

SATURATION IN MULTI-MEDIA

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Sartre explains how one reaches an “image” of a person by the “mediation” of a picture of that person... The listener must arrive at his own “image” or conscious state through the “mediation” of the music being played.....

Isn't it strange how

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become

A CLICHÉ!!

Many people are not willing to have the control of all their sensory input given over to someone else, even though he/she might propose to be an artist.

If one could imagine a situation in which all of the senses were being bombarded with intense external input, what frame of reference would the stimulated imagination turn to?

Radio actors are schooled in making their audience “see” the story. Television actors are schooled in making their audience “feel” the story. Environmentalists are schooled in making their audience “...” the story.

Radio was supposed to replace the theater. It didn't. Television was supposed to replace radio. It didn't. Environmentalism was supposed to replace ... It didn't.

All of our senses are always on. Environmentalists in art should stimulate a greater involvement in the situation by the perceiver. It involves all of the physical senses and, therefore, should be natural to the man animal. Since it is all around us it should make us

aware of living in it. It should dispel detachment, which seems to be the Renaissance legacy. Does it? Is it?

Why has multi-media lived such a short life and already become a cliché? Does history show us a time in which there is evidence that its people were not aware of multi-media? Infatuation with multi-media as a new concern is certainly superfluous. It's really infatuation with technology which creates new media all of the time.

Wagner tried to control all of the visual, theatrical, verbal, language, musical, and psychological materials that were available to him. Metastasio is said to have remarked that he never wrote words for an aria without having imagined its musical composition.

Why has multi-media become a cliché so soon when the concert hall was able to last for a couple of hundred years retaining a great deal of usefulness? We have suddenly realized the power of environmental wrappings, but this perception seems to have caused new environments to only be useful as compositional tools for a short time. At the Electric Circus in New York a series of events called, "Electric Ear", is being produced. The series has earned for the Electric Circus the nomenclature, "New York's multi-media experiment center". However, one cannot fail to question how much the power of the Electric Circus environment itself, rather than the power of the individual composers and artists who have been featured, has to do with the success. One can see a battle these days raging between composers and environments they are given to work with. The composer asks, "How can I make my material powerful enough to supercede that of the environment, thus, destroying an environment that exists and creating another one?" The existing environment always wins.

In the process of creating or constructing an event, work, or situation of experience, artists have been led by recent trends in environmental thinking to begin with overly general concerns. These generalities cannot be combined to lead to new concepts. Composers and artists are led to the "fallacy of abstraction" of the most obvious properties of the materials of a particular medium. We are trying hard to create a generalized environment without considering as a point of departure some combinations of its constituent parts. One can only form good generalized concepts by successive combination of increments of related thought, induction in methodology. McLuhan-ites of the musical world seem to be starting from the point of deduction, the point of a generalized intuition about a particular environment. This, by experience, seems to lead to a very simplistic kind of saturation of media. The concept is not useful because it does not lead anywhere, it draws one to no new conclusions, and it lacks fecundity. One is left bombarded by complex sensory input that has the general taste of wax.

The paradox of generalization always leads to a dead end. It has no usefulness and becomes pointless beyond the moment of its demonstration. One cannot start with a general idea of field of material and be content with expecting the perceiver to break it up into its constituent parts. Here again, one is left without direction. It merely becomes a catalog of data in which anything can be located but nothing is suggested.

Thinking of “concrete” concepts within consciousness is subject to voluntary qualification by the other qualities of consciousness, imagination and conception. One must realize that the activity of the imagination is a continuous state of conception, generalization. One arrives at his conscious state (here being analogous to the generalization state), through the mediation of more specific and discrete events within the artistic event or experience. To sustain interest and be successful, artistic material must stimulate the imagination to seek further possible extensions of an idea. It must lead to something else, be able to exist in combinations that “add up” to new ideas. Careless environmentalism due to mistaken methodology leaves one at a point of a useless generalization that lacks pregnancy. One is not led to view beyond what the artist has done. This saturated creation prejudges too much and furnishes no terms for its own elucidation.

The successful artist invariably coaxes his perceivers in the direction of making this elucidation for themselves. He/she will always know how much to constrain and when to quit, leaving the listener-looker to his own. No sensible artist ever takes his participants to the point of conclusion or to the end of his material. He will always know how much to leave to the imagination. The success of something created and its usefulness can usually be measured against a factor of newness. One must always be able to notice something new in it, be led to a new imaginative state of conclusion. This sensitivity of “how far to go” and how explicit to be becomes his/her distinction, a kind of “empfindsamkeit” that is the characteristic of Mozart and Terry Riley. One must not be led to the mistake of “loading one’s material to the gills” in order to provide newness. He/she will only end up with meaningless saturation.

Why does saturated environmental control of multi-media correspond to generalization? Communication is a discrete process. A transmitter can never communicate in the sense of presenting a defined message; it can only stimulate the receiver or influence its course of action. It is a process, not a state. Either by scanning or integral apprehension one perceives and is led to a conception, a point of generalization. Abstract forms might never be communicated exactly. They may themselves depend on convention and concept formation. The perceiver judges a communication channel by two parameters: intelligibility and intensity. Interestingly, these two factors are virtually independent of each other. The saturation limit is reached when the information capacity of a communication channel is surpassed. No information is received if the intelligibility and intensity levels transmitted are more than the channel can accept. Such situations exhibit perceptions or concepts that have no systematic virtue, no unit or descriptive characteristics. They are only intuitively general notions.

Despite all this, information can be apprehended instantaneously and simultaneous relationships can occur. Relationships may be perceived that do not derive their meaning from their change (continuous, consecutive, connective, comparative) in time. Further learning may take place by examination, either systematically or by random experience. Art tends to construct general notions out of more specific ones. I have tried to show how these relationships can occur in my THEN WE WOUND THROUGH AN AURA OF GOLDEN YELLOW GAUZE.

Saturation resulting from the “fallacy of abstraction” leaves our senses awash with an indeterminate gestalt. It is like whipped cream on a bad cake, a senseless ornamentation as euphemism in language. Is this the Neo-Rococo age fraught with frills and overproducing? One can never reach a totality anyway and such a synthetic approximation of one does not provide a very sound starting point. We must replace these dead-end ideas with more suggestive ones and try to stimulate the growth of artistic conception on the part of the perceiver-participant. This is where we need apply the requirements of logical technique, imagination, and ingenuity.

Susanne Langer said, “The various arts exhibit a striking unity and logic.” One is led to these points of visualizing a general unity and logic by the mediation of carefully controlled, refined, considered, (whether by intuition, feeling, or logical system), discrete, and specifically oriented events or elements. Let us look for points of departure that are concrete, explicit, and combinable. I have a feeling that they exist today in advertising, which may exhibit extremely important forces for “new art”, but then, that’s another article.

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