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# Introduction

Nowadays, we live in a world where most of our interactions are mediated by technology. We could argue about digitalisation's positive and negative aspects or propose alternatives for those developments. Still, unless there is a radical change at a global scale, digital is here to stay.

In the landscape of contemporary art, the emergence of digital technologies has not only transformed artistic practices but also challenged the conventional structures of art institutions. This thesis delves into the intricate relationship between contemporary digital art and established art practices and institutions. We unravel the dissonance through the lens of lessons learned from avantgarde movements. As we navigate this exploration, it becomes apparent that the principles once championed by avantgarde pioneers’ clashes are actual and alive on establishing digital art and art practices reacting against the established institutional frameworks that aim to house and legitimise artistic endeavours.

To comprehend the contemporary discord, we first turn to the lessons imparted by avantgarde movements. These radical artistic endeavours, born out of a genuine desire to break from tradition, questioned the essence of art's autonomy, art institutions, and the role of art in the praxis of life. Our journey begins with exploring how these movements sowed the seeds of rebellion against established norms, challenging the existing order and laying the foundation for a discourse that continues to resonate today.

The first chapter follows the historical context of avantgarde movements. Here, we set the stage for an in-depth exploration of the clash between contemporary digital art and established art institutions, drawing inspiration from the rebellious spirit of avantgarde movements. By revisiting the principles of autonomy, institutionalisation, and the societal role of art, we aim to understand the profound shifts accompanying the digital age. The subsequent chapters will delve into the challenges of unstable media, the digitalisation of life, and the emergence of a new "digital creative practice."

Central to our inquiry is the concept of the autonomy of art, a principle cherished by avantgarde visionaries juxtaposed against the institutionalisation of art. The first sections illuminate the tension between the inherent freedom of artistic expression and the institutional structures that seek to categorise, validate, and often stifle innovation that gave fruitful soil to the historical avantgarde movements to develop. The clash between the avantgarde spirit and institutional expectations sets the stage for examining digital art's place in the contemporary art world.

To comprehend the disjunction, we delve into the multifaceted relationship between art, the status quo of society and everyday life. As we unravel these interconnected threads, it will become evident that avantgarde art challenges not only institutional norms but also societal expectations, inviting us to rethink the role of art in our daily lives. Those challenges will come back when we look at digital art in the contemporary world.

As we venture further into contemporary art, the second chapter on "Unstable Media" beckons our attention to the transformative impact of digital technologies on artistic expression. The term "unstable media" encapsulates the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of artistic practices influenced by digital tools and platforms. This chapter is the first bridge between avantgarde ideals and the unprecedented possibilities of the digital age.

We follow into the core of this thesis, which is the chapter on computer art. This chapter, laden with illustrations and case studies, seeks to unravel the intricacies of unstable media and computer art compared to traditional forms. By examining practical differences, conceptual paradigm shifts, and illustrative examples, we embark on a journey that lays the groundwork for understanding the nuanced relationship between contemporary digital art practices, the institutional frameworks that seek to encapsulate them, and paradigm shifts accompanying the digitalisation of artistic creation.

Embedded within the exploration of unstable media is an inquiry into the digitalisation of life itself. The increasing interdependence between art and technology prompts a revaluation of our understanding of artistic objects and their place in an environment saturated with digital stimuli. We get inspiration from the film "Ghosts in the Shell" as we navigate the intricacies of identity, existence, and the transformative power of the digital realm. This will delve into the profound implications of the cyborg metaphor. Donna Haraway's proclamation that "we are all cyborgs" becomes a guiding principle, inviting reflection on the symbiotic relationship between humans and technology. This interconnectedness extends beyond mere tools and engenders a new perspective on artistic creation, where the boundaries between artist and medium blur into a collaborative dance.

We scrutinise the practical differences between computer art and traditional forms to contextualise the paradigm shifts brought about by unstable media. Three distinct shifts from conventional art practice emerge, each challenging established norms and inviting a redefinition of artistic processes and outcomes.

We illustrate this with the work of Vera Molnar, an artist who navigated the transition from the imaginary realm to the tangible, marrying the ethereal possibilities of digital creation with the materiality of the real machine. This illustrative case study encapsulates the transformative journey from concept to manifestation within computer-generated art.

As we traverse the chapter, the distinctions between digital art objects and their traditional counterparts become increasingly pronounced. We scrutinise both the practical and conceptual disparities, shedding light on how digital technologies have reshaped the materials and methods of artistic creation and the very essence of what constitutes an artistic object.

At the heart of this exploration lies a redefinition of the artist and their role in the creative process. The emergence of the new "digital artist" challenges conventional notions of authorship, craftsmanship, and the tangible marks of the creator on a “canvas”. Digital tools usher in a paradigm where the artist is mediated by technology but becomes a mediator, orchestrating algorithms and manipulating code to breathe life into virtual canvases.

With the artist and their practice evolving, the very nature of the artistic object undergoes a profound shift. No longer confined to a static canvas or a sculpted form, the "digital art object" is dynamic, interactive, and mutable. We dissect the conceptual underpinnings of this shift, exploring how digital art objects challenge the viewer's traditional expectations of permanence, singularity, and the sanctity of the original.

Embedded within this exploration is a reflection on the relationship between digital art practices and the avantgarde movements of the past. While avantgarde artists sought to break free from traditional constraints, contemporary digital artists face similar challenges while navigating a frontier where the boundaries between virtual worlds and the real world blur, opening up new avenues for experimentation, innovation, and a redefinition of artistic autonomy.

We illustrate this with Rafael Rozendaal's exploration of the internet as a canvas. His work serves as a poignant illustration of the transformative shifts mentioned in the chapter. His digital artworks, accessible to anyone with an internet connection, challenge the traditional notions of art consumption, distribution, and ownership. The internet becomes both the medium and the exhibition space, democratising access to art in ways inconceivable within the confines of traditional art institutions.

As we navigate the evolving landscape of digital art creation, originality becomes a focal point. In digital art, replicability is not a flaw but a feature.

We have one final chapter to probe into the challenges posed by the digital age to the traditional concept of originality, exploring the dichotomy between the myth of originality in traditional art and the replicability inherent in the digital realm.

Traditional art often romanticises the notion of the singular, irreplicable masterpiece, elevating originality to mythical proportions. However, in the digital age, where copies are exact and infinitely reproducible, the very foundation of this myth is questioned.

We point out how the commercial dimensions of digital art, delving into the rise of NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens), are bringing digital art back into the traditional frameworks it aimed to disrupt.

We close with some personal final remarks on my practice and my take on the digital avantgarde.