Issues in Social Media for the Arts 2019
Blueskying a Social Media Platform for the Arts

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Google Docs Transcript: Adriene Jenik

 using media to critique and interrogate itself

Since my earliest art activities (as a member of the [Paper Tiger TV Collective](#) in the 1980s), I have used media to critique and interrogate itself. Whether investigating the capitalist networks behind network TV, asking audience members using mobile devices to enjoy a story event to reconsider their customary relationship to them, or, more recently, using a drone camera to memorialize civilian deaths by drones - the media form, context and affordances are part of the "content" of the work.

Until the early 2000s I would have been considered an "early adopter" of various communication technologies, using coding in my artwork and developing live, globally situated telematic performances. I joined with other artists to see what was possible to communicate with these new tools - where was the edge? I was equally interested in the how and to whom we were communicating.

Judy Malloy
6:38 AM Nov 5

Hi Adriene, Welcome to Issues in Social Media for the Arts!

Adriene Jenik is an artist and educator who resides in desert. Her computer and media art spans 3 decades, including pioneering work in interactive cinema and live telematic performance. Her mediated performance projects have been written about in The New York Times, published in The Drama Review, and recognized by the Rockefeller Foundation. Jenik's current creative research projects include "data humanization" performances, immersive learning experiments and street performances reading "climate futures" with her ECOtarot deck. At Arizona State University, she serves as Professor of Intermedia in the School of Art, affiliate faculty in the School for the Future of Innovation in Society and a sustainability scientist at the Global Institute of Sustainability.

Some early performance experiments, grouped together as Desktop Theater, took advantage of the decentralized, low band-width and low/no cost but high visual/creative freedom of a platform called "the Palace." Designed by artist and coder Jim Baumgarten, it was a lovely free space that invited expression of all kinds. It was very simple in a lot of ways and got pushed aside by up and coming 3D spaces like Second Life. Since The Palace needed no special computing equipment and could be accessed through a dial-up modem, there were lots of different types of people from lots of places in the world who used it. For more than 4 years we (my main collaborator Lisa Brenneis and I, and our desktop theater troupe) experimented with creating online street theater and improvisation on the platform. It was crude, but allowed for tremendous iteration - we performed more than 50 unique performances during our run. These type of public online performance activities were also being developed by others.

The Palace fell victim to business interests, security concerns, and a series of next new things. One of these was Facebook which required real world account information assigned to each account (for security) and in my initial assessment, appeared to flatten relationships. As someone used to a large degree of freedom of expression, a hard fought sexual liberation and exuberant creative experimentation, I was turned off by the appropriation of the word "friend" and decided to duck under the wave and wait it out until another more robust option for socializing became available - at this time these applications were not so long-lasting. ==As a result, I never ended up creating a facebook account and to this day remain off the platform.==

Judy Malloy
5:25 AM Nov 14

And yet your work continues inspirational in this field. Open_Borders Lounge -- https://ajenik.faculty.asu.edu/projects_obl.html-- for instance, is always an important resource in my classes.

Adriene Jenik
9:46 AM Nov 14

Thanks, Judy. I read all the statements with great interest and look forward to seeing the ways that things get integrated. I'm glad my past work still resonates - as you know, there was alot of things we started that have great potential and I look with interest and investment in how this next gen of students and developers dreams up next era tools and processes. Thanks for taking the risk to try new things! you inspire me.

Decades ago, I joined with others to start "alternative media centers" where people from all walks of life could tell their stories and develop their voices. I also was involved in the development of the Indy Media model of independent grassroots publishing/citizen journalism. I continue to be excited by the potential of these networks. However, as someone involved in political activism, I am deeply concerned about the impacts of state surveillance and control enabled in these platforms. And as an educator for decades, I see the increased anxiety in my students, and feel it myself the more I utilize and engage using a computer interface. As well, I am deeply concerned about the seeming hegemony of capitalism and the way that we continue to march in the direction of a climate catastrophe, against the apparent will of the vast majority of global citizens.

So - at this point I write to you as an anachronism.

I live very humbly in the desert. In my current creative projects I work hard to make them as simple as I can. I am concerned with direct engagement and impact. I now imagine and foster the growth of "non-mediated centers" where people can go to find peace and sanctuary away from their devices.

Judy Malloy
6:09 PM Nov 13

The desert and the Arizona mountains are extraordinarily peaceful. I remember walking in I think the Phoenix Valley Preserve.

Where I live now, if I don't walk in the woods often, and sit by myself for a while, I'm not happy. For years I've alternated woods escapes with immersion in writing and coding, often on the same day. Not too long ago when writing about years ago living in the Colorado mountains and working in Boulder with early computer systems I wrote these words:

"The sound of the punch card reader echoed in my mind on the drive up the hill, until when the sun set outside my cabin, it was replaced by the Great Horned Owls hooting to each another; the howling laughter of the coyote pack, and the scuffling outside of a bear, real or imaginary"

This approach to life has always seemed "normal" to me.

I'm very interested in what others might suggest regarding a new social media platform and look forward to weighing in where I feel my experience and perspective can be of use.

Mara Iskander...
10:38 PM Nov 8

Thanks for writing this - I had a great time looking up the little visual documentation I could find regarding 'The Palace'. It does seem that the more online spaces attempt to emulate the trappings of real life - currency, property, real-name verification, the more they seem to be drained of any potential. I'm interested in whether you think a 'new social media platform' is viable at all, given your current desert practice and concerns. The last time I found 'peace and harmony' within a device, my eyes were encased by a VR display and I was, through Daniel Steegmann's work 'Phantom', in a few square feet of Amazon rainforest, rendered beautifully in black and white wireframes. Nobody else was there.

Adriene Jenik
1:28 PM Nov 9

Hello Mara. Your VR experience sounds very striking. I have also heard of people having a beautiful spiritual connection with "tree" https://www.treeofficial.com/ and also much earlier within Char Davies work "Osmose."

Regarding if I see a new social media platform as viable - I know for a fact people want to connect and connect in ways that are deeper than what can be monetized. So we have a conundrum - In order for a large amount of people to be participating in a social media platform there needs to be some type of business model (the way that we understand how to "scale" in our culture), and money to hire people etc often comes from investors who want to profit (eventually) from the idea/platform, etc. THis is not inherently bad, but scaling anything for profit tends to distort and pervert the original (often socially beneficial) intentions and require elements of control and management that move against free expression. Smaller efforts have been

started up and launched that are alternatives, but they have petered out because "everyone" is putting their energies in other spaces. As well some of them (like instagram) have been bought up and changed to fit into the new framework. Instagram's founders quit working for the platform because of this.

I think that perhaps the issue of scale is at the heart of this challenge (and many things in our democracy). These technologies are an extension beyond our human scale and capacities, and our humanity is straining to catch up. As things develop faster and faster, there is less time to reflect and critically consider the implications of them. And so...

It is not the technology that I give the agency to - it is our human discernment - from the developers, to investors, to consumers, policy-makers, etc. It seems part of the network aspect of all of this means that we are hooked to each others decisions which pull us to act and perform differently than might be our choice.

I exist the way I do so that I can stay as close to the ground as possible as this helps me better understand and discern what might be beneficial to me and the planet.

What do you think or hope for?