section. In an ideal case we are dealing with a multi-specialist – and there are few of them. The "multi"-domain contains elements such as sound, video, graphics, hypertext, and programming and if we add cultural competence and economic expertise, we get the attributes of a third millennium artist.

There are several viewpoints in the question of new media and technological competence. First, a lot of works have been created with a simple unique message, which is not so much dressed in means of new media, as it is born using means of new media in a very simple way. New media is not merely a carrier of information; it is also an organic environment where art is born. Take for example Olia Lialina's „IF YOU WANT TO CLEAN YOUR SCREEN“(1996) [1] and Nelli Rohtvee's („Net-Poetry 2“, 1997). [2] Remarkable works of art have been created by top technological specialists and work groups, that "speak to" the universal and the human and are not hermetic, meant for a circle of experts. A fitting example is "Osmosis" (1995) by Char Davies.

3. Social problems

I have dealt with this issue in the article "The Forum of Latera E-Mail Group," [3] which described art social transformations in the Estonian art of the late 90s. Art collided with new "hot" digital mediums. People that had earlier set in the art hierarchy could not find anchoring points. But here one should stress the part of art education and changes taking place in the social environment that influence art education.

If in a political and economic sense it is accustomed to view the last 20 years as "liberation" and "renewal" then in a mental and social sense one set of rules has replaced the other. From the viewpoint of eternity there is no estimated valence. The main parameters that describe the social set of rules are three domains: the distribution of information, resources and reputation.

All of these we have seen before but the present society is different, as these have been remarkably integrated with art education. The same has happened in the art life as a whole. This integration means that the fight in this field has obtained a meaning of existential fight. The most important goal of achievement is the ensuring of meal and survival. To observers this seems as a specialized, professional or pedagogical activity; as a very refined, thoughtful and cultural activity.

In the landscape of information gathering and reputation creation the fight is being fought over guaranteeing maximal resources for one's own activity. The connection is definitely direct, but not absolute. The borders exist because whatever highly reputed pedagogical initiative does not automatically serve maximal resources; will not find reward nor living space from society; if its existence even remotely damages the interests and territories of existing artists.

There seems to be space but it is not handed out. At some point a situation of power play emerges – who is after whom? Who has a louder voice and a better lobby has a better chance of winning. The content is of secondary importance. The persuasion of the public and the deciders of one's advantages is the core of the game. Activity and aggressiveness can achieve a lot on this level.

The entrance of new means of creation to the field of art education in this way is characterised by three everlasting spheres where change and changelessness can be noticed: the psychological, professional and social aspect. These are the self-determination questions of the author, the questions of defining the level of professional activity and the social influence to the previous. Definition battles in the field of the creation of meaning in society directly affect the artist's identity and the assessment of the quality of his or her actions.

References and Notes:

1. *Olia Lialina, "IF YOU WANT TO CLEAN YOUR SCREEN," <http://www.entropy8zuper.org/possession/olialia/olialia.htm> (accessed June 29, 2011).*
2. *Nelli Rohtvee, "Net-Poetry 2," <http://lizard.artun.ee/~nelli/nellinet/net1.html> (accessed June 29, 2011).*
3. *Raivo Kelomees, "The Forum of Latera E-Mail Group," in *The Social Profiles of Estonian Art*, ed. Johannes Saar, 24–55 (Tallinn, Center for Contemporary Arts, 2003).*