

新媒體藝術中的「用者自創」

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假若要從縱橫交錯、五花八門的當代新媒體藝術中點出一些具普遍性的特質和方向，我想近年發展得愈見活躍和成熟的「自家製」運動及其延伸的精神，肯定是其中最為突出和具深遠影響的一項發展。

作為一種主張跨媒介與跨學派的藝術形式，新媒體藝術結合了當代文化強調流動身份與多元表述這一個特殊的文化取向和價值。新媒體藝術的內容和形式活潑多變，往往不受傳統藝術類型的束縛限制。它大量混合利用各式的技術（電腦、互聯網、機械、電子裝置等）與媒體（影像、聲音、文字等）於創作中；又輕易遊走於音樂、表演、電影、遊戲和裝置藝術之間的傳統藝術分類。正正由於這種流動多元的取向，我們若果只單單以「媒體」和「形式」這兩個傳統藝術觀念來分析、了解新媒體藝術，便很難辨認出一些具有歸納性的觀察和意義，換來的往往只是一些片面或是不甚了了的結論。

但假若我們不單視新媒體藝術為一種類型或形式，並暫且放下狹義的媒體中心論，轉而嘗試去明白新媒體藝術作為一種當代文化實踐的可能及想像，那麼我們可能不難從眾多看似不同的新形式和運動中看到一些相近的理念和課題。而在當代新媒體藝術眾多不同的發展之間，其中一個較為明顯的共同課題和趨勢便是前文所提到的「自家製」精神的提倡與其普及化。一如其名，「自家製」文化強調參與性和自主創造力。其主張不假外求，尤其減少對主流／建制的倚賴，並往往提出另類的方法去補充、挑戰和取代主流的固有創作程序和模式。要更具體去說明「自家製」這概念在新媒體藝術之中的位置，我們不妨拿近年開始興起的藝術家開發軟件來作為其中一個例子，去看看它的端倪。

近十數年間，我們開始看到了越來越多由藝術和設計工作者所主導研發，專門為學習和應用電腦程式於音樂、多媒體、互動設計的數碼軟件的誕生。當中較為人熟悉的例子有 Chuck、DBN、Field、Impromptu、Lily、Nodebook、Processing、Pure Data、openFrameworks、SuperCollider 和 vvvv 等等。這些藝術家開發軟件有著不同的流通和分享形式，當中既有免費軟件 (freeware)，亦有以「通用公共許可」(General Public License) 而授權的開放源碼軟體 (open source)。為了方便的原故，我們暫且把它們歸納並簡稱為「藝術軟件」。

上述所提到的藝術軟件都是由不同的藝術家、設計師、音樂家和媒體工作者（例如 Ben Fry、Zachary Lieberman、John Maeda、MESO、OpenEnded Group、Miller Puckette、Casey Reas、Ge Wang 等）因應他們自己的研究、創作、技術或其他不同的需要而衍生和研發出來的計劃。有別於大部份主流商業媒體軟件，藝術軟件不單是一件為用者提供一些既定的效果、捷徑或程序的工具。藝術軟件的主要目的和功能是要給予使用者一個有善和開放的平台，讓他們能運用電腦語言去設計和創作聲音、圖像或其他多媒體互動經驗。它們更著重讓用者明白、理解數碼創作背後的基本運作及原理；通過這理解從而鼓勵用者利用這些數碼平台來實驗和製造自己的工具，為往往看似「高深莫測」的電腦藝術「去黑盒化」。從這一意義來看，藝術軟件不單只是一種工具，它同時亦是一種「後設工具」(meta-tool)。當然這並不代表在藝術創作上利用商業軟件或是免費藝術軟件有著甚麼必然或本質上的好壞，但明顯地二者象徵著兩種極其不同的創作理念和藝術視野。

「用者自創」這一種不假外求的態度，打破藝術家往往可能過份倚

賴主流或現成技術所限的問題。從實際的角度來看，自家製軟件給予創作者更大的實驗空間和自由，減少受商業軟件及其所謂專業程序的既定想法和因循的限制。從其精神而言，藝術軟件鼓勵創作者走出既定的角色並嘗試從多方面介入藝術創作的整個過程（開發、研究、製作和分享）之中。藝術軟件告訴我們，軟件／工具研發本身就是藝術創作／內容的一部份。藝術家除了能創作「內容」之外，亦有能力（及需要）去創造和改變創作本身的技術、過程和範疇。藝術軟件開發這個例子的重要性並不單純要指出駕御科技或技術的必需性，而是這個理念如何可以鼓勵一個綜合及整體 (holistic) 的創作態度。藝術創作不限於表達、溝通、呈現；它同時亦是實驗、研究和建造。科技並不能走出和獨立於文化之外，相反亦然。而我認為這正正是藝術軟件最大膽、最有意義的地方，因為它根本地挑戰近代藝術傳統對於藝術家的角色的定位，以及對於工具和內容的二分化提出一次再反思。

「自家製」文化啟發並展示了一個新的藝術創作態度和模式的可能，而藝術家開發軟件只是「自家製」文化在云云媒體藝術發展的其中一個較為新近的例子和化身。若果把「自家製」文化放回藝術發展的大歷史之間，我們其實不難發現它早在二十世紀媒體藝術發展史出現的蹤跡。二十世紀初未來主義藝術家 Luigi Russolo 的「嘈音機器」(Intonarumori)、視樂藝術家 Thomas Wilfred 的「色光投影機」(Clavilux)、美國電腦動畫先鋒 Whitneys 兄弟四十年代開始研發的類比電腦、德裔實驗動畫家 Oscar Fischinger 的「寫光器」(Lumigraph)、錄像藝術家 Nam Jun Paik 及工程師 Shuya Abe 的錄像合成器 (Paik/Abe Synthesizer)、實驗電影藝術家 Stan Vanderbeek 的「電影球」(Movie-drome)、錄像藝術家 Vasulka 夫婦二人一系列的錄像裝置等等，都是一些二十世紀較為人熟悉的「自家製」媒體藝術先鋒例子。在「媒體藝術」還未成為一個普及的藝術形式和通用詞彙之前，這些媒體藝術家已經走出既有的框框，並向世界展示了開發自己理想的藝術工具的可能。

今年香港獨立短片及錄像比賽聯同 art.ware project 邀請了三位世界知名的新媒體藝術家 Golan Levin, Zachary Lieberman 及 Julien Maire 來作一場示範表演，為大家展示自家製媒介的獨特創意和未來電影的無限可能。美國新媒體藝術家 Golan Levin 2001 年的「鈴聲——手提電話交響樂」(Dialtones--a Telesymphony) 可謂技驚四座，其後的作品如「人手輸入戲」(Manual Input Sessions) 不單再次展示其個人電腦程式功力，更成功把新舊媒體融合成一場極富詩意的多媒體手影戲。同樣來自美國的 Zachary Lieberman 是近來大熱的 openFrameworks 的計劃主舵手，其作品「畫」(drawn) 亦不遑多讓，透過電腦程式把一張簡單的白紙和一枝墨筆轉化成一場活潑幽默的即興動畫表演。最後來自法國的 Julien Maire 可算是現代魔幻燈籠師，他自製的投影機可謂重新賦予電影觀賞一個新的意義和經驗，使大家再到電影院時不得不回頭細望投影機這頭被久違了的怪獸。三位藝術家將會分別於他們的表演中利用其自創的軟／硬工具，展現自家製媒介的神奇魔力和奇特創意，並把一些大家日常久違的事物轉化成一次魔幻般的懾人影音經驗。

「自家製」當然不一定是烏托邦。「自家製」文化並不是要單純地把獨立研發分割於主流科技、文化的發展來看待，否則這只是過份簡化二者之間複雜的關係。如前文所指，「自家製」的重點精神在於要提倡一種整合的創作態度，藉著藝術家介入藝術的整體創作過程，拓展出更獨立的創作空間和自由，從而達到革新、豐富藝術表達及其範疇的目標。Levin, Lieberman 和 Maire 的作品正好顯示了這目標的可能。

Customising New Media

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New media art is notoriously multi-faceted and diverse. But if one were to find a way to identify some of the common features and recent directions of this highly malleable art form, I think one might find the "do-it-yourself" philosophy and its associated movements (such as free software, open-source, open design etc.) to be important and useful points of entry for the discussion and understanding of the multi-dimensional developments of new media art in recent years.

As an artistic practice that places strong emphases on transmediality and interdisciplinarity, new media art shares with contemporary culture concepts of fluidity and heterogeneity, and embraces them as part of its visions and agendas. Less concerned and fettered by traditional conceptions of artistic genres or forms, the substance and form of new media art tends to be mutable and less clearly defined by discipline. It often employs and mixes different technologies (e.g. computer, Internet, robotics, electronics etc.) and media (e.g. images, sounds and texts etc.) in its production, creating a hybrid form that stands somewhere curiously among different artistic categories such as music, performance, film, video art, game, installation etc. Owing to this dynamic and fluid nature, to understand and analyse new media art simply in terms of traditional concepts such as "media" and "form" often yields a vague and incomplete picture that fails to provide useful observations for critical inquiry and reflection of the subject matter.

However, if one can momentarily suspend a "media-centric" perspective and not merely regard new media as an exclusive artistic genre or form, but instead understand it as both a projection and embodiment of contemporary cultural practice, then one might immediately find it much easier to discern similar themes and ideas among seemingly diverse forms and movements in new media art. In recent years, one of the most evident commonalities shared across the many different sub-developments and practices within the multi-faceted domain of new media art is the advocacy of the "do-it-yourself" spirit and its growing popularisation. As its name suggests, the culture of "do-it-yourself" emphasises autonomy, participation and creativity. It aims to minimise one's dependence on establishments (or established means) by innovating alternative ways to supplement or challenge conventional methods and protocols. To better illustrate how the concept and culture of "do-it-yourself" is applied and operated within the area of new media art, we can perhaps use the recent development of artist-developed software as an example to support a more concrete discussion.

In the last decade or so, we began to see a blossoming of independent computer software developed by artists and designers for use in the learning and production of music, multi-media and interactive design. Among the numerous examples in the list, the more well-known programmes include *Chuck*, *DBN*, *Field*, *Impromptu*, *Lily*, *Nodebook*, *Processing*, *Pure Data*, *openFrameworks*, *SuperCollider* and *vvvv*. These artist-developed software have markedly different distribution strategies and sharing philosophies as compared to their mainstream commercial counterparts. Some of them exist as freeware while others assume the form of open source software licensed under General Public License. For the sake of convenience, I shall tentatively put them into one category and refer to them generally as "artist software" in the following.

The above-mentioned artist software are projects directly initiated and developed by artists, designers, musicians and media practitioners (e.g. Ben FRY, Zachary LIEBERMAN, John MAEDA, MESO, OpenEnded Group, Miller PUCKETTE, Casey REAS, Ge WANG, among others) for uses in their own researches and artistic creations. In contrast to most commercial software, artist software is more than just a ready-made utility targeting for the easy creation of prescribed outcomes, shortcuts or procedures. Rather, its main purpose is to provide an open platform for users to apply and experiment with digital means (e.g. computer programming) to design and create sounds, images and other multi-media interactive experiences. In addition to functioning as a productive tool, artist software also aims to facilitate the understanding of basic principles and practices of digital creativity for its users, thus demystifying the seemingly "inaccessible" and "incomprehensible" digital black box (i.e. the computer) that has often come to associate with digital art. Through the understanding and mastery of the digital means, users are empowered to tackle their problems by devising their own custom solutions as well as to further advance their creative ideas. Seen from this perspective, artist software is not just a productive tool but also a kind of "meta-tool". Of course, this does not imply that using commercial software for artistic creations is necessarily a good or bad thing, but it

is obvious that the two approaches embody and represent two very distinct creative philosophies and artistic visions.

The "do-it-yourself" approach targets to minimise artists' (over-)reliance on established methods or existing technologies. From a practical perspective, "homemade" software provides creators more room and freedom to experiment by breaking away from the conceptual and procedural limitations that are often imposed by commercial software with their so-called professional protocols. Moreover, artist software encourages creators to step out of their usual roles in order to engage with the process of artistic creation holistically (i.e. research, development, production and distribution). Artist software tells us that tools development is indeed an important and integral part of the whole of artistic creation. Aside from creating "content", artists should also have the capability (and surely the need) to develop and transform the technologies, process and paradigms of artistic production. What is significant about the case of artist software lies less on the urgency or importance of technological mastery, but rather on how it inspires us to facilitate a more integrated and holistic view on artistic creation. Instead of seeing art-making simply as acts of expression, communication and exhibition, this view also treats research, experimentation, and development as indispensable parts of the whole artistic process. Technology cannot exist outside of culture, and the reverse is also true. The truly radical character and value of artist software resides in its challenges to the established role of the artist, and sparks a rethinking of the traditional dichotomy between notions of tools (means) and content (end).

"Do-it-yourself" culture inspires and demonstrates the possibilities of a new creative attitude and artistic model. Artist software is simply one of the more recent incarnations of it that serves as a testimony of this spirit among many other similar developments. If we place this culture back to a much larger historical context, it is not difficult for us to trace some of its roots and precedents back to the developments of media art a century ago. Luigi RUSSOLO's *Intonarumori*, Thomas WILFRED's *Clavilux*, Whitney brothers' *analogue computer*, Oscar FISCHINGER's *Lumigraph*, Nam Jun PAIK and Shuya ABE's *Paik/Abe Synthesizer*, Stan VANDERBEEK's *Movie-drome*, and the Vasulkas' video installations, etc. were some notable instances of pioneering efforts of "homemade" media art in the 20th century. At a time before "media art" gained wide circulation as a term and became recognised as a distinct art form, these media artists had already broken out of their particular confines and showed the world it was indeed possible for artists to develop custom tools that cater specifically to their own artistic visions.

This year, **ifva**, in association with **art.ware** project, have invited three world renowned new media artists: Golan LEVIN, Zachary LIEBERMAN and Julien MAIRE to conduct a live performance that promises to present the limitless possibilities and unique artistry of "homemade" media. Golan LEVIN wowed his audiences with his work *Dialtones - a Telesymphony* in 2001. His subsequent piece *Manual Input Sessions* continues to demonstrate Levin's imaginative mastery of the computer as an expressive medium by fusing elements from old and new media and transforming them into a futuristic shadow play. Zachary LIEBERMAN, the New York-based new media art veteran, is the mastermind behind the red-hot *openFrameworks* project. His piece, *drawn*, turns a blank piece of paper and a brush into a playful and exquisite live animated theater that borders somewhere between the magical and the comical. Julien MAIRE, from France, is a modern magic lantern master. His self-constructed projector creates a whole new meaning and experience of cinematic viewing, forcing audiences to take a fresh look at this often neglected object called film projector. The three artists will incorporate tools that they developed into their own performances, showcasing the inimitable alchemy of homemade media that is capable of transforming ordinary yet often neglected objects into mesmerising experiences.

Surely "doing-it-yourself" does not by itself guarantee a creative utopia. "Homemade" culture is not here to dichotomise independent and commercial research/development, for that would only be an over-simplification of the complex relationship between the two. Rather, the significance of the "do-it-yourself" movement lies in its advocacy of an integrated creative attitude, encouraging artists to participate more holistically in the entirety of the creative process, thereby staking out a more autonomous and independent creative space while revolutionising and enriching their artistic expressions. Levin, Lieberman and Maire's works are excellent illustrations of how this goal can be realised.