


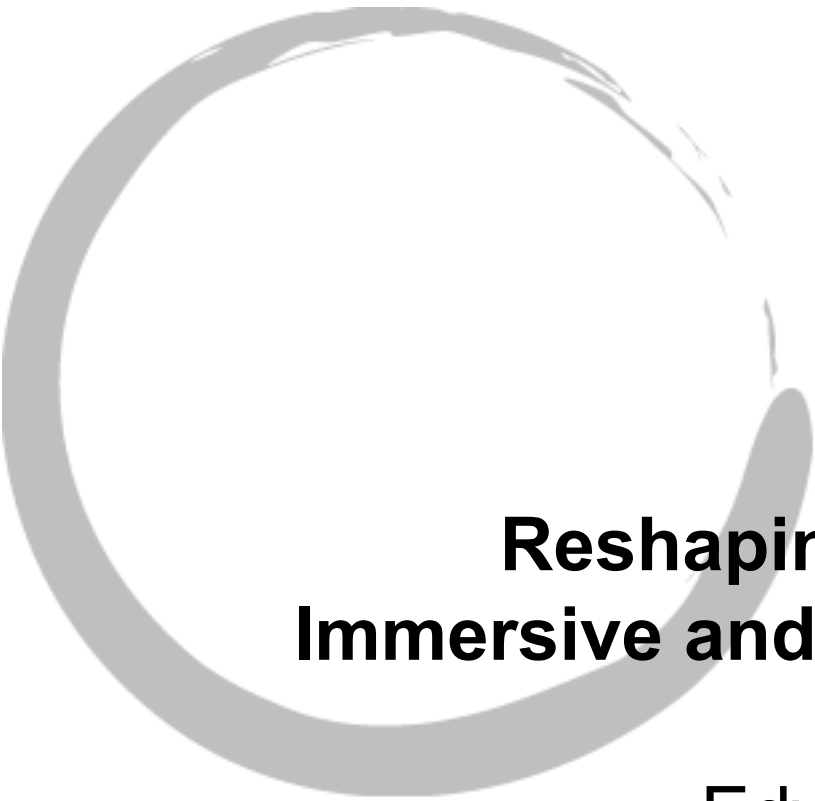


**VM503
AESTHETICS AND HISTORY
OF NEW MEDIA**

WEEK 3 CLASS 1


Jo-Anne Green, Emerson College





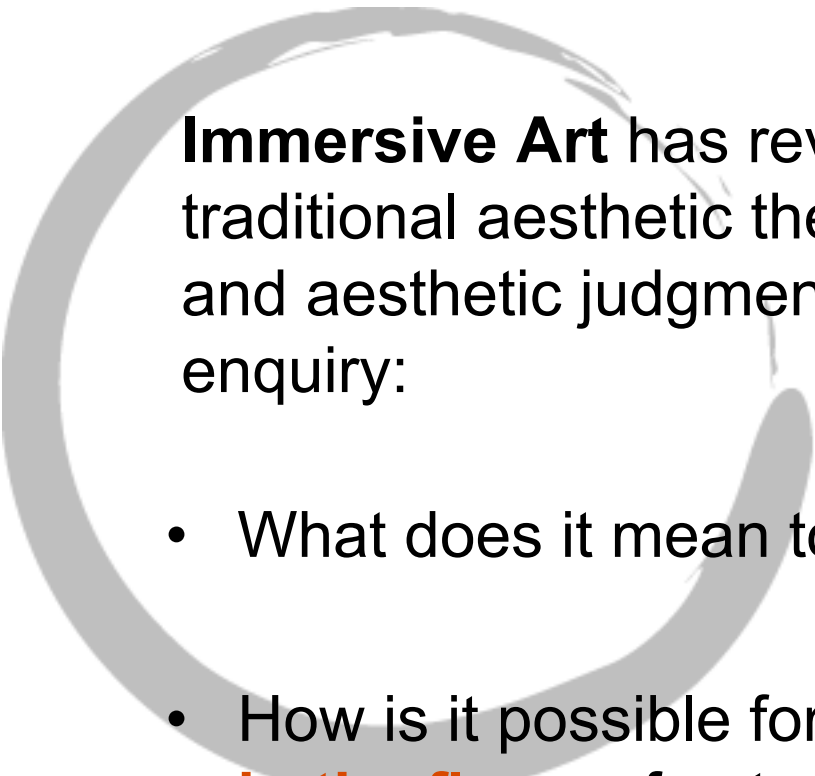
**Reshaping Spectatorship:
Immersive and Distributed Aesthetics**
by
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Immersive		Distributed
Virtual Reality (VR) Screen-based Installation		Net.art, Networked Art: (operating in and experiencing the spatial and temporal flows of information networks)
Collapse distance between 'viewer' and representational space by bringing the screen/image closer to the viewer's eyes.		Collapse distance between remote participants and events by connecting people.
Different <i>media</i> , <i>processes</i> , and <i>modes</i> of audience engagement but share interest in transforming/extending <i>notions of the body and perception</i> through technological mediation.		
Immersion is the sensation of being present in an environment that is illusionistic and sometimes remote.		
Immersive artworks re-shape our understandings of art spectatorship, from a distanced and passive exercise , to an active and often intimate endeavor, that is both <i>playful</i> and performative in nature.		

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Immersive Art has revolutionary consequences for traditional aesthetic theory in relation to spectatorship and aesthetic judgment. Three questions guide this enquiry:

- What does it mean to be immersed in art?
 - How is it possible for viewers to become **immersed in the flows** of networked information?
 - If networked immersive artworks create **new aesthetic experiences for participants**, what are the consequences for traditional theories of aesthetics and spectatorship?
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What is Immersion?

- *Immersion* implies that one is drawn into an **intimate and embodied relationship** with a **virtual** and **physical** architecture, whether this immersive affect is generated by a VR system, the cinema, a panorama or another medium.
- It suggests that one is **enclosed** and **embraced** by the audio-visual space of the work, and **transported** into **another realm or state of perception**. One cannot be immersed without being affected by the environment on **perceptual, sensory, psychological** and **emotional** levels.
- Indicates a human **desire to fuse** with the **representational space or technology** -- a desire to become *posthuman* or *transhuman*.

- Immersive artworks often generate **self-conscious** and **self-reflexive** forms of perception and interaction as participant-viewers engage with the work.
- Considering this, Immersive art presents a challenge to traditional aesthetic philosophies -- specifically those descended from *Immanuel Kant* -- that seek to assert the need for **perceptual distance** during the experience and assessment of art.

- **Critical distance** has remained a dominant discourse in art history and theory.
- Modern aesthetic philosophy has often struggled to account for **sensory-aesthetics in the body** of the spectator, tending to privilege **rational thought** over **sensory perception** and a body that **simultaneously thinks and feels** (Lyotard, 1994: 10)
- Modern aesthetic theory that asserts the need for critical distance tends to **perpetuate a mind/body dualism** where **the mind** of the spectator is seen as the **primary site** of interpretation.
- Critical Distance vs Critical Reflection

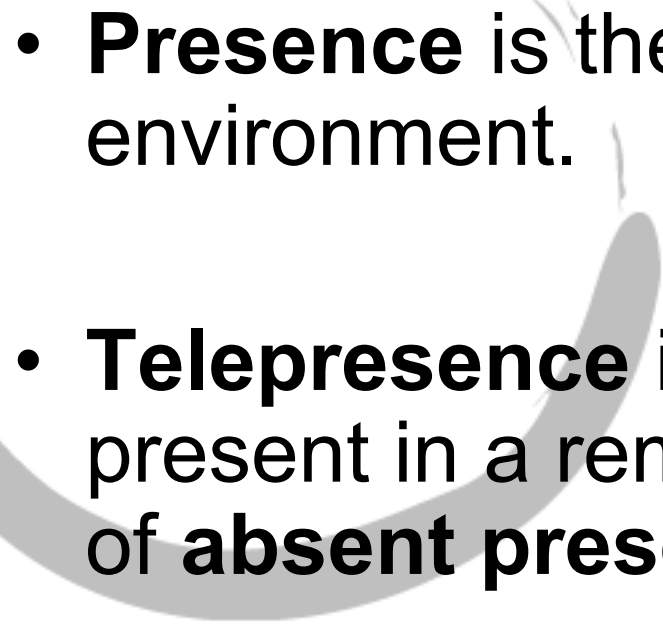

- Immersive digital art may be seen as an extension of modern art movements such as *Dada*, *Fluxus* and *Conceptual Art* because of the **emphasis on formal elements, the concept of the work, art as an event, and the focus on audience participation.**
- Immersive art is concerned with exploring and **foregrounding the body's** complex role in aesthetic experience.
- **Somaesthetics** = the critical study of the experience and use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning. (Shusterman)

- Rather than making the technology and interface **invisible** and **natural** to the participant, new digital technologies and aesthetics are often appropriated and applied in critical and subversive ways to **draw attention to the medium, the interactive event, and the modes of perception**, used to participate with the work.

QUESTION: is it possible to be immersed in an experience and be aware of the technology mediating your experience?

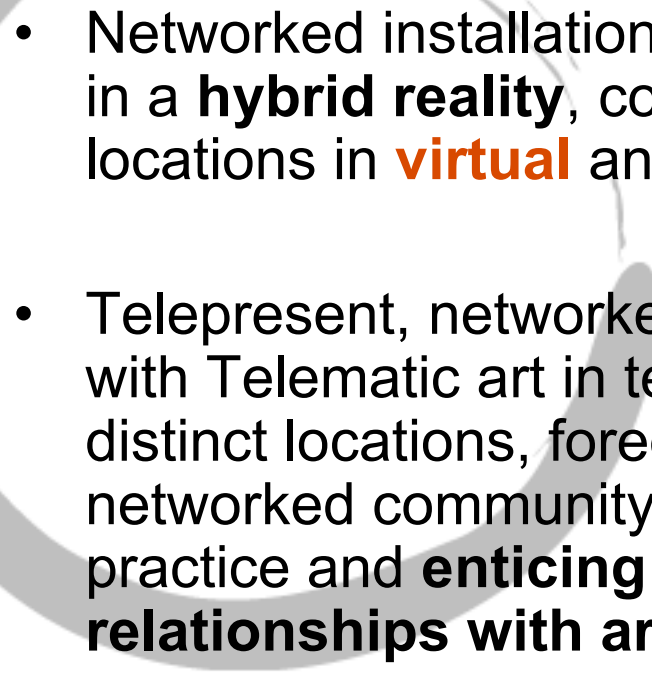
Virtual Reality

- Whether it is **total** or **partial**, immersion implies that the *user* experiences **a sense of fusion** with a *technologically generated space* -- a virtual environment (VE).
- The user becomes **deeply embedded** in this illusory space and their faculties of perception -- their senses and processes of cognition of space, time and motion -- recognize this experience as being akin to an **embodied form of perception**.
- Consequently, the **boundaries** between the computer-generated stimuli of the VR system and the embodied space of the participant-viewer **seem to collapse**.

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- **Presence** is the sense of being in an environment.
 - **Telepresence** is a sense of being present in a remote environment, a form of **absent presence**.
 - Both contribute to a sense of **immediacy** and **intimacy** with that environment.

Networked Art

- Technologies such as telephones, simulcast TV, and the Internet seem to **collapse the distance** between users in remote locations by placing them in a **communicative relationship** with each other.
- **Telematic**, **Telepresence** and **Telerobotic** art projects explore the idea of our physical body and communities **being distributed throughout the world**, yet also **being linked together** via networked connections and spaces.
- The themes of *new communities*, *surveillance*, *voyeurism* and the *lack of privacy* in relation to networked technologies and spaces, are dominant concerns.

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- Networked installations often seek to immerse participants in a **hybrid reality**, connecting people from remote locations in **virtual** and **physical** spaces.
 - Telepresent, networked installations share some concerns with Telematic art in terms of **linking participants** from distinct locations, foregrounding the concept of a networked community, stressing **process-orientated art** practice and **enticing multiple users into participatory relationships with art**.
 - Telepresence **extends the body**, producing a type of **cyborg embodiment and perception** for the operator who fuses her naturalised modes of sensing and perceiving with technological modes of seeing, hearing and feeling.

Conclusions

- Networked art creates immersive experiences by **collapsing the perceived distance** between participants or events. Digital networks connect people who are geographically distributed.
- Immersive and distributed aesthetics are not necessarily escapist in nature and do not always represent a flight from the body. Rather, as the term aesthetics implies, they can evoke a **return to the body and sensory perception** by heightening awareness of naturalised and embodied modes of perception.
- Artworks that generate immersive and distributed aesthetics have had a dramatic effect on traditional aesthetic theories that uphold the ideal of a **distanced observer**. Immersion refuses the illusion of a secure place outside of an artwork or technological culture where one can **dispassionately assess art, technology and our relationships with these discourses**.