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NOT new media art

Abstract

Following a decade of involvement in curating and producing art projects which engage with technology, alternative distribution and production methods, and art experiences outside of traditional gallery spaces, I still find the term 'new media art' unacceptable and difficult to speak about. In fact I find any preface to the word 'art' unnecessary, which is why I have set up an organization which works with artists across the board and whose core aim is to transgress disciplinary boundaries and work across a range of contexts. If we take the term 'new media' to stand for more than just the medium itself but for an area which, informed by technological possibilities introduces new ways of thinking about presentation, distribution and access, then I would argue that all art is 'new media art' as all art carries within itself the technological thinking of its time but not necessarily in ways that are immediately visible. So for the purpose of avoiding what is in my opinion a meaningless term, in my presentation I will just speak about ART in relation to the terms listed above.

Electra is often perceived as a 'media arts' organization, but we very deliberately work across all available contexts and media – and are not particularly interested in finding out what 'media art' may mean in the process. However, it is true that even though our projects have never been determined by the medium itself, our funding has. In order to fund our projects we do need to categorise our area of operation (for the benefit of box ticking). Since I have never met an artist who refers to him/herself as working in one medium only (other than when filling in funding application forms) at Electra we let conversations with artists and other production partners shape the final outcome.

So in this talk I would rather discuss terms like 'context', 'community' 'belonging', 'accessibility' and 'distribution' across contemporary art in the widest sense, focusing on projects which I believe bring with them new ways to think about art production and consumption. In my experience these are the elements that determine curatorial and production processes and the final output. For me the term 'new media' is irrelevant– it is the art that is doing the radical boundary-crossing and in most cases good art will carry within it useful strategies, discoveries of new media, science and technology, without needing to categorise itself as 'new media art'.

As we were asked not to focus on our own projects for this talk but to talk about initiatives we see as interesting models, I will speak about projects (and curators, producers, organizations, artists) which I find inspiring and exciting at the moment and whose approaches I believe may have a lasting impact on contemporary art across the board. These may not be directly plucked out of the 'new media context' but nevertheless each of them encapsulates elements that the new media discourse continues to engage with. I will discuss works by Christoph Schlingensiefel, Reena Spaulings, Club In the Shadow, Emma Hedditch and others.