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Media Studies 255

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Read all the instructions in the final exam instructions carefully before beginning! You’re required to write into this document, adding the necessary pages, and resave the file as your own.

**Essay Question I.**

**New technologies have always produced unintended consequences. One result of this would be how UX designers and engineers face a number of new ethical challenges today with the rise of technology regarding our interaction with it and dependence on it.**

**What is the primary job of a UX designer? Discuss the principle ethical quandaries faced by UX designers. What is persuasive design? Discuss the ways you feel this positively and/or negatively affect user behavior.**

The world of today is a world filled with new and emerging technologies. Without us even realizing, every day new discoveries are being made and advancements are happening more rapidly than we could ever imagine. Engineers with ideas and plans to make the everyday life of a human easier, more productive, making things more accessible and all around more enjoyable. However, at the end of the day the main goal of the producer is to make a product that will be successful; a product that will be user-friendly, and most importantly, a product that will bring in large revenue. This is where we’re introduced to the UX Designer.

Behind every new technology there is a UX Designer. According to lecture 9, a UX Designer is the person, or persons, at the helm of the design, ensuring these enhancements from the start of the idea through the distribution of the completed product. The primary job of a UX designer is to enhance user satisfaction, improve usability and extend the productivity of the product at hand. A major concern and driving factor is whether or not the product is something that makes things easier for human use. Is it something that will improve our task performance, will it make the task easier and/or faster? Is this product something enjoyable, that users will take positively to? These are all concerns faced by UX designers when working on a product.

Typically the UX designers are thoroughly trained. However, they could be self-taught. Today, this process is almost always involving code. Without even realizing, pretty much every new technology we interact with on a daily basis like apps, video games, social media platforms and even our email is riddled with code. Without code, they wouldn’t exist. Mainly, UX designers work with any kind of interactive product, usually powered by a computer, device, or internet technology. To test and improve the usability, accessibility, and pleasure provided in the interaction between the user and the product, the UX designer employs a wide variety of techniques. All of this sounds really positive so far, right? A team of people who vigorously test and smooth out problems in product designs to ensure that user satisfaction is at an all-time high? Unfortunately, as with most things there is good and bad; positives and negatives.

While working on these typically highly advanced, and sometimes revolutionary products, UX designers are faced with principle ethical quandaries. At the forefront of which, you have human costs and the devaluation of work through optimization of system design, augmented human ability, and automation. All of which aren’t terrible, within automation you’re eliminating dangerous and tedious work. Early efforts were driven by ways to make things easier for human use, trying to improve our task performance augmented us. While perhaps there were good intentions behind automation, it has done much harm. Automation has aided in dehumanization. While it has maximized efficiency, it has cut many human jobs and caused depression due to less human interaction. It has also lowered human skill set level. One of the most tragic events to be caused by this is the Foxconn Workers Suicides. Foxconn, the trading name for Hon Hai Precision Industry Company, is the largest private sector company within China, with a workforce of 1.4 million, and one of the world’s largest employers. Foxconn epitomized the commanding heights of China’s export oriented Industry. While it seemed like the picture of corporate success, it was hiding a dark, and inhumane employment regime. One that was not uncovered until a series of employee suicides in 2010. Tian Yu, a 17 year-old employee survived suicide attempt and recounts the series of events. Her personal narrative providing insight into the “consequences of the labour regimes of the globalized manufacturing supply chains of China’s export industries.” Yu found herself working 12+ hour shifts under inhumane treatment. While working on the assembly line, you were prohibited from having bathroom breaks and could not turn down overtime. She only got a day off every other week. Public humiliation for doing a task wrong or too slowly occurred often. There was no communication allowed in the workshop and the ever changing day and night shifts made it impossible to form a network of friends or build relationships. “This ‘advanced’ production system removed feelings of freshness, accomplishment or initiative toward work.” The work conditions brought on by automation that Yu faced at Foxconn were truly dehumanizing and stripped away the value of rewarding work. Which raises the question, “at what point must efficiency and optimization yield to human concerns?”

UX designers can subconsciously alter users through suboptimal choices and actions. Through persuasive design, which is defined as “an area of design practice that focuses on influencing human behavior through a product’s or service’s characteristics, based on psychological and social theories,” UX designers are able to yield thousands of variables, and target potential barriers and emotional triggers. By the use of the same design, someone’s behavior can be changed for the better, while someone else’s may be changed for the worst. In a way, this reminds me of the chapter entitled “The Dark Side of New New Media” in the New New Media book by Paul Levinson. In this chapter, he discusses one of his lectures where he seeks to answer the question of whether some technologies are inherently good or bad in their use and impact on people. There is not a single technology that is consistently, solely good or a device without any ill effects. Levinson says, “the determining factor in whether the knife --or whatever the technology -- is used for good or bad turns out not to be the technology but the human being or group of humans using the technology.” I feel like this quote summarizes my feelings towards the question at hand.

**Essay Question II.**

**The rise of digital technology has had a massive impact in the international creative community. Small digital video cameras and editing software have made it easier than ever for aspiring filmmakers to make a movie. Inexpensive recording software has done the same for musicians. Digital photography now rivals the traditional chemical process for resolution, while image manipulation is simpler and more sophisticated than ever before. Ultimately, the Internet provides a worldwide platform for artists of all stripes to share his/her work.**

**What are some of the core characteristics of the digital world? Discuss how these have impacted the arts. What are some specific developments that have impacted artists? In what ways are they unrewarding and in what ways are they beneficial?**

It is undeniable that digital technology has made an everlasting impact on the international creative community. One might even say the dynamic impact digital technology has had on art is an irreversible, game-changing one. In the past, very few people could be producers and creators. Not because they lacked the creativity or talent, but simply because the equipment was expensive and not easily accessible to the general public or the average joe. You needed more money and more expertise to be able to acquire and master these pieces of equipment. Meaning very few people could do it and less music and movies were being produced. This is a stark contrast to the realities of today. Now, anyone and everyone can be a writer, a musician or photographer, if they feel moved to. These may seem like positive developments on the surface but in a world where everyone can be a producer and a creator, everyone can be an artist, this can devalue the importance of technique and proper training.

Today, it seems that everyone is an inhabitant of the digital world. Some core characteristics of the digital world, according to the lecture, are inherent in the very nature of digital processes and in and of themselves have had a significant impact on the arts; its electronic, it’s networked, it’s interconnected. Material is in electronic form rather than in a physical form. There does not have to be a physical object for example, a book painting photograph or film reel for something to exist as an artwork. An artwork can be created electronically by recording from the physical world onto digital devices, manipulating or remixing electronic information that already exists, creating such as drawing digital graphics or combining any of these processes. However, it could be difficult to distinguish between a recording and a fabrication. Sounds they create may not exist in the physical world. It’s networked - as soon as the piece of art is on a network it is available instantly and to wherever the network reaches. Its format table so it can be moved and changed in format to be experienced in different ways. For example, many tv shows are aired on their network and then the next day you can access and watch them via Hulu at any time on your phone, laptop or smart TV. It is interconnected and can move between many points. Meaning its open to modification and interpretation. The viewers can all have a difference in experience due to simultaneous collaboration which makes it hard to determine what the original was and hard to capture what the artists original intention was. If you think about it, memes are the ultimate example of interconnectivity. An original piece of art is taken and edited to express different forms. There is a negative to this, however, and that is everyone now thinks they’re an “expert.” In the past, music, art, movies were critiqued in magazines and newspapers by industry professionals. There was much more validity to it. Today, you can comment on anything and give your “critique” which is more of an opinion.

These characteristics have undeniably impacted the arts, as discussed and captured in the documentary PressPausePlay. Elaborating on the first paragraph, one topic of discussion in PressPausePlay is how difficult and tedious it was to produce just one song. You needed multiple pieces of expensive equipment, all of them completing a separate task or creating a different sound. Today, you can do in 5 minutes what took several months to a year, 20 years ago all with one piece of equipment. Today, with a laptop, phone, GoPro or other type of handheld video camera, we can create music, film, CGI, computer graphic art, and so much more. Because these products are so much more affordable and easily accessible virtually anyone can become an artist. More young people, with more access to these tools that weren’t always available to them are definitely impacting art. While, there is more equal opportunity, is there really? The market becomes too oversaturated, making it much harder to breakthrough. As you mentioned in lecture, in a world where tens of millions of people who want to be heard and share their art, it is less likely that the compelling work will rise to the top and more likely to get drowned out or lost in the masses. It is truly up to the viewer and seeker. I believe that in these industries it is all about luck, right place, right time, and who you know. It’s natural to think that social media and video sharing platforms can help you get discovered when many celebrities and online celebrities have made it big off of it. But in reality it is much harder than you think. I don’t think that it being so easy for anyone to be able to make music, or film or art is a bad thing. I believe it to be beneficial if used as a form to express your creativity and as a way of release. However, you have to be realistic. In the documentary they bring up a very good point; just because you can, does it mean you should? They wonder if this is destroying the creative world and breeding a world of mediocrity. In this sense it is definitely painted in an unrewarding light. This is definitely not a topic that is black and white because there are positives and there are negatives. There will be success stories and pure talent discovered from this oversaturated market and unfortunately there will also be extremely talented people who are lost in the fray.

**Essay Question III.**

**Human enhancement technology converges nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science to improve human performance, attempting to temporarily or permanently overcome the current limitations of the human body through natural or artificial means.**

**Discuss some specific developments in human enhancement technology. Do you have trouble with the idea of these technologies making us stronger, faster, better? Do these advancements come at any cost? Such as privacy issues or a question of morals? What technological innovation do you think we need most and why?**

In lecture we learned that human enhancement refers to the general application of the convergence of nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science to improve human performance. Furthermore, it is stated that human enhancement is any attempt to temporarily or permanently overcome the current limitations of the human body through natural or artificial means. Some developments in human enhancement technology includes 3d printing of limbs and blood vessels, organ transplant, powered exoskeletons, and electronically augmented senses amongst other things used for treating illnesses, disabilities and enhancing human characteristics and/or capacities.

In my opinion 3D printing is beyond incredible and fascinating. Not to mention that there is something just so satisfying and almost calming about watching a video of a 3D printer at work. Its capabilities and the medical advancements that are able to be made because of 3D printers are truly miraculous, to me. I mean seriously awe inducing. In the video on slide 7 we can witness the 3D printing of a blood vessel, that is to scale and can function like a regular blood vessel. This was done at Harvard University, but Harvard is taking it even further and has created the first entirely 3D printed heart-on-a-chip with integrated sensing, also known as, micro-physiological systems. “We are pushing the boundaries of three-dimensional printing by developing and integrating multiple functional materials within printed devices,” said Lewis. “This study is a powerful demonstration of how our platform can be used to create fully functional, instrumented chips for drug screening and disease modeling.” Super impressive stuff. While I am excited to see where 3D printing goes in regards to the bio printing of blood vessels, printed heart monitors, and printing with human tissue, I think that the work that they are able to do now with prosthetics is something really important. They are truly changing the lives of wounded veterans, or people born without limbs. Essentially, providing them with more opportunities and independence while treating disability.

Diving deeper into Human Enhancement, we’re introduced to Michael Chorost. After suddenly going completely deaf in 2001 and having a computer implanted in his head to help him hear again, Chorost was inspired to write his first book, Rebuilt: How Becoming Part Computer Made Me More Human. The things he proposes in his latest book, World Wide Mind, brings thoughts of Iron Man to my mind. In this book he proposes many ideas for the future of humans. Not so much enhancing what we already have, but giving us new capabilities we’ve only seen in movies. A major one being telempathy, the ability to communicate with another person electronically, measuring and exchanging Neural Activity which evokes the same neural activity in the other person’s head Essentially allowing one person to know another person’s feelings or their physical sensations. Which is obviously something that doesn’t exist right now. You ask the question if this comes with any costs, if it invades privacy or a question of morals. I think that this “telempathy” definitely could if there weren’t any limitations to who could or could not read your mind or feel your feelings. I feel like it could be kind of fun if it worked similarly to Apple’s Airdrop feature in the sense that you get to choose who can send you their thoughts and who you will allow to access yours. I feel like this could be a really special thing for people who are mute or deaf. It would make communication with friends and family much easier. I definitely do think that this could also be beneficial for soldiers as posed on page 20. If used for positive and productive purposes I don’t see anything wrong with it.

Citations

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