



Welcome to the conference
Real-Time: Showing Art in the Age of New Media

This month and next, the CRUMB discussion list is hosting debate on the conference theme, and here are some extracts which might help inform the conference. At the end of the debate, further extracts will be edited into a text file on the CRUMB web site. Anyone is welcome to join the discussion: www.crumbweb.org

Yours, the CRUMB team, 18th September 2009

Subject: Re: September 2009: update and "Real-Time: Showing Art in the Age of New Media"
From: Michael Connor
Date: Fri, 4 Sep 2009 10:59:39 -0400

Charlie,

Greetings from Eastern Standard time. I like your point about the work of art as ontological mirror: [...] But with regard to the idea of 'continued resistance', I think it's fair to say that time-based art is extremely successful in mainstream institutions. I'm not sure you're drawing the line in the right place; perhaps the real binary is not between object and non-object but between open and closed, or object and system.

Michael

Subject: Re: September 2009: update and "Real-Time: Showing Art in the Age of New Media"
From: "Gere, Charlie"
Date: Fri, 4 Sep 2009 16:47:09 +0100

Michael

When Christiane Paul, Jemima Rellie and I curated the FEEDBACK show at Laboral in Gijon a couple of years ago we focussed 'on art responsive to instructions, input, or its environment'. This was partly to be able to exclude video etc... from our considerations without getting bogged down in medium-based definitions of the work we wanted to represent, such as 'digital' work

On the model of Gregory Bateson's definition of information as 'the difference that makes a difference' we can think of truly time-based work as involving a temporal difference or deferral that makes a difference (I keep trying to write the derridean neologism, difference with a final 'a' rather than 'e', for difference/deferral, but it keeps getting changed back to difference). In other words, unless there is some kind of event, something that happens, that arrives, that is open to the future, rather than mere repetition, it is not time-based [...]

Charlie Gere

From: Barbara_London
Subject: [NEW-MEDIA-CURATING] checking in
Date: 6 September 2009 20:01:00 BST

[...] So much innovation happens around inter-disciplinary activity, and there is as much going on today as thirty years ago. The main difference is that electronic tools are less expensive, more versatile, and ubiquitous. Most museums are quite wired up, with short commissioned videos or audio tours, artist interviews, and relevant music offered in downloadable formats to mobile phones and PDAs. Hip to Twitter and the Internet, museum-goers will stop and readily engage with whatever media is offered in the gallery (art and educational.) Sure there are museum and gallery visitors who only pause for a nanosecond, but there are plenty of others who become involved and even return. [...] I agree that delivering (and mediating) the artwork to the viewer is the reason the institution is there. Some art takes ages to work through a museum bureaucracy. But some makes it in very fast.

Data clouds are a recent approach to "preservation." Three institutions have pondered some of the same issues. You can check out the Tate/MoMA/SFMOMA web site <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/mediamatters/> [...]

Barbara London

Subject: Recap: September 2009: "Real-Time: Showing Art in the Age of New Media"
From: Sarah Cook
Date: Mon, 7 Sep 2009 18:50:04 +0100

Hi CRUMB list readers

[...] for the purposes of those just joining up to this discussion, here is my rough and ready re-cap of some of the points so far. [...] Apologies for lousy punctuation and the subjective sound-bite-style editing of what continues to be a rich and varied discussion:

The discussion started with Charlie Gere quoting Michael Fried on the question of presentness in the work of art, making reference to ideas of "the perpetual creation of itself", or inexhaustibility and of endlessness as 'presentiment of infinite duration'. He suggested that time-based is determined by time of spectatorship.

Sally Jane Norman replied that she remains very un-easy with this distinction between "atemporal object-based" versus "temporal time-based" arts, something which kept coming up all week.

Josephine Bosma's question for a definition of time-based arts pointed to one which said that time-based arts are "art works that are sequenced through time, that change as we view them, and that may be ephemeral." She added that for her it is "not just about viewing time, but also very much about running time. ... If it were just about viewing time, every artwork would be time based."

Charlie agreed in response and asked if the potentially infinite time-based art work is as much of a means of denying death as an object (which continued a subthread in the discussion about theatre and death, and repetition, to put it glibly).

Johannes Birringer's insight was that "it seems it would be interesting to assume that in Chicago in the 80s and 90s, before the museum or the art world had to deal with "real time" and interactive art", the time based arts were happening (taught and developed, curated) in the School as compositional experiments with durational... forms, or microforms ... and architectural installation forms..." He then brought in the question of the audience as inter-actor, and as contingency for the definition of the work as time-based.

Michael Connor pointed out it isn't so much a line between the object and non-object (i.e. video projection?) but between object and system, and whether that system is open or closed to interaction/participation. This seems crucial for ongoing discussions about how to exhibit process-based art. In the 'definition' discussion that followed the term 'event-based' was proffered.

Curt Cloninger indicated ... that "The medium itself doesn't have to be "generative" (random seed software, aleatoric instructions) in order for it to create an "emergent" experience. A "static" object can create an emergent experience. Indeed, all objects (art or otherwise) are always already doing this."

Roger Malina brought us back to the question facing curators by reminding that "unfortunately there are purely structural (see network theory) realities that make institutions in general resistant to change, and the larger the institution the longer the time constants..."

Simon Biggs posited that "If museums, and the artworld they occupy, are going to change they will not do so out of their own actions. If they change it will be because of some form of irresistible alternate model emerging."

Neal White came back to the idea of the 'event structure' (something Beryl and I have been writing about in relation to curatorial models of exhibition/presentation of new media art), something I hope we can pick up on again in this discussion.

Armin Medosch reminded us again that the key difficulty in engaging in discussions like this (and indeed that we had in structuring this conference) is that it is "somehow paradoxical to stress the difference [between art and new media art] and then complain about not being understood or overlooked." He stressed the importance of "understanding media art ... in its historic specificity." We really hope we can do this throughout this discussion, and welcome your comments on historically context-specific curating of art.

Rosanne Altstadt picked up on this too, that our 'straw man' distinction of pitting video on one side and the internet on the other is problematic to start with. Her comment, which I loved, is that "a work which is social by nature (as is Internet, interactivity, social systems etc) can benefit greatly from a certain sociability in its curatorial presentation." I want to hear more about strategies for this.

and lastly Barbara London usefully noted from her experience that, "Some art takes ages to work through a museum bureaucracy. But some makes it in very fast" - suggesting a medium-irrelevance, perhaps? [...]

Thanks, Sarah

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Subject: Time versus control
From: Jon Ippolito
Date: Sun, 13 Sep 2009 11:24:27 -0400

Hi CRUMBers,

Thanks to Charlie Gere et. al for starting this discussion and to Curt Cloninger for reminding us that an archive, like any form of memory, doesn't really safeguard artifacts from the effects of time, but imposes its own changes instead. [...]

Recognizing the importance of control to institutions like galleries and museums, many artists have tried to subvert the expectations that attend particular devices, contexts, or genres. Some of the most important new media artworks wrest control from a manufacturer or curator to a viewer or participant. [...]

In the age of asynchronous media and remote presence, even live performances can strain the boundaries of a "time-based" designator. Perhaps in response to suffering through one too many performances where viewers couldn't get up and leave, MTAA posted online their One-Year Performance Video--a re-enactment of performance artist Sam Hsieh's year of isolation in a small room, but with a difference. 1YPV enables viewers to time-shift their experience of the year-long project, tracking the amount of time they watch M.River brush his teeth or T.Whid stare at the wall but allowing them to pause and return to the performance at their leisure. From a curatorial perspective, I think it's less important how long the thing lasts than whether you give people access to the pause and fast-forward buttons.

Cheers,

Jon [...] <http://thoughtmesh.net/>

From: beryl.graham@sunderland.ac.uk
Subject: [NEW-MEDIA-CURATING] Time - another running summary
Date: 17 September 2009 13:52:18 BST

Dear List,

As I often am, I'm humbled by just how smart the people on this list are, and how generous with their knowledge. As we run up to conference, here's a stab at another running summary, and first a comment about the aims of the conference:

Armin Medosch rightly pointed out the tension between wanting the specific history and phenomenological differences of new media art to be understood, and wanting not to be overlooked by the mainstream, and that's a tension that CRUMB has often explored. Our tactics have often been to build bridges between what might be familiar to general contemporary art curators (live art, conceptual art, activist art) and defining what might be truly different about new media, thus trying to avoid what Matt Fuller has called "cut and paste conceptualism". I hope we've tried to do this with this conference, we have invited both general contemporary art curators, and new media specialists and asked them to find common ground, as well as very accurately define areas of difference, in order to understand where new knowledge must be applied. I'm really impressed how knowledge from the different fields of live art, performance, and video are being tested against new media art here, and hopefully that will also happen at the conference.

I'm particularly grateful to Sarah for posting her summary, and to Curt Cloninger for posting his '9 kinds of time' - these accurate definitions and categories of time are very useful indeed. In an attempt to summarise recent posts and to map Curt's typology onto the concerns of the conference, I've arranged these under some headings which embrace the subjective:

TIME AND THE AUDIENCE

Curt: >1. The time it takes the actual media art object to play out (as Jon Thompson noted -- a decaying sculpture, a perpetually updated data cloud). Smithson's work really problematizes this kind of time. The art collective Spurse has been exploring "deep time/rapid time," considering geological formations over time. Also categorically problematic is aleatoric software (like Brian Eno's "77 Million Paintings") which perpetually runs with enough generative variability to keep from ever "looking" like the same thing twice (although arguably it is performing the same perpetual function at an algorithmic level).

Curt: >2. The Cartesian clock time that the discrete viewer/user actually spends viewing/interacting with the work in the space (three seconds, 30 minutes, or whatever).

Curt: >3. The more subjective Bergsonian time (analog, non-digital, qualitative not quantitative) that the discrete viewer spends affectively experiencing the work (could involve personal prior memories, could involve the work coming to mind later after leaving the space). This is related to the Cartesian clock time, but by no means solely determined by it.

Issues of audience are consistent areas of 'difference' for new media art, especially if the audience takes

on the role of participant, or even curator. This can be a challenge to general contemporary art curators, who may have been content to leave any ideas of audience, affect or experiential concerns to the education department. Curators may even have great suspicion of, or disdain for anything concerning 'audience studies'. Lizzie Muller is one of the few people to have formally studied artists' intent, and audience experience, in curating interactive new media art. Some time ago on this list, Spencer Roberts discussed Bergsonian time in relation to interactive works. So far, those from live art, sound art and performance have suggested delicately differentiated ideas of liveness (Johannes Goebel, Sally Jane Norman, Marc Tuters, Josephine Bosma). What might other curators tell us about audiences' experience of time?

TIME AND ART INSTITUTIONS

Curt: >5. Archival time -- how the work is archived, collected, subsequently displayed, gradually folded into an art historical canon.

Curt: >6. The evolutionary time of art criticism and art historical scholarship (and its overlap with philosophy, science, culture theory, etc.)

Curt: >9. Institutional evolutionary time -- the time it takes art institutions to come to terms with and incorporate new media forms (or new conceptual approaches to old media forms).

In discussing 'Life Cycles' of new art, the tension mentioned above is very apparent. According to Gartner Inc.'s Hype Cycle, the Peak of Inflated Expectations is followed by a Trough of Disillusionment before the more gradual Slope of Enlightenment reaches the Plateau of Acceptance. Barbara London has mentioned here the different rates of progress, and has also elsewhere mentioned the tension placed on curators to simultaneously do The Novelty Hustle for the latest thing, versus the long term considerations of collecting, which is deeply linked to the development of critical art histories.

Whilst this conference does NOT specifically concern the technicalities of preservation and conservation, Charlie Gere, Neal White and Jon Ippolito have all discussed on this list the importance of new media works entering collections, and another tension between 'fixing the work to death' versus some gleefully nihilist destruction (Simon Biggs) is explored. Lizzie Muller's mention of her work on David Rokeby is interesting in this context, for it combines methods concerning documentation of works in collections, and an 'experiential' approach linked to 'TIME AND THE AUDIENCE'.

TIME AND THE ARTIST

Curt: >7. The evolutionary time of an art practice throughout an artist's life.

It has been said that art institutions do not collect artworks, but artists, so in relation to the heading above, then the hype about the 'newness' and the Novelty Hustle militates against collecting mature bodies of work as they develop. For artists, there is also the different new media time-scale of 'versioning' which may confuse the collecting strategies of art institutions. As Jon Thomson says: "Speaking as an artist, I tend to find 'variability' of an artwork (as already mentioned by Curt) one of the more useful prisms through which artworks can be characterised, understood and ultimately preserved."

Would any other artists on the list care to comment?

TIME AND THE CURATOR

Curt: >4. The time that the entire show or project runs.

Curt: >8. Curatorial research time.

Gavin Wade will be discussing this at the conference, and CRUMB research has consistently identified that the duration of shows is very important for new media art- whether concerning the evolution of participatory works during a show, or the suitability of festival formats for 'works-in-progress'. Would any other curators care to comment?

Yours,

Beryl

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