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Art 101 Sec 3

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Reading 3

Q1. From the Manovich reading, give 2 examples of a user interface with a piece of technology that has a performative action or theatrical behavior. This is in context with the ideas credited to Brenda Laurel that Lev mentions in the article.

IMPORTANT : They can be electronic/digital or analog but NOT a computer, video game console or smartphone. Explain why these are good examples.

One modern example of a technology that has a performative action/theatrical behavior can be found in Samsung and LG washing machines, which play a song at the end of the wash cycle (where the volume can be adjusted from the control panel). The sound indicates the end of the cycle while also playing a jingle as a ‘congratulatory’ or ‘satisfying’ aspect for the user. Another example is the classic analog rotary phone from the 1960s-70s. While the user interface is much simpler, the sense of touch by manually dialing the numbers, paired with its rotary motion and sound, makes this older device an example of technology with a performative action/theatrical behavior, as it engages with multiple senses and creates a ‘hands-on’ experience for the user.

Q2. Also from the Manovich reading, Lev uses the term Gesamtkunstwerk. What does this term mean and what is he referring to the aestheticization of information tools?

Gesamtkunstwerk refers to the “unique interactive narrative [which] directly engages the three senses of sight, hearing, and touch” (6). In the case of the LG Chocolate, the sense of taste is also evoked through its model name. Overall,

Manovich discusses the aestheticization of information tools and how they evolved from simplistic, professional, business tools, to colorful, animated experiences and ‘theatrical performances’ made for the everyday consumer.

Q3. From the RadioLab Podcast, the guest podcast artist is sharing his radio show called 99% invisible. The first piece is about sound design. What would you describe the role of this kind of sound designer and how does it relate to this idea of theatre and performance?

Sound designers, as described in the podcast, are essentially people who create the sound that correlates with a certain event or function of a product, such as clicking on a widget on your computer. These sounds, often created in real life, like dropping marbles or opening vise grips, are typically overlooked by the average person when it comes to mechanical devices and products. Sound plays an integral role in the sense of theatre and performance, as it contributes to the feelings and experience of the user, especially in a heavily-digitalized world. Often evoking a sense of confirmation (such as dial pad tones), comfort (like music playing while on hold), and satisfaction, sound is crucial to optimizing this theatrical experience.

Q4. From the Skeuomorphism vs. Flat Design article, what are the philosophical and visual differences between Skeuomorphism vs. Flat Design and how might this also relate to this idea of theatre and gamification or aesthetic based event described in the Lev Article?

As defined in the article, “Skeuomorphism creates a sense of familiarity by emulating materials, while flat design stays true to its medium, often feeling minimal and utilitarian.” Regarding skeuomorphism in a visual sense, depth, shadows, bevels, overlapping imagery, and a reference to real or familiar objects

are the focus. For example, in iOS6, applications looked like buttons that you can press, having drop shadows and icons that refer to physical objects that may be dated (such as the classic telephone receiver for the ‘Phone’ app, or the paper envelope representing the ‘Mail’ app). In a philosophical sense, skeuomorphism is also about mimicking or resembling another object, material, etc, such as electric tea kettles designed to look like original stovetop tea kettles, often having a “stove-like docking station and gooseneck spout.” On the other hand, flat designs visually lack depth and shadow, are minimal in design, clean-looking, and efficiently use space. Examples of this are common in modern UI design, such as when iOS 7 was released in 2013, transitioning from skeuomorphism to flat design. Philosophically speaking, flat design integrates the user into a more digital experience with its digital interface. While both design categories have its purposes, both offer an intentional experience and evoke certain feelings within the user, contributing to the aestheticization that Manovich discusses about information tools.

Q5. Based on the Manovich reading, and following up on Q.1, As a group, find 3 or more images of different examples of technologies that embodies for you the author's idea of how interfaces to early electronics or machine systems were designed in the past. Specifically look for examples from the 1950's,60's, and 70's, (**..not 1980's and 90's...**). Explain why these are good examples. Then list 2 or more images of examples of technology that embody the authors ideas of how interfaces are today. Again, explain why these are good examples. Please include images and text description for each example you are referring to. At least 2 images minimum per person from a group. For example a group of 3 should have 6 images. Share these images as a group in discord, and then publish your images on your readings website.

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Left to Right: Gents Walker & Hall Wrist Watch (1960), Apple Watch Series 8 (2022)



Left to Right: Regency TR-1 transistor radio (1954), Apple iPod Classic 3rd Generation (2003)



Left to Right: Sixteen-track studio at Hun Sound, San Rafael, California (ca. 1970s), Tascam DP-006 multi-track recorder (2013)

All of the older technologies listed above on the left-hand side share a simpler, classic design. They all seem to have a hand-crafted appearance and/or straightforward purpose. Minimal design and careful choice of materials are used in these older interfaces and technologies. Meanwhile, the above, right-hand images of their modern counterparts are shown, appearing very different. The Apple Watch Series 8 for example, is also minimal and sleek in its physical design, but is now loaded with much more advanced functions, like monitoring sleep, health, and the ability to detect a sudden fall of its user. The look and materials of these modern technologies follow a similar pattern, however they have been improved in multifunctionality, efficiency, and portability/size. Overall, each example of the listed, modern technologies generally look like their predecessors, but are drastically improved in some way.

Q6. As a group, please come up with examples of two different kinds of technology that normally don't have this interface design or 'consideration' mentioned in the reading and podcast, but could benefit from this 'theatrfaction' or 'gamification' idea of its interface. Please describe what you suggest doing to it to change it.



On the left is a TI-84 calculator and on the right is a Shure wireless microphone. Both are examples of two different technologies that have generally stayed the same in regards to user interface design, and lack a 'theatrfication' or 'gamification' element. For calculators, it may be beneficial to add some color to the values, calculations, and graphing to differentiate and organize the data. For the microphone, a built-in autotune feature and key tuning feature may be beneficial to the singer or performer. These added features can prove useful for some users, adding to the gamification and overall experience of the technology.