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The Social Event Machine

Abstract

This presentation looks at the daily grammar of the event. It calls for reflective, concentrated, dialogical, experimental media art events that have agency. Organizers. Who conceptualizes and facilitates? It is not merely curators who are at work. Artist, turned cultural producers, are equally among the initiators. The cultural producer blurs the lines between the artist, activist, theorist, and curator. She may also teach wearing all of these hats in rotating order. Cultural producers can generate platforms such as mailing lists, websites, and independently organized exhibitions to circulate their ideas and set up stages from which they can interact with an audience. The power of the media art curator is somewhat decentralized but she is still important as expert and cultural legitimizer. She can contextualize projects as part of culturally discursive currents or historical processes. When I look into the eye of the event organizer I see writers, artists, and engineers.

Event formats. In his book "Discourse Networks" the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler examines the influence of the materiality of machines of communication (e.g. the typewriter) on the formation of discourses. The syntax of the social event machine sculpts its content. Over the past year there were many experiments with conferencing formats that attempted to escape the predicaments of soporific paperism and the traditional scenario of top-down keynote proceedings and panelism. Who would have thought that there are actually experts in the audience?

Organizers need to realize that "patrons" can't just be stashed away in the cinematic dark of the auditorium. Equally, presenters need to offer more than new media keywords du jour, performativity of ideas and style. Affect should not rule over content. It matters if presenters have something to say indeed. Too many simultaneous sessions irritate the audience. Each time when people get together at these events there is an enormous potential. Such latent opportunity gets lost at most discursive events. Our conferences can put a subject on the map with or without institutional funding. We meet resource scarcity with self-organized cultural activities! The social event machine should only kick into gears driven by acute urgency allowing for vivid exchange, inspiration, and focus! We don't preach a new event dogma! What we do offer are a few extra adjectives for the grammar of the event.