

From Data to its Organizing Structure

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The collection, organization and classification of data is today considered as one of the fundamental processes by which contemporary culture structures and systematizes its dynamic environment. The theme of this presentation is to reflect on the process of data collecting, compilation, visualization, and interaction within the domain of art practice, and on a larger scale, as a transformative social process that is redefining the relationship between subjects and the institutional structures in which we navigate. The presentation will describe and provide a cultural analysis of two of my recent artistic projects "Pockets Full of Memories" (PFOM), and "Making Visible the Invisible (MVI)" both involve a three-step process of data collection, data processing, and data visualization.

In PFOM, the public scans an object in their possession, and then rate its properties by providing descriptive and demographic information through a questionnaire. The data accumulates throughout the length of the exhibition. A self-organizing 2D visual map algorithm is used to organize the data on a continuous basis, moving the images of the objects into an ordered state according to similarities defined by the contributors' semantic descriptions. This project addresses the collection, organization and presentation of data as a conceptual entity beginning with data as organizing system, data as expression through individual contribution, data as cultural artifact through digitizing, semantic description, and attribute rating; data as processed information, classified, organized, visualized in the exhibition space and the internet, and as information exchange meeting point, through online commentary, contributed on the internet.

"Making Visible the Invisible" is an artistic work that explores the informational infrastructure of the new Rem Koolhaas' designed Seattle Public Library by statistically analyzing and then visually mapping the public's interactions with the library through the borrowing and return of library books, cds, and dvds. In this way, one can potentially have a window into what may be "general concerns" or what the community may be "thinking" or considering as interesting information based on the actions of the library clients.

Information retrieval and visualization form the basis of the new Information Visualization discipline that has evolved out of the intersections of Information Library Sciences and Computer Science. The intent with an artistic project like this one, is to approach data analysis and its visualization in such a way that it provides new forms to experience the data, shaped by dramaturgic and choreographic methods of organization in space, to achieve unexpected associative and metaphorical relations as a means to reveal new forms and patterns that will hopefully be able to communicate in a fuller and innovative way that which words, and statistical information by themselves would not be able to.

With the integration of digitization into the process of assembling data and information, cultural artifacts become translated into numerically evaluated data, and encoded with metadata as a way to describe them. As a result, the numerically described data can be classified through basic

mathematical operations of addition and subtraction, and numeric comparisons. Artistic projects such as these that explore data processing and expressed through visualization, are a form of rapid prototyping experiments that trace the relationship between cultural data and their organization defined through their structure and the activated mathematical processes. On the larger scale, one can consider these artistic works as expressions of general trends in the changing cultural conditions of the Information Society. Information management is the defining form of culture today as it positions us as citizens in performing according to economic and political models defined through the statistical outcome of collected data. Artistic processes with databases become a way to address the question: Is our relationship to the institutional structures more or less humanizing as a consequence of the new world information technological order and its transformative expressions in the economic political zones?