

BEHAVIOURABLES AND FUTURIBLES

Roy Ascott 1968

When art is a form of behaviour,. software predominates over hardware in the creative sphere. Process replaces product in importance, just as system supersedes structure.

Consider the art object in its total process: a behaviourable in its history, a futurible in its structure, a trigger in its effect.

Ritual creates a unity of mood. We need a grand rite of passage to take us from this fag end of the machine age into the fresh new world of the cybernetic era.

Just as our environment is becoming more and more automatic, so our habitually automatic behaviour becomes less taken for granted and more conscious and examined.

Now that we see that the world is all process, constant change, we are less surprised to discover that our art is all about process too. We recognise process at the human level as behaviour, and we are beginning to understand art now as being essentially behaviourist.

Object-hustlers! Reduce your anxiety! Process culture and behaviourist art need not mean the end of the Object, as long as it means the beginning of new values for art. Maybe the behaviourist art object will come to be read like the palm of your hand. Instead of figuration - prefiguration: the delineation of futuribles. Pictomancy - the palmistry of paintings - divination of possible futures by structural analysis. Art as apparition? Parapsychology as a Courtauld credit?

Cezanne's structuralism reflected a world flooded with physical data. Our world is flooded with behavioural data. How does that grab you?

Social inquisitiveness is a factor we would like to reinforce.

All in all we are still bound up with the search for myths. But the context will be biological and behavioural - zooming through the micro/macro levels. Get ready for the great biomyths, visceral legends.

Imagine this game. Groups of people with highly constrained artificial behaviours moving through zones with different functions (like: magic, camouflage, enlargement, reversal, disparity). Gives you: zone-shifts, time-shifts, identity-shifts. No light-pen needed to work out that potential.

Dare we talk about art and social modelling?

We are very much concerned with generating futuribles - maybe that's because the more we can dream up alternative futures the more changeable the present can become. And change is what we are all about - change for its own sake. That is the essence of behaviourist art, and generating change is the aim of the behaviourist artist.

We could talk about the levels of resolution for examining two classes of art system - the discrete and the continuous. That's like classical and behaviourist art.

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How about the notion of secret reciprocity?

Cybernetics will have come of age when we no longer notice the hardware, where the interface is minimal. Same goes for art?

The cybernetic age is an age of silences. Same goes for music?

Artist on the campus. We can create new rituals in the centres of learning. We can introduce art as visual matrix for the varied discourse of a university. To hell with commissioned monuments!

Is it useful to discuss the thermodynamics of an artwork? An artwork is hot when it is densely stacked with information bits, highly organised and rigidly determined. Hot artwork admits of very little feedback in the system artifact/observer, its really a one way channel; pushing a message from the artist, out through the artwork into the spectator.

Call it cool when the information bits are loosely stacked, of uncertain order, not clearly connected, ambiguous, entropic. Then the system allows the observer to participate projecting his own sense of order or significance into the work, or setting up resonances by quite unpredicted interaction with it. We must also consider the cut-out mechanism which operates when an artwork overheats; when it is too hot, too densely stacked with an overburdened accumulation of bits, a sort of infinitely inclusive field. Then the system switches to a very cool state and feedback of a high order is possible.

Behaviourist art has two principle aspects - the biological and the social. it will be more or less visceral, more or less groupy.

Great art sets up systems of attitudes which can bring about the necessary imbalance and dispersal in society whilst maintaining cultural cohesion. For a culture to survive it needs internal acrimony (irritation), reciprocity (feedbacks), and variety (change). Enter art.

With heart-swopping behind us, what about behaviour - transplants?

The process structuring of artworks must inevitably reflect the substructure of behaviours in our cybernated ecology. Gives you: video analogues of processes which may trigger new behaviours.

Art now comes out of a passionate affair with the future. Let's take into account ESP, astrology, divination by tarot, the whole psychic scene, and work out scenarios for the astral plane. Let the mediums give the message. Remember! Black and White magic is easily reproduced.

If we are to keep art schools let them be structured as homeostatic organisms, living, adaptive instruments for generating creative thought and action. But first - more artists and scholars - fewer clerks and boy scouts. no more phoney - liberal blind man's bluff. Within a behaviourist framework the creative interplay of reason, passion and chance can take place.

The CAM - concept is essentially a futurible - anticipatory and speculative, depending for its viability on an understanding of the past. As a projection of our behaviour - based

culture it is intended to be a scenario which is neither surprise - free or definitive. It is an Alternative. The idea of the alternative or multifold alternatives is becoming the very core of art as it progresses. As in science and sociology, to which it aspires from time to time to relate, generating alternatives futures seems to be essential to the internal development of art.

Art creates mythic futures. The mythology of change and uncertainty and the ritualisation of the will to form combine in the behaviourist art. "Only through myth and the structures it requires can we combine the necessary paradox of definition and ambiguity, of order and uncertainty, of the tangible and the infinite". Levi-Strauss.

In the post-industrial society is not technology that will carry us through so much as psychotechnology. That may take us beyond Skinners behavioural engineering into the shadow lands, the futuribles, the speculative, astrological, dreamed-up, out-of-body, future behaviours. We may not have reached the frontiers of parapsychology, but when we do-wham ! Instant communications with no media. Total telepathy, waves of alternative behaviours surging on from creative impulses of the mind. A hardline software culture, always being rerouted, conditioned only to branch.

Art is now a form of behaviour.

Message ends.

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