Chapter VIII
Broken Cinema: The Eye and Hand in a Time-Based Art

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ABSTRACT

This is a guide for working with a visual art form using a digital time-based medium. This chapter will provide an overview of the necessary theories; processes, concepts and most important the "elements," needed to create expressive visual artworks through the technologies associated with this visual art form. It will examine in some detail how people can effectively visually communicate and express our artistic ideas and intentions through a digitally time-based medium. We have reached a point in time-based visual art where the tools and technology have matured enough to allow us to focus our attention more on process and concept rather than specific hardware or software tools. Please understand that more than a theorist, the author is a practitioner of the art form that he will discuss in the following pages. As such, at times, the author will be using his own empirical experience to support arguments in combination with or in place of the opinions of others. The ideas this chapter would like to address are rather complex and there is not enough space in a single chapter to put them forth in their entirety. Therefore, by necessity the author will have to be brief, somewhat simplified, and a bit reductive. Nonetheless, he hopes it provides a basic understanding of the concepts and principles for creating visual art with a digital time-based medium.

"To See a World..."

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

(Fragments from “Auguries of Innocence” William Blake)

INTRODUCTION

Visual art forms continue to evolve due to new innovations and the combination of traditional and emerging concepts, technologies, and processes creating new mediums and tools of artistic expression. How the artist works with these new mediums and how we, the viewer (or participant)
understand meaning through visual perception is simultaneously evolving as well. The way in which the visual artists create new works relative to changes in technology and the way we extract meaning from these new visual art forms and understand their inherent narratives in their new appearances is continually adapting.

During the Italian Renaissance, science and art would often intermingle, overlap and sometimes be engaged in by practitioners of both disciplines. Leonardo da Vinci was a perfect example of the type of creative artist who was able to work in both areas and combine them. Over time a divide occurred between these two disciplines that separated art from many of the technologies and innovations of science. In the ensuing five hundred years, from the Renaissance to the later part of the nineteenth century, the creative technology available for artists to use changed very little. Driven by artistic urges and developing naturally out existing practices and technologies, innovations in printmaking and still photography, such as varnishing advanced the technique in oil painting of glazing and the camera obscura that was the predecessor of the photograph. Unlike prior artistic forms, the historical development of film, that is to say the motion picture, as a creative medium was unique. The medium did not arise from the needs or creative explorations of the artists. Instead, the invention of a new technology “gave rise to the discovery and gradual perfection of a new art” (Panfosky, 1997). No sooner had this art form been established then the reverse became true and much like other visual art forms the creative desires and explorations of art-makers spurred innovation and advancement of the art form itself.

Initially, the invention of the computer seemed to have little or nothing to do with art. Eventually, as we well know, the computer came to play a fundamental and influential role in evolution and creation of new creative art forms. Through its processing power and the ability to work with digital sound and image many pre-existing art forms including music, photography, drawing, and printmaking can now be created with the computer as a tool (please note, I specifically refer to the computer as a tool and not a medium). This has allowed the artist to creatively use and engage new technologies as they develop. It has also brought about a re-consideration of the relation between art and science and resulted in a tremendous amount of innovation and fusion in both areas.

The continued innovation of the digital process and its inclusion of motion picture technology created new opportunities of creative expression for the visual artists, very distinct from that of the traditional motion picture or contemporary cinematic mediums. Digital time-based visual art is the form that has resulted from the advancements in the technology and its accessibility as a creative medium for the artist. Used as a time-based tool it enables the artist to create visual work that embodies time as a formal element and engages it as an aspect of expression and narrative structure. Although it does share some of the formal qualities of the motion picture and cinema (as many art forms share qualities) it has a unique set of elements and principals all its own.

Working artistically and expressively with the available and evolving technologies for time-based creative practice requires consideration, understanding and application of the unique concepts, processes and principles that are fundamental to such a digital visual art form. This chapter will define a set of fundamental elements and formal principles specific to digital time-based art. It will also examine how the artist’s approach to the creative process has changed relative to working with an art form that is distinguished by its unique and particular set of temporal qualities. The discussion will cover a definition of terms specific to a digital time-based art form; the structural aspects of a time-based art; its relation and similarities to other mediums such as drawing, poetry and music and how its narrative form may differ from the traditional Aristotelian idea of narrative or Poetics as well as the established and conventional form of cinema.
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