

# Media art in (Post)Modernism:

## Turning to new media technology

Media Technology, today we take for granted that media technology has become a significant impact on our lives. We use it as a method or a tool to create, produce and compose new media. As well to support human communication over distances in time and space. [1] The medium ranges from common media types like photography, video, information and interactive media. However, why could these new technologies be seen as a base for the movement of Modernism? First, let us categorize these media technologies in four different groups by historical value: Art media, print media, electronic media and digital media.

Second, Modernism refers to a philosophical and cultural art movement globally from the early twentieth century. Sighting the value of the modern industrial society, artists used new materials and techniques to reflect these realities. [2] The focus on these techniques and materials is a technological improvement provided by the industry. With the arrival of the mass media, this reflects on the use of media technology and the creation of new media art. The movement arose with the advent of photography; this representational function rendered much of visual painted art obsolete. Thereby strongly affects the aspect of Modernism. To make clear, it is highly debatable whether a work is Modernism or Postmodernism. [3] I will use the acceptance that Modernism is a subclass for a wide variety of cultural developments. Postmodernism is one of these movements based on socio-technological and philosophically progress and not a specific visual style. Thereby from the 20th century postmodernism referred to the awareness and the reinterpretation of Modernism. As follow, I will discuss four artworks from different disciplines in their role as new media art and their use of technology in the broader aspect of (post)modernism.

### Oscar Gustave Rejlander

*The Two Ways of Life, 1857*

Rejlander was an expert in photomontage and a pioneer in Victorian art photography. He was undertaking many experiments in combining prints and photography. Rejlander was not the inventor of this; however, he created more sophisticated and impressive works. He was

experimenting with the combination of printing from several negatives and made his best metaphorical work, *The Two Ways of Life*, for the Paris Exhibition in 1855. A photomontage of thirty-two images, which shows the path of evil on the left and sound on the right. [4]



Royal Photographic Society Collection, 1857

Rejlander was a pioneer in photomontage and used the *form* of photography for the full technical capabilities of the camera as a capture medium. To create a scene with real naked women and not the idealized forms common in Victorian art. Seen indecent it reflects the moralistic reality of the modern industrial *function* in society. *The Two ways of Life*, could then be seen as a contextual adoption of the commonly heard expression, in the art movement Modernism, 'form follows function'. As it can do better than any other medium to effectively and technically efficiently reproduce parts of the visible world on the flat-surfaced collage. [5] This early form of Art media is not just contemporary, as it is a new way to convey the everyday use of spreading and changing visual information.



White chapel art Gallery, 1956

### Richard Hamilton

*Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956

This iconic work of Hamilton is amid the most well-known works in post-war British art. It defines the rise of consumerism in society in the mid-1950s. The print initially made in 1956 is a mix of magazine covers dated even before '56 and is a phenomenon by several years in the movement of pop art. Hamilton contributed this work for the 'This is Tomorrow exhibition' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. The goal of the exhibition was to have artists and architects create their vision of the future, trying to confuse and stimulate the user with images and

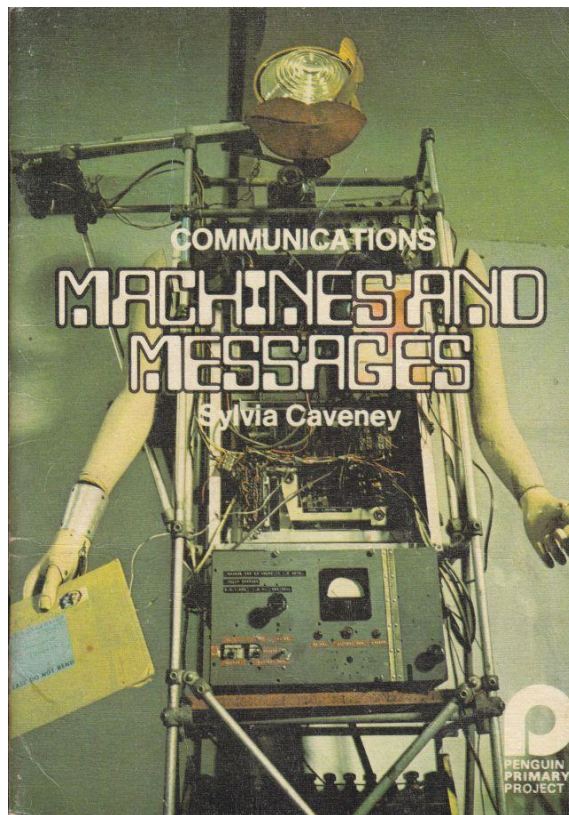
iconography from the modern world. [6] *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* Is a collage made from iconic images in magazines brought back by John McHale from the United States? The collage represents the various ways of communicating information over print media at the time. Hamilton had a strange interest in modern technology and popular culture. All of the objects you see in the work (a phone, a television and a tape recorder) would have been in the 1950s state of the art, but will now appear completely outdated. Notice the half-naked man holding like some giant lollipop with the word 'POP'. A funny detail because the term POP Art was not really in use back then.

Hamilton states in *Exteriors, Interiors, Objects, People*, [7] that the work is more an allegory rather than a representation of a room. Men could see the ceiling as a space-age view from the earth, and the carpet is a distant view of people bathing on the beach. It summarizes the course that took shape in post-war Britain, with the future of Hi-tech and the surge for optimism. This modern collage not only shows the use of modern technology in society but also the use of print media and his hope for an optimistic future.

## **Bruce Lacy**

*Rosa Bosom, 1965*

Radio Operated Simulated Actress Battery Or Standby Operated Mains, otherwise written as R.O.S.A. B.O.S.O.M Is maybe not the most famous robot, but she won the 'Alternative Miss World' contest in 1985. Made in 1965 by the British Bruce Lacy, Rosa was a replacement actress for his live shows like 'An Evening of British Rubbish' which he made with Alberts. [8]



White chapel art Gallery, 1956

with the creation of long-standing artworks but with the definition of other cultural strategies and the gesture of communicative multi-media forms. When art defines itself as contemporary the value of the modern electronic media should furnish new concepts and improve our relations with technology and ourselves. [10]

Rosa was a reaction to actors getting bossed around. For the robot does not care about being always told what to do and does how the director wants it. Thereby removes the spontaneity and the creativity of an actor's input. It gives a peak of Lacy's critical attitude towards the future where artificial substitutes might replace every part of the human anatomy. Lacy emphasizes his fears about the creation of robot-like humans and ironically makes one himself, Rosa even was his 'best man' when he got married, getting some worldwide publicity.

Lacy believed that artists should awaken conscience and awareness of life when moving to a fearsome future where someone's very identity may be lost. The artist should safeguard society. With his humanoid sculptures, Lacy did not try to make aesthetically likeable but allowed the materials to dedicate a particular image. [9]

Therefore, the future of arts no longer seems to lie

## **Marshmallow Laser Feast (MLF)**

*We Live in an Ocean of Air, 2018*

*We live in an Ocean of Air* is an art installation in the Saatchi Gallery in west London by art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast. A multi-sensory immersive virtual reality experience about exploring the growing life of a giant sequoia tree. Moreover, exploring these individual organisms through their structure and feeling them breathe. This VR experience pushes cutting edge technologies to its limits because you are entirely free to walk around in the digital world



by weaning the computer on you. For the digital world has almost no constraints in its impressiveness, the user can expand perception and explore the connection with the natural world. You are even connected with this world with a heartbeat, breathing and hand tracking sensors; you can smell the scent dispersal system and feel the air moving through the wind machines. One of the makers, Barnaby Steel, thinks that after having this short experience. You feel the world beyond the limits of your senses. Near the end, when the world fades away, your emotions are beginning to run high. [11]

Another key feature of 'We Live in an Ocean of Air' is that you can participate in this experience both individually and together. Steel's colleague Hand Ersing speaks about humanity's independence with nature is absolute. The irony of using a digital world to make the audience understand and interconnect with this ecosystem is there. However, if this is what is needed to bring them closer together, the message has succeeded. [12] The exciting thing about VR is that instead of being a consumer or an observer of art, you become a participant. This interactivity between the real and the digital world forges a relationship between the brain and the physical activity. [13]



Saatchi Gallery, 2018

### Why postmodern art

Why should these four previous works fall under a strategy like modern and postmodern art? I think it is because all of them used a new medium and technology to create these artworks. When an artwork was called 'modern', it was because it did not build on the teachings that came before. When in the 1950s aesthetic beauty became less critical to the underlying concept of art, art became after that called contemporary art. [14]

Nevertheless, I do believe it is not just contemporary; media art has a profound use for us. These artists are the founding fathers of technologies we use and what has yet to come. **Rejlander** with his first use of photomontage of modern reality, A technique that has become important in this day and age. **Hamilton**, with his collage of our consumerism, and how we will be dependent on technology. **Lacy** with his robot as a replacement for actors, making us conscious of our relationship with these humanoids in the near future. Furthermore, **MLF** with their VR experience, trying to restore the lost connection we got with nature in this digital age. By calling it contemporary, it feels like something from the past, a label that does not give these artists enough credit.

## References

1. "What Is 'Media Technology'?" *Moore Kingston Smith*, 25 Oct. 2019, [mooreks.co.uk/insights/what-is-media-technology/](http://mooreks.co.uk/insights/what-is-media-technology/).
2. Tate. "Modernism – Art Term." *Tate*, [www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism).
3. "Modernism." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 12 Nov. 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism).
4. "Oscar Gustave Rejlander." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 3 Sept. 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar\\_Gustave\\_Rejlander](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Gustave_Rejlander).
5. "Why Photographers Don't Get Modern Art." *PetaPixel*, 6 Mar. 2017, [petapixel.com/2017/03/04/photographers-dont-get-modern-art/](http://petapixel.com/2017/03/04/photographers-dont-get-modern-art/).
6. Tate. "'Just What Was It That Made Yesterday's Homes so Different, so Appealing? (Upgrade)', Richard Hamilton, 2004." *Tate*, 1 Jan. 1970, [www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-just-what-was-it-that-made-yesterdays-homes-so-different-so-appealing-upgrade-p20271](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hamilton-just-what-was-it-that-made-yesterdays-homes-so-different-so-appealing-upgrade-p20271).
7. Richard Hamilton: Exteriors, Interiors, Objects, People, exhibition catalogue, Kunstmuseum p.44.
8. Regine. "The Bruce Lacey Experience." *We Make Money Not Art*, 11 Aug. 2012, [we-make-money-not-art.com/the\\_bruce\\_lacey\\_experience/](http://we-make-money-not-art.com/the_bruce_lacey_experience/).
9. "1965 - ROSA BOSOM - Bruce Lacey (British)." *Cyberneticzoo.com*, 12 Nov. 2010, [cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1965-rosa-bosom-bruce-lacey-british/](http://cyberneticzoo.com/robots/1965-rosa-bosom-bruce-lacey-british/).
10. "John McHale and the Expendable Ikon." *Design Observer*, [www.designobserver.com/feature/john-mchale-and-the-expendable-ikon/32898](http://www.designobserver.com/feature/john-mchale-and-the-expendable-ikon/32898).
11. Jacobson, Seth. "The Virtual-Reality Art Show That Seeks to Repair Our 'Broken Connection with Nature'." *The National*, The National, 12 Dec. 2018, [www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/the-virtual-reality-art-show-that-seeks-to-repair-our-broken-connection-with-nature-1.801988](http://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art/the-virtual-reality-art-show-that-seeks-to-repair-our-broken-connection-with-nature-1.801988).
12. "Marshmallow Laser Feast – We Live in an Ocean of Air." *Art Week*, 10 Jan. 2019, [www.artweek.com/events/united-kingdom/art-exhibition/london/marshmallow-laser-feast-%E2%80%93-we-live-ocean-air](http://www.artweek.com/events/united-kingdom/art-exhibition/london/marshmallow-laser-feast-%E2%80%93-we-live-ocean-air).
13. Schuster, Angela M.H. "The Art of Virtual Reality." *Robb Report*, Robb Report, 1 Sept. 2018, [robbreport.com/shelter/art-collectibles/art-of-virtual-reality-2813207/](http://robbreport.com/shelter/art-collectibles/art-of-virtual-reality-2813207/).
14. "What's the Difference Between Modern and Contemporary Art?" *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., [www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-modern-and-contemporary-art](http://www.britannica.com/story/whats-the-difference-between-modern-and-contemporary-art).