THE AGE OF NEW COMMUNICATION – THE SCREENERS PROJECT

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Abstract

The technological revolution which legitimised the everyday use of computers shows that we are increasingly moving from textual cultural expression to visual/hypertextual. Following books, the Internet has become the new data-medium invention involving a new type of literacy, and it still remains relatively under-researched. Aside from art, new media connected with technical advances has the potential to transform the culture of mass society by means of easily available visual data with various purposes and functions. This contraposition of postmodernity and technologism is also significant in analogue artwork because it determines a new approach to working with visual information as well as changed attitudes towards means of expression in art education.

Contemporary life in our globalised society has already been manifested in two ways: everyday 'biological life offline' in the present without devices and 'virtual life online' though screens. The Screeners project is inspired by David Cronenberg´s screenplays about our obsession with new technologies, in terms of our desire for something new, and the threat of us becoming dominated by these technologies. In his work, Cronenberg also attempts to depict the transition from humanity to post-humanity up to robotics. Everyday situations contemporarily manifested through frequent use of various screens (smartphones, tablets, TV-screens, computers) might already signify the end of traditional communication. Moreover, mobile phones enable us to switch our minds into another virtual reality within a single moment. A growing number of people are increasingly beginning to find it natural to integrate their 'self' as an additional new virtual identity into their life. My focus is on my students born after the year 2005.

Keywords: Extended reality, internet, virtual representation, identity, communication.

1. Basic characteristics and objectives

Biological life offline (life in the present without any screens) and virtual life online (digital and with screens) if we evaluate and compare them with each other, we can see the difference. I use the perspective of variability (identity), simulation, timelessness, representation, and specific self-presentation and self-realisation. I am interested in how my students reflect the difference in the way they experience life though their screens (devices) and their life and communication in the present (presence without mobile phones). What does communication online allow students to do, and what are they allowed to do via personal communication?

How can we currently examine our life? 'What we usually call reality is a "cut". But is the reality in which we live the only possible one? The same material (everyday life) can be transformed into different versions of reality.' (Bourriard, 2004).

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Virtual self versus personal presentation

In the theoretical part, I will conceptualise 'self-presentation' helped by the theories of Jean Boudrillard. I will employ the theoretical framework of *Simulacra and Simulation* and categorise it in individual internet communication platforms and networks. I will focus on the 'avatar' concept as well as the types of virtual identities users can customise themselves and the way they work with this identity. I am also interested in how new tools can be used for the realization of a 'new type of self-presentation' or self-realisation.

2.2. Human–user

Easy-to-understand 'joy' and instant satisfaction as a specific simulative platform, which every user can realise through a variety of software applications and phone games, is aimed at the contemporary technologically accelerated society. Every day, something new is invented which is better and which makes life easier. A study that has already been conducted in the area of neuroscience is trying to warn us against 'digital dementia' (Manfred Spitzer). New technologies are changing our habits and thinking, and they influence our social values and preferences. It will also be necessary to address the concept of neoliberalism and the shades of modern concepts of capitalism, which are often referred to in contemporary philosophical essays attempting to capture the 'expanding' present in its virtual representation; for example, in the theories of William Storr, Alfie Bown, and Marcus Gilroy-Ware.

2.3. The nature of new media

The nature of new media is examined in detail in the theoretical framework of Lev Manowich, who focuses additionally on specific axiological outputs which I will employ in my work as well. It is certainly also interesting to realise how new media and technology reflect a certain human essence. Based on the theories of Palo Fabo, it is possible to say that despite being a machine, the 'thinking' and operations of a computer are a thoughtful and realised overcoming of human limits by humans themselves, regardless of how computers are used.

3. Research questions

From the axiological perspective of our two-sided contemporary world, which values biological life offline and virtual life online stand in opposition? Each one of them has different rules. Which rules from the virtual life come to light in everyday direct communication? What is the difference between these two poles? What are students learning from their 'extended and virtual reality'? Can the experience from the virtual reality be transferred into common life, and in what way? How can we examine social change in art education and in students' artwork? Which social aspects can we talk about if we explore this area?

4. Research process

Within the media education classes (integrated into art education), I have already conducted a research probe. Students were given an assignment to create a mental map on the topic 'online virtual world with a screen' and 'biological world without a device'. I was interested in the actual situation regarding the use of digital devices, whether using the internet, social networks, or games. I was interested in seeing what values would emerge as part of the assignment.

5. Survey

I summed up the values which appear in mental maps for each topic separately. For the axiological evaluation of the mutual discourse of two opposing subjects **reality** (a representative of biological life) and **online** (virtual life) I was searching for symbolised values which can be contraposed against each other. I'm still collecting visual data from mental maps.

From the perspective of the prism of the research question, even a seemingly simple task displays aspects or moments which I include in the research. For example, the strong integration of younger students' personal Facebook profiles into their real lives when completing the 'false identity' assignment. Or, when conducting a 3D modelling project 'My Room, My Space', my colleague and I were surprised by the natural presence of many screens in these physical models. In many of them, they even replaced the windows (window as 'window').

6. Conclusion

My research is still in the process of qualitative evaluation. The aim of this study is to portray the difference between life in the virtual world behind screens and life without screens. Some theoretical predictions envision a transition to the 'singularity', while others theorise the current accelerated technological progress as a social experiment with a big question mark. It is nonetheless clear that the intergenerational communication gap is becoming ever wider. The development of technology and media is also influencing the process of learning and education.

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