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NAME: PATRICK LICHTY

COUNTRY: USA

1. What was your first experience with digital art/new media? How did that experience shape your view of the world? Did it inspire you to change your art/practice?

PL:

1978 - Computer-based: Atari 800. Earlier than that, around 1972 or so, the Akron Art Institute had an exhibition of neon and electroacoustic music that was amazing. Since I was eight years old and already painting, making ceramics and textile, I just thought these forms were really interesting and caused me to integrate electronics into things I was making by about 13 or 14...

By the time I got the Atari in '78, I think it made me want to draw or write music with it rather than try to write a video game. I think my parents misconstrued my interest, sending me to engineering school in '82. However, this probably was not a bad idea, because there were very few teaching what I wanted to know at the time, and I was too immature to develop it the way I would later want to. Things happen for reasons, I assume.

My involvement in technology has been organic - I was raised with science fiction in the 60's my mom let me watch Star Trek in its third season in 1968, and technology was (for me) merely something that I saw coming for years. I thought - "Let's make something really cool with this!"

2. What books are you reading now? Are they related to digital art and new media? Are any of those critical books written about new media, digital art, art theory? If so tell us what you like about these books and what you have gained from reading them.

PL:

The Last Lecture, by Randy Pausch. As a pioneer in VR, Pausch created the ALICE platform, but at the end of his life, it's interesting to see what he thinks really matters. It reminds me that it isn't all about "the work"; it's also about what sort of person is doing "the work".

The Baroque Trilogy, by Neal Stephenson. I love Stephenson's exhaustive (Baroque!) detail and epic breadth in this series. It reminds me of how recent the Modern era is, how rich technology's history is, and underscores that perhaps the future isn't what it was cracked up to be. In my art, I have been looking at the leading (futurism) and trailing edges (history), and have been feeling that wanting to surf at the edge isn't as important to me as it once was.

3. Describe your personal practice. How does your art/practice relate to other works/ other people working in your field?

PL:

My definition of my practice is something that continues to develop over time. The current one seems to be the most concise, in that I investigate media and social relations, as I started out as a serious contemporary artist in 1990 doing research in qualitative sociology and virtual culture in BBS'es, VR, etc. However, this includes theory, activism, hacking, playing with the virtual/physical boundary, all that.

My most visible "art" has been part of the tactical community, to be certain. However, many know me for my writing, and the only people I might tend to

invoke might be painter Andrew Forge, who said that his work was the working out of his thought. Otherwise, perhaps people I might like to situate myself close to would be my friend and collaborator, Greg Little, maybe Maywa Denki in regards to my investigation of video devices.

The problem is that I feel that there aren't many practitioners who are as tied to the text as foundation of their work, and I say hesitantly that the person I identify with most in regards integration of text and practice is perhaps Manovich, although I cannot compare us.

In the past 3 years, I have gone heavily into virtual worlds, and especially the online virtual world, Second Life as one of the founders of the virtual performance group, Second Front. In regards to this, the work has been closest to artists like Gazira Babeli, Franco and Eva Mattes, and Cao Fei, but carrying on the performance traditions of artists like Abramovic, Gomez-Pena, Nauman, and Fluxus.

4. What do you believe are the most interesting ideas being investigated in your field. Tell us how your personal practice integrates, relates or extends those ideas.

PL:

I'm curious as to whether virtual worlds are actually going to be viable spaces for Contemporary work in the larger sense, like Video has its nascent era. I am also interested in seeing how New Media will integrate into the Contemporary scene, and what parts of it will remain specific to its community and traditions. In this manner, I have sought to limit myself far less to New Media venues, and am working in spaces that are merely appropriate to what I'm trying to do at the moment.

5. What are the most negative aspects of new media? If you could create great change in the field what would you do? How would you like to see new media develop in the near future.?

PL:

The increasing dependence on screens and devices increasingly mediates interpersonal relations, which is a sentiment I voiced in Haymarket Riot's "Web" videos (1997-2000) when I wrote, "Our Relationships are Being Replaced By Wires." Although my community is largely online, I have resisted giving my students solely electronic media, and refuse to do distance learning, because as sensate, communal beings, I still feel that there is great value to physical community. Hanging out with my friends Gazira and Bibbe are a pale shadow of having coffee with them.

In addition, I am feeling increasingly chained to my media, and from this I am very interested in independent media, such as making New Media off the power and data grids, and doing New Media outdoors, and in large physical spaces without screens.

6. In the general discourse of contemporary art as it exists today, what interests you the most? What interests you the least?

PL:

Perhaps what interests me least is the "fashionability" of art, and what interests me the most is when art bleeds out of the "art space". This might mean a viral piece, activist work, or even the commodity-forms of Murakami. What I love is when art and thought get into the mass consciousness and play what Pausch calls the "head fake". The least interesting place for art is the gallery, with few exceptions.

7. If you could alter the course of ideas and practices in contemporary art what would you do. For example would you create virtual archives? Would you set up a lottery system to fund artists? Would you start working with sociologists to expand your practice etc...

PL:

I would eradicate the idea of "disciplines" and restructure Western thought holistically. Math, Science, Engineering, Art, Cultural Studies as we know them

would cease to exist. However, the resultant epistemology would be so alien that I'm not sure how to explain it briefly.

8. Do you have a question you'd like to ask yourself? Do you have a question you'd like to ask other people for a future e-interview?

PL:

Why are you doing this at this time? Is it still for the same reasons? What, if anything has changed?

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