

The Challenge of Enculturation on Art **Lindsay Grace**

Abstract

Enculturation is the act of passing cultural ideologies from one person to the other. It is what breeds innovation instead of new creation. It is the disease of derivation, instead of the birth of creativity.

This chapter assumes the practical perspective of critical anthropological distance to understand the culture of art. Such critical evaluation should illuminate the distinct characteristics that encourage patterns. In the tradition of anthropological and sociological study of existing culture, this chapter seeks to illuminate the distinguishing characteristics of contemporary art production and offer perspective on the critical creative process. It takes new media art as its case study because it serves as a cross-cultural intersection of scientific invention and artistic innovation.

Background

There is little novelty in the concept of enculturation. It exists in a variety of disciplines and social situations. Research into specific enculturation practices, patterns, and effects ranges from the typically sociologic, *Best Practices for Enculturation* (Boyle, P., & Boice), to the extraordinary, Alan Bishop's *Mathematical Enculturation: A Cultural Perspective on Mathematics* (1991). Perhaps as part of a growth in the accessibility of information, the cross pollination of formerly specific cultural aspects has witnessed a consistent growth in contemporary history. In kind, the interest in culture and intercultural study has grown. In Robertson's often cited *Globalization: Social Theory and Global*

Culture, he writes "by now it must surely be clear to most sociologists that in contemporary sociology and social theory that there is an awakening . . . of interest in the social relevance as well as the intrinsic significance of culture and cultural change" (Robertson, 1992, p. 32).

The new media arts, although not the only artistic endeavor effected by the growth of enculturation is an excellent subject for the evaluation of this process. New media art is a distinctly acculturated art practice. It sits at the nexus between a wide, and often changing variety of artistic cultures. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this art, the new media artists often float between science and art disciplines. It is this edge at which intriguing acculturation of science and art occurs. This is what Lev Manovich (2002) described as "the computerization of culture" which "not only leads to the emergence of new cultural forms such as computer games and virtual worlds; it redefines existing ones such as photography and cinema" (p. 9).

Responding to substantial changes within two cultures is an everyday fact of the new media arts. They must be acculturated in order to exist. The culture of technology, and that of art, is the subjects and tools integrated into new media art. Again, in Manovich's (2002) words, "the gradual computerization of culture will eventually transform all of it" (p. 6). Here, that which existed in extra-technical space of artistic endeavor, finds itself blending with the technical. Two cultures are acculturated to make a third. The resultant cultural accumulation is the focus of this chapter.

The cultural aspects, here described, are limited in scope to those characteristics best understood as part of western tradition of art making and evaluation. The reasons for

