

ERIG

Jack Anderson

Jack Anderson

FoAM Valuator: Market Development for New Media Art and Commercial Sales

Valuator is a study of the contemporary art market, focusing on marketing strategies for new media art sales. The most innovative and challenging of contemporary art practices are not transacted in the mainstream market for current art. To have agency within these spheres of trade, the results of new media art disciplines will require a redefinition of what is deemed collectable, and how the price mechanics in fine art are circulated and the preservation instruments used to build the heritage trust necessary for the endorsement of future beneficiaries. Valuator is a qualitative-analysis safari into the wilds of economic value construction in the arts.

The economic impulse is individualistic, the cultural impulse is collective.

—Throsby 2001

A question: Why is there a resistance to transacting the exchange

of new media art?

Perhaps there is a resistance to, a distain for or even a meddling with economic considerations of value in the very computational processes of new media art. Beyond the scale of a "hostile worlds" divide between social and economic valuations ascribed by neo-classical perspectives on transaction, the essential onus on ownership to provide a context for trade breaks down when developments are freely exchanged and constantly evolving between creators to give them greater capacities to enlighten and inspire audiences to interact and potentially become contributors as well. What evidence is there for this claim?

Point 1: Economics of New Media Arts Organizations

Because there are subsidies for artists, they must all be rich. That would be logical if the providence of these benefits did not encourage more artists to expend greater energy competing for less than if they could if they were to be working from a profit motive. The resultant scarcity of these protections encourage the providers to seek quantifiable results from processes that once defined become painfully

stale; nearly useless.

For example:

Say that I were to patent the process for a video installation work similar to that of a classic and recognized artist such as... anyone, Bill Viola. You buy a little black book, place all of the pertinent information about how the installation will work, what makes it reproducible and unique, how it may be constructed and under what contexts. You seal this in an envelope and send it to the office with a cheque and self-addressed stamped envelope and you wait your six to eight weeks for reply. At the end of this time, you have your formula that no one can use without your permission, you hold your stated and authorized claim to uniqueness and you've killed all interpretation, imitation and substitutions of your work. What a bummer. Now no one else will want to share with you because you could sue them if they mishandled your process.

This is all familiar terrain to the open source community. Its implications to the art market and the protectionist nature of, say, authentication of an "original" painting created on the open market,

versus a freely available instruction set for making your own Bill Violaesque installation created in a protected and subsidized market, can make an accountant attempting to quantify the results of a new media grant out-and-out bonkers. What value is there in a painting if it must always be free for now and forever? None. What value is there in a formula or a computation if it cannot be rendered? None-ish.

So what do you do if you want money to keep on devising new ways to stay out of the job market? Find another form of validation that increases your value from: person that tinkers with bits and wires and the odd materials, to: a researcher/developer of ways by which bits and wires and such can be constructed (open source, of course), or perhaps an actual researcher and/or compiler of the trends in construction and development or even of the nature of the market for such stuff (such as me). This is all well and good until the value of doing research et al. exceeds the value of actual construction, and more effort is given over to describing the tinker than the tink itself.

We quickly come to realize that it becomes an issue of financial returns. Organizations and organized individuals that want to sustain their presence in a marketplace where value of work (or its actuarial

value) is arbitrary, but valuation of the compilation and description of work is still rooted squarely in the scurrilously borrowed leitmotifs of academia... well, that is a bit harsh, but you see my point. And this in fact brings us to point 2.

Point 2: Valuation – Price Circulation

Economists have scratched their heads to come up with an explanation for Yves Klein. Even ArtForum's Thomas McEvilley (thank you, Wiki) has classified him as "enigmatic." When he says his work is worth the cheque which was burnt for it, what you pay for is what you get. This is the problem with New Media Art. Research never pays for itself. Research creates a dividend, which if successful, gives rise to greater creations. Most researchers will tell you that most research is utterly useless. That is why it is so hard. And that is why it is so hard to fund. Prices in goods with a low material cost can fetch a pretty penny when the transaction is unique (a Picasso – scratch that – a Vermeer). The same can even be applied when the good is ephemeral but the desire for a transaction remains high. Contracting for a service, such as a back massage or a snippet of code, has similar tenets, but differs in respect to what that service means to the provider... and for how long

that service must be rendered, and what that means when it begins to crowd out what you would really like to be doing – which is tinkering around with your bits and wires.

The hedonistic price function for new media art (sorry about this one) is a hedonism. In the French Academy of painting, a contract for work was done by the square... I'm not sure what they used before metric, but that is what it is – a price metric. "I would like (x) units of a canvas painted in a moody style of me looming over the fireplace." You set your prices according to your pay grade, which was determined by your reputation. Your reputation depended on who you had offended (or forgotten to offend), and how often people were willing to fork over versus your ability to churn out genius strokes. From this fairly reasonable approximation of worth a system evolved that allowed a collector to determine present and possible future value of your work and decide if it was worth a second mortgage.

Prices circulate in a closed system which is why good galleries make it so damn hard for you to even get a catalogue. New Media artists think in terms of budgets, labor, assembly, etc. but really have no idea what their work is worth. Even if they consider this process a service

that they render unto the world, there is a moment when they probably wish that they had just stayed at home and read a good book on their Kindle. It's easy to set standards for coding, but it is difficult to ascribe a value to a code that you might or might not use in a whole slew of endeavors.

So, as with anything that is more headache than it is worth, it inevitably becomes someone else's problem.

Point 3: Preservation and Heritage

Who represents the artist's needs? And more importantly why? I was shocked to discover that a museum I admired (by proximity more than anything else), the Centraal Musea in Utrecht, The Netherlands, was revealed to have the generous budget of close to 1% of its funding for the acquisition and presentation of new art. This, I was told by the director, was a great success and the result of dedicated leadership by its competent and thoughtful staff. I am probably wrong about that, but before a telephone call is made to the lawyers, we can use that figure as an illustration of how and why it is in their interests (and in the

interests of every other institution of contemporary cultural display) to figure out how to make new media art pay for itself. If this new media were to get out into the world willy nilly, and without the authoritative stamp of the gatekeepers, this 1% would become irrelevant and be taken away for the acquisition of new roads, tanks or god forbid, Public Art.

There are real economic benefits for institutions to create labels for value and to determine ways to preserve that value for as long as possible.

Since the market for new media is largely a protected, subsidy-driven marketplace, the dealer is put to pasture and value becomes the domain of the curator. It is hard to put forth the cash as a private individual to pay for the promotion of a new media artist when your main clientele are institutions that share a budget with the same ministry that provided the artist their funds.

When whizkids (american for wunderkind, I think) nestle in their caves carving out code on their computational devices and bring them out into the light to share with their ilk, they work with what is available

or preferable and slay the dragon of the moment. All victories have value, but the stories that remain are those that can be told unto myth. An Altair 8800 is a mythic device, but hardly much more than a dusty box with a few broken led lights that intermittently flash after hours of manic button pushing (to tell the truth, I'm not really certain if it even had buttons). If your life's work was fed into this machine and the only one who could turn it on was the retired FORTRAN engineer, aka the janitor, who is definitely NOT a member of the curatorial staff, then those bleeps and buzzings will forever be lost to the ether. With important words like "emulation" and "migration" an entire industry of preservationists is born. The whizkid that develops without a good map for future travelers will be turned away from all sorts of opportunities to sell out if they can't make these gatekeepers "get it." So, for now, the major impediment to valuation for the New Media artist is to convince people who want to invest in what you do that they will be able to reproduce your dragon at a retrospective... if you can get so lucky.

Point 4: Marketing Values and Development Strategies

I know that this will date me. Not because I am so old, but because the movie that is a hallmark in an entire industry of collective

consciousness pushery is about to be released and I am going to use a quote from one of the legends in it to illustrate my point: "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose" – Janis Joplin. The movie is about Woodstock. I'm not going to go see it, but I don't hold it against you if you do. Anyone at this point is likely to start packing their bags and toss every technical tool but their iPhone/Commodore 64. Do not despair, there are many other ways to get what you want.

The creepy world of commercial. Japan has for some time been the source of outlandish vending machines, silicone love dolls and reality TV shows that would in the Western World be considered great art. But in Japan, these useless gadgets and media sell. And generally these items are made to an impeccable standard that we dedicate to high end automobiles and espresso machines. Out of this curious culture has arisen the scandalous, but strangely appealing Device Art phenomena. Beautiful objects that do nothing useful but give pleasure have a place in this world. For every person that tinkers with wires and bits, it is seductive to think that somewhere somehow there is a firm out there that can cast the shell for what is a really good concept out of 6061-t6 aluminum alloy with a hot pink recycled rubber pedestal. Is it art? I don't know. But don't let that dissuade anyone. It will be pretty

and pretty can attract those poor dealers that have so far been shut out of the game.

Sustainable is a dirty word. And playing in dirt can be fun and educational and as of now, timely. Farmers are the first people to take innovative ideas and make life from it. My cat with a simple camera attached to his collar could probably make a better video than most of what I made in art school and so it isn't much of a stretch to consider that the world we have around us is the best canvas in which we can paint. The DIY culture and the transformation of how we make art so that it is as friendly as the way we live (or would like to live) has surfeit opportunities to cross-pollinate with new media culture. I know that this is what you know, but I'm just beginning to realize this and you will just have to bear with us stragglers for a while longer.

And to conclude with a fragment. Making money and creating value often overlap.

The rest of the world has known this since Bartertown. Plugging into or devising your own scheme for self-determination can free you from the yoke of depression. When THE CHURCH had decided that it was

not ok to use prostitutes and catamites as models, the swashbuckling Caravaggio relied on the protection of the powerful Del Monte (not related to the banana). Estranged new media artists have made modest integrations into PACBELL, XEROX PARC and even Brussel's fallen Starlab. There are still possibilities to be self-determining within such a framework, but you should probably talk with someone who has been there first.

Royalties, Financial Instruments, Auctions, and Reputation-based exchanges are also ripe for leverage. Many of these possibilities preclude putting your source out to pasture, but the creative commons (CC) has given us a mighty shield to protect our interests and let our brethren look inside the box. The more you look into the barren minds of economists and statisticians, the more freedoms you can find in their dismal science. Creativity can happen with more than bits and wires. And funds may be found in more than a grant application. That said, I will be spending much of the rest of this week filling out one of those.

If you would like to contact me about my research with FoAM I have
gobs of convoluted data and discourse that might garner your attention.
Please feel free: jack anderson <velo665@yahoo.com>

Although the “guild for Reality integrators and generators” may have been active for centuries, since November 2006 six cultural organisations have begun to open the doors of the guild. The current gRig members share a mutual purpose; to mix separate realities, as well as bring whole new realities into existence. They are committed to research and create situations in hybrid (or mixed) reality, where digital media and physical materials, objects and spaces are increasingly intertwined. It is on these fuzzy edges that experimental technology and contemporary culture amplify each other’s potentials. We have found these edges to be the most fertile ground for innovative social and cultural advances, in which the Guild for Reality Integrators and Generators can be best called into service.

gRig sites 2006-2009

FoAM (Belgium) is a transdisciplinary laboratory committed openness, resilience and a holistic approach to life. FoAM seeks out and connects people in the interstitial spaces between professional and cultural boundaries, encouraging them to mix realities of art and science, digital and physical, nature and technology, adopting the motto - “grow your own worlds”. <http://fo.am.be>

nadine (Belgium) is an arts laboratory aimed at developing research focusing on transdisciplinary experiments in the fields of new media and live arts. *nadine* is a flexible and evolving project that doesn’t shy away from questioning itself to be able to stay on top of the constantly changing needs of artists.

<http://www.nadine.be>

Time’s Up (Austria) is a research institute using experimental situations as a means of investigating the behavior of the public individual in everyday and nearly everyday situations. <http://www.timesup.org>

Performing Pictures (Sweden) works in the area of moving images and new technologies for media delivery as part of the Interactive Institute – a Swedish experimental IT-research institute that combines expertise in art, design and information technology. In their artistic practice Performing Pictures explore and develop responsive film art. <http://performingpictures.se>

KIBLA (Slovenia), a multimedia artcentre, is focused on the new (contemporary) educational, cultural and artistic praxis, connecting education and research, culture and technology, arts and sciences, emancipating and demystifying media as a creative tool in education and new forms of art. <http://kibla.si>

InterMedia (Norway) investigates the intersections between design, communication and learning in digital environments. Their approach is multidisciplinary and involves critical research, development and experiments. <http://intermedia.uio.no>



Education and Culture

Culture 2000

Supported by: the Culture 2000 Framework of the European Commission, the Flemish Authorities and the Flemish Community Commission of the Region of Brussels-Capital

