
Since Lev Manovich introduced new media aesthetics in his provocative The Language of New Media (2001), digital technology has become an increasingly vital aspect of artistic praxis. With his new book, Timothy Scott Barker proposes a new vision of digital aesthetic theory by applying the process-oriented philosophy of Whitehead, Deleuze, Serres, and Bergson to interactive new media art. Bergson’s statement, “There do not exist things made but things in the making,” provides the groundwork for Barker’s focus on our dynamic interactions with digital art. The first three chapters are dedicated to unpacking these philosophers’ theories of time, aesthetics, and technology. The author then follows by applying process philosophy to both the well-known works of David Claerbout, Bill Viola, and Dan Graham as well as artworks by other artists. Barker than engages Deleuze’s theories on the “virtual” to examine how digital encounters involve both human and machine in a mutual interrelationship in which both adapt to the limitations of each other. Next, the author argues that the development of the Internet, artificial intelligence, and motion technology forces us to reconsider our interaction with art; that it is the experience with art and not the art object itself that creates meaning. Investigating the relationship of the archive and the database with contemporary art, the final chapter assesses how the nature of the database re-contextualizes our perception of history and time.

Baker is ultimately concerned with exploring the relationship between users and digital technology. Because his approach is entrenched in a particular school of thought, a large portion of the book is devoted to defining the key words of process philosophy: “prehension,” “contemporary occasions,” “subject-superject,” “temporal thickness,” and what exactly an “event” is. The author’s theory of digital aesthetics is compelling. By arguing that everything (human, machine, object) is in constant flux, Baker’s theory gives agency to both the user and the work of art, debunking any notion of “subject” and “object” being “outside” of time. Both human and artwork are joined in a continuous process of dynamic interaction with one another, and it is this interaction that provides for a new paradigm of aesthetics.

While the introduction is well written and thought provoking, at other times the writing is somewhat monotonous and repetitive in the effort to explain complex concepts. It can be difficult to engage with the illustrations via small black-and-white photos alone, but that is mainly due to the nature of artworks that are intended to be interactive. This book is geared toward upper-level courses in aesthetics, philosophy, and art and is ideal for a research-based library with a new media collection.

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