From Net.art to the Post-medium: What History for the New Media?

Aline Guillermet

Translator: Simon Pleasance

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/29350>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.29350

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 25 May 2018

Number of pages: 131-135

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Aline Guillermet, « *From Net.art to the Post-medium: What History for the New Media?* », *Critique d'art* [Online], 50 | Printemps/été 2018, Online since 25 May 2019, connection on 02 June 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/29350> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.29350

This text was automatically generated on 2 June 2019.

EN

From Net.art to the Post-medium: What History for the New Media?

Aline Guillermet

Translation : Simon Pleasance

REFERENCES

Kate Mondloch, *A Capsule Aesthetic: Feminist Materialisms in New Media Art*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2018

Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today, Boston : The Institute of Contemporary Art ; New Haven : Yale University Press 2018. Sous la dir. d'Eva Respini

- 1 At a time when the “new media”, from the Internet to digital technologies, have become “mass media”, it seems timely to adopt an historical viewpoint in order to look at the way the art practices associated with them have developed. Recent publications provide us with keys for embarking on this line of thinking. As the catalogue for the exhibition *Art in the Age of the Internet* shows, certain visionary and utopian works anticipated the way the Internet would work as a network, back in the late 1960s: George Maciunas’s *Learning Machine* (1969), and Stewart Brand’s *Whole Earth Catalogue* (1968) made it possible to situate the Net.art of the 1990s, with its claims of artistic, political and identity freedoms, in a broader, and not exclusively digital, historical context. Such an approach also helps to shed light on the basic differences there may be between the beginnings of Net.art and the more recent development of so-called “post-Internet” or “post-medium” practices. While “surf clubs” existed solely online and in the form of collaborative networks, the art practices developed since the 2000s lay claim to a discursive approach which sometimes proceeds by way of more traditional media. As a result, “post-Internet” art is not necessarily to be found on the Internet, and old followers of Net.art, like Petra Cortright, are now producing “digital paintings” on silk and aluminium, designed for both exhibition and sale.

- 2 This new form of use, which is furthermore correlated to technological development, tallies with certain issues presented by an art “situated” exclusively on the Internet. How do you define yourself as an artist in a context where everyone can produce content? How are you to exhibit works devoid of material incarnation? Lastly, what place is to be given to the body in a context of virtual reality? *Art in the Age of the Internet* sheds light on the problems run into by attempts to show works produced and distributed on the Internet. At documenta X, in Kassel, in 1997, the works of Jodi, Heath Bunting, and Martin Kippenberger were presented on networked computers, but not on the Internet, rendering part of the artistic content inaccessible. Conversely, certain attempts to exhibit a terminal connected in a gallery ended up failing, with the public happier to use that opportunity to check their emails. Unlike these materiality-free works, *A Capsule Aesthetics* asserts that the immersive works exhibited in a museum setting help to focus the public’s attention, and usher in a line of thinking about the subjective forms of aesthetic experience to which the new media give access. Pipilotti Rist’s video installation *Pour Your Body Out* (2008), with its digital projections on huge screens, wraps viewers within a purely sensory environment, while at the same time encouraging them to spread their bodies on cushions placed on the floor. If it is hard to see how such an installation contributes to a real reflection about our status as humans in the digital age, there can be no doubt that Pipilotti Rist, and Patricia Piccinini and Mariko Mori, are trying through their art to define a feminist subjectivity, in the extension of new materialist trends responding to the virtualization of our experience, ushered in by Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles.
- 3 However, the dilution of digital art in the globality of a creative space, which we can describe as “post-medium”, has limits, both aesthetically and politically. What happens to the militant and anti-establishment values which were made possible by the very medium of the Web, thanks to the collective and interactive possibilities of reflection and action? Martine Syms’s online work *Reading Trayvon Martin* (2012) provides an important counter-example to this de-politicization. This is an Internet site which brings together tweets, messages found on the social networks, and links concerning the shooting and murder, in 2012, of the African-American teenager Trayvon Martin. Syms thus encourages the viewer to think about the way information and news are generated, circulated, and consumed online, demonstrating at the same time that a certain form of Net.art, one that takes into account the recent development of online news platforms and social networks, remains topical more than ever.

AUTHORS

ALINE GUILLERMET

Aline Guillermet has a PhD in Art History and Theory, and is a Junior Fellow at King’s College, Cambridge. Her research focuses in German painting since 1960, the impact of technology on contemporary painting, and digital art. She has recently published “‘Painting like nature’:

Chance and the Landscape in Gerhard Richter's Overpainted Photographs" (*Art History*, 40:1, February 2017).