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Betreff

Dissertation Review

Laura Adel

Dissertation Review Laura Adel Tenderness of Art—analyses and creation of Interactive Environments based on Immersion

The presented thesis with the title *Tenderness of Art—analyses and creation of Interactive Environments based on Immersion* by Laura Adel presents art-based research on a broad, transdisciplinary foundation that links philosophical, aesthetic, and technological theories to broaden the concept of interactive, immersive environments. Her investigation deals with the field beyond the “gamification” of art, beyond VR/AR/XR environments and conventional, more technically determined attributions of immersion. It asks how an environment can be created in which the human body functions not merely as a tool (as in a game), but rather as a level of multisensory experience, immersing the viewer in a situation “that safeguards the metaphysical resonance of aesthetic experience” (p. 5). Laura Adel describes the concept of tender coexistence as a new form of being in a world where physical- and virtual-based reality (even if it is not referred to as such), technology, and nature are inextricably intertwined in order to reach a new level of perception in times of social dissociation and cognitive overload (p. 5).

The thesis is divided into three parts, which describe the structure and outline of the work. In the first section *Immersive Environments* Adel lays the theoretical foundation for her research. She proposes a model for interactive, immersive environments by using Bruno Latour's ANT (actor-network theory) to understand the artwork as a network of material-semiotic relationships in which both human and non-human entities (actants) possess agency. In addition, she refers to Graham Harman and OOO (object-oriented ontology) in order to view the artwork as an infinite matrix of relations that exists independently of human perception. In doing so, she distinguishes between the real object (which eludes perception) and the sensory object that the viewer perceives. Finally, the focus is on “dialogical disposition”— a deepened perception in which the viewer establishes a connection to the work through physical and mental engagement. Following Richard Wagner and Elżbieta Gieysztor-Miłobędzka, she conceives the environment as a Gesamtkunstwerk (“total installation”) that forms a material, ideal, and emotional unity.

All in all she suggests a philosophy and practice of relating to humans, machines, environments, and data not as things to master, but as partners in an ongoing dialogue.

The second part expands the theoretical model to include aspects of cyberculture. Adel analyzes how technology transforms reality into a “mixed reality” while simultaneously changing the viewer's cognitive apparatus (attention, memory, perceptual habits). She introduces terms such as “cyber habitats” and “meristemetic tissue” (as a metaphor for generative, transformative digital layers). Again, she advocates a tender and inclusive approach to media, in which technology is understood not as a tool but as a partner in dialogue to expand cognitive horizons.

The third part presents Laura Adel's artistic project INTERWORLD, which she describes as an installation that serves as a field for “embodied research” (see headline). Using six interactive objects (3D-printed stones with sensors) coupled with large-format projections, Adel translates theory into physical experience. The stone functions as a central symbol for the connection between enduring matter and digital reality. Through tactile interaction with the stone, the theoretically required “tender coexistence” becomes materially tangible and perceptible. Here, an attempt is made to translate the preceding theoretical reflections directly into artistic practice.

The dissertation demonstrates a strong spirit of experimentation, intellectual independence, and is composed in a quite sophisticated language, which oscillates between poetically metaphorical nuances and technically precise descriptions. I could follow the structure of the written thesis easily and found it striking that Laura Adel presents a consecutive numbering of the subchapters in addition to and integrated with her three chapters. In doing so, she emphasizes a linearity in her intellectual execution and thus actively supports the readers of her thesis and takes them into her world as an artistic researcher.

Within the chapters, there are sections marked as “Sprouts.” These refer to Adel's own artworks, which arose directly from theoretical considerations and serve as supporting material manifestations of her research. As case studies, she illustrates theoretical concepts by (very!) briefly analyzing specific works by other artists (e.g., David Bowen or Dorit Margreiter Choy). It would have been helpful here if the structure of the analysis had been based on recurring parameters such as the background of the work, understanding and relationship to interaction/immersion/total work of art, context and relation to Adel's thesis, etc., so as not to disappear as a reference in the jumble of keywords and leaving the reader to speculate on its importance in the given framework.

Laura Adel's dissertation gives rise to various critical approaches that challenge both contemporary trends in art and technology and traditional forms of perception. Her argument serves as a critical corrective to a purely functional or detached relationship with the world. She criticizes that gamification often reduces the human body to a mere tool for performing tasks within a given structure. She observed that this results in a loss of depth, because in playful structures, the viewer's behaviour is often subordinated to task-oriented logic, which can jeopardize metaphysical resonance and deeper aesthetic experience. In summary, her thesis rejects the superficiality and purely functional use of technology and bodies. She criticizes a relationship with the world that is based more on dominance than on tender coexistence and dialogue in art and technology, which fits very well with the attitudes that media art students advocate today. I therefore consider the chosen topic to be topical and well-integrated into the larger framework of existing research. To my knowledge, she mentions the most important researchers in this field and attempts to find a language that describes the relationships and feelings that arise, that one senses, that

emerge only to disappear again in the same moment. How can one describe something for which there are no words? One cannot even be sure that the feeling one had during the interaction will return? Nor what does this mean to the artefact? Adel acknowledges that works based on the visualization of body contours in particular often offer only a limited experience to an “untrained” audience. While dancers establish a deep kinaesthetic connection, laypeople often use their bodies only as functional tools/instrumental bodies (p. 41), which undermines the desired “tender coexistence.” Although I think I understand the observations on which Laura Adel bases this criticism, I find such statements very critical in their generalization (and again very human oriented). There is no universal accessibility to experience, as deep immersion depends heavily on the individual circumstances at the moment of interaction: the moment, the process, the situation, the art based research process, where the past and the future blur, repetition refers only to the form of the process, and awareness of this process can hardly be guided, repeated, controlled or even compared.

Secondly, I found it quite challenging to fully grasp the role of OOO (object-oriented ontology) within interactive and immersive environments, particularly since the thesis as a whole centers on relations and dialogical dispositions. It remained unclear to me, even toward the end, why OOO holds such conceptual significance for the artist and her practice, especially when the world appears to be constituted through interrelations, situations, and processes of intra-action in flux (as discussed by Latour and Barad—both of whom are also referenced in the thesis). Assuming that this sensibility is something the artist has developed in relation to her artistic practice, and knowing that for students, the metaphysical and speculative power in OOO holds an important source of inspiration for new artistic processes, I do not want to dwell further on this discrepancy in approaches.

However, what I found missing was a more precise elaboration of the question of what is considered real. I had the impression that Laura Adel attributes realness primarily to the objects in front of her. It would have been crucial, however, to also deconstruct this division of physical and virtual realness—particularly within the framework of her own theoretical construction of immersiveness.

The descriptions often borrow metaphors from biology (Tendrils, Root, Sprouts und Shoots, Meristematic tissue,...) but these are only minimally introduced, justified, or not explained at all (Sprouts). In general, it would have been desirable for the names and persons mentioned to be introduced and contextualized in the time they belong to. This would lead to a better understanding of who was working on which topic, when, and from which profession (for example, Mikhail Bakhtin was only mentioned in a footnote in the introduction and never appears again in relation to “dialogical disposition”). I understand that the poetry of terms often loses its magic when they are explained, defined, and thus deconstructed too much. However, it would have been helpful to introduce some terms earlier and more extensively in the thesis, or even to include a kind of glossary of terms in the appendix.

Finally, I would like to highlight a really important strength of the work, namely when Adel criticizes herself and her own processes. This is particularly evident when she speaks about anthropocentrism (p. 81) while at the same time openly admitting that she herself tends to project human perception patterns onto technological processes (e.g., when scanning objects). This creates a tension between her theoretical claim (equality of objects) and its practical implementation, which the artist transparently makes visible through her theoretical treatment due to her high sensitivity to the topic.

Apart from a few typos, which suggest that the thesis was submitted rather hastily (if possible, I would prefer to have the thesis corrected further before it is publicly archived), I have a document in front of me written by an art based researcher, who tackles the difficult topic of computer-based interaction, immersivity and tender coexistence in a highly inspired, ambitious, and experimental way. In summary, I consider this work by Laura Adel to be very valuable both artistically and scientifically. I have only

identified some minor issues with regard to accuracy, which are partially offset by the strength of the work presented. Nevertheless, this dissertation offers a novel investigation of “tenderness” in a technological context, and I conclude that this dissertation should be graded “good” (2).

Based on reading and analysis of the concept and the realization of the dissertation, and after taking into consideration the creative output, I recommend an academic Ph.D. title in the field of art, in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation be granted to Laura Adel (born 23.05.1994), PhD student at the Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design Wroclaw and submitting her dissertation under the supervision of Ac. Prof. Jakub Jernajczyk.

With best regards,



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