THE ARTIST AS FACILITATOR - SELECTED ASPECTS OF MEDIA AESTHETIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

It is well known that every new technology alters not only the individual person, but also our cultural values in private and social life. This is what media theorist Marshall McLuhan called the *real revolution*. Digital natives are constantly conflicting with older educational modes and values, which are not fitting in their environment. It then becomes necessary to approach schools with concepts to bring awareness of the existing digital culture. The negative attitude towards the digital environment by adults as a result of rushing to one's judgement have caused devastating consequences for nowadays adolescents. Although the educational system deals with media literacy, this term is lacking of references to culture and art. Therefore, methodologies must be found to complement the educational system. This system involves the cooperation with artists, museums, and other cultural institutions. To understand *media* we have to know how media enters our minds and shapes our consciousness. This cannot be communicated and understood by only *teaching* media literacy nor the ability to understand simplistic media grammar. Workshops at schools organized by artists gives students the space to discover media and its environment from an experimental point of view. Media Aesthetic Education encourages students how to use digital media in order to interpret the reality through their senses and aesthetic experiences of the environment (and daily lives) rather than simply depicting it.

Keywords: *Digital Natives, Education, Media Aesthetic, Media Culture*

Media as Environment

The term *Digital Culture* seemed misleading in the way that we understand it as an autarkic sphere with its own functions in which we humans can freely step in and step out anytime. *Digital Culture,* rather, coins the environment that surrounds us.

Speaking of environment; according to media theorist Neil Postman we are living in two different kinds of environments. One is the natural environment and the other is the media environment, which consists of language, numbers, images, holograms, and all of the other symbols, techniques, and machinery that shapes the individual and the paradigm of society (Postman, 2000). By this, media is no longer understood as a vehicle transporting informations from A to B, but as environments. Marshall McLuhan concluded that every new invented technology alters the ratio of our senses, the social

pattern and cultural values (McLuhan, 1967, p. 8). From the oral culture to writing culture, industrial revolution and electronic revolution, he explained the close connection between the medium and human perception. McLuhan died in 1980, so he had not encountered the digital transition. Nevertheless, his thoughts and the approaches of Media Ecology can be certainly adapt into the present situation.

It is a call for the society, a call for the educational system to recognize that there is a digital environment, a new age which forms a culture.

Education

Why do I point to the educational institutions? McLuhan noticed that schools educate children to become part of a *rear-view-mirror* society (McLuhan, 1967, p. 74f). In other words, students encounter digital media technology from an obsolete point of view where they cannot find any relations to their world. The artists, as McLuhan stated, has been the one, who realizes that the future is the present and uses their work to prepare the grounds for it (McLuhan, 1967, p. 68).

I might be harsh when I say that schools are killing children´s most powerful drive, which is *curiosity*. It is lacking of total involvement and spaces for creative work. This vast field of possibilities, the depth and the beauty of the digital field, stays unexplored. It is time that the method of education shifts from instructions to discovery, exploration, critical thinking and reflection.

Media Literacy as we encounter mostly in the educational scheme do not facilitate a clear understanding of *media* and even less the artistic and cultural implications.

The result is a *tunnel view* towards art when its meaning is addressed only to an object.

Culture and Art

Culture and art are more or less designated in the frame of a high culture. In other words, we exclude ourselves from those topics. But it is the comparison of daily life, countries, lifestyles, customs and traditions that estimates the meaning of culture.

The aesthetic experience, as the interplay of sensual perception, is the result of an emotional or physical reaction towards an action or object.

Art is rather a tool to enhance the accessibility of creative work, the interpersonal skills as a listener and collaborator, abstract and analytical thinking. Furthermore, Media Aesthetic Education builds upon the thoughts of avant-garde art. We encourage students to break out of the conventional and to nourish their drive to experiment in the whole field of media.

In fact, this emphasize the concept of *the social sculpture.* A term coined by German artist Joseph Beuys containing his famous statement that every human is an artist. He did not mean that in every person there is a Vincent van Gogh or a sculptor, rather he meant that as an ability of universal creativity in life. The conscious act is crucial for implementing art into the daily life of society. It encompasses all elements of action: thoughts, ideas, decisions, and steps of progress and creation.

7000 Eichen exemplified the idea of the social sculpture by the participatory and interdisciplinary intervention of art and ecology within the Documenta 7 in 1982.

Media Aesthetic Education

Media Aesthetic Education is the comprehension about the links between art and media, the creative development of the individual, the understanding of beauty, the development of interpersonal skills and aesthetic experience. The major goals of Media Aesthetic Education are in short:

Reflecting media, art and culture without confusion. Raising students´ curiosity and encouraging them to think critically and reflectively. Avoiding a *tunnel view* towards media, art and technology in cooperation with artists.

Projects

1. Aleksandar Vejnovic: Im Einklang mit den Flüssen Ilz, Donau, Inn - Die Drei Flüsse Installation (In harmony with Ilz, Danube, Inn - The three rivers installation, 2017)

Students of three schools (age: 9 - 15 years) were encouraged to explore their acoustic environment of their hometown with portable recording devices. They recorded sounds above and under the rivers. The sounds were composed into experimental short pieces which were afterwards mixed into a sound sculpture where the sounds of the three rivers of the south German city Passau interacted in one space. This installation was exhibited for public to facilitate context, site, and the environment. The visitors could discover the fascinating sounds of their home.

2. Fadia Elgharib and Aleksandar Vejnovic: An Encounter with Sound (2017)

Students recorded with their smartphones the acoustic environment and created soundscape compositions. The project's goal was to create an awareness of the accessibility for creative work with a daily device and to encourage students to listen to the soundscape with an open ear.

3. Niklas Brehm: Radiokulturarbeit an Schulen (Radio cultural work in schools, 2018)

The focus of his work was the medium Radio, but not in the sense of a handcraft only to transfer sound, but rather the effect of this medium. In other words to point to the listening habits, the aesthetic of the word and sound. In addition to the artistic approach, Brehm focused also on the social competence between students.

Acoustic Ecology

It is to say that the educational and facilitation concepts are the basis of Acoustic Ecology. In the time of the digital age we aim to sensitize the auditory perception and apperception as well as sustain an auditory culture in general. Those projects arouse an awareness for the soundscape concept with a critical faculty, ingenuity, and sustainability. By this we can say that Acoustic Ecology is a model for Media Aesthetic Education. Also to mention here is how the relationship between students and teachers changed. Instead of a hierarchically communication the projects facilitate a creative space of mixed perspectives.

Conclusion

We have to find methods to implement artistic projects into the curriculum as a fixed part, not only as workshops on irregular occasions. Methods in practice, like STEAM or creative spaces in full day schools and day nurseries are one of several options to work on. By this we have to be aware that we are stepping into a political sphere.

In my opinion, it is for the sake of art and its ambiguity to collaborate more with artists, art and cultural institutions as well as to prevent a tunnel view and a philistine attitude of future generations. It is much doubtful that forcing students to reproduce the original by depicting reality is the right way to prepare future generations for the society within which they grow. Workshops at schools organized by artists gives students the space to discover media and its environment from an experimental point of view.

What does *facilitating* mean for artists? The German artist Joseph Beuys elucidated his experience as a lecturer at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, teaching like if it were a work of art (Bischop, 2012, p. 243).

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