

# Distribution as a Process for Online Technology

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**Abstract**-This paper looks at how distribution has not being understood as a process. For too long distribution is discussed in cultural and social technological debates.

**Index Terms**-Distribution, collaborative, participation, digital content.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article looks at distribution as a process. It considers how distribution as a process interacts with technology and how users engage with distribution. It is not the first time that the relationship between distribution and technology has been discussed. Distribution as a process was discussed as a curatorial practice for online technologies by CRUMB (Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss) on its 2012-2013 list. Some of the discussions about distribution relate it to the visualization of data within curatorial practice locating it within social and cultural debates. CRUMB's online group discussions looked at how the actions of curators, artists and gamers created social environments for people to interact with. The behavior of audience was a major consideration to exhibitions that included gamers and artists working together with curators. Another topic was how to document and display the collaborative process of these exhibitions that would engage the audience. CRUMB and other online art gallery organizations considered how people from different ethnic groups interact with technology. Furtherfield art projects looked at the accessibility of online technology for people from low economic backgrounds. One of their projects involved teaching people to build software. Online projects related to peer interest and its connection to online technology. There were mapping projects that discussed how you can relate different data to other sources. However, this is not the only way to consider distribution because there are other ways to approach it without placing in within social and cultural debates. To comprehend distribution as a process this article will reveal how this works. For the purpose of this article the term 'user' will refer to anyone who interacts with technology.

## II. DISTRIBUTION AS PROCESS.

Participation is an important feature in considering distribution as a process. There are two forms of participation; the singular and collaborative approach. Singular participation works in a linear way; it deals with a stable plan of interaction that follows link formats in a fluid way when the process is not interrupted. When the process becomes broken the fluidity is placed by jarring directness. This creates an overlapping exchange action. It ensures that the distribution process is still contributing to the dissemination of any data. Singular participation occurs externally and internally depending on flexible or rigid different commands made by the user. A recent example of this is Martin John Callanan's new work "Departure for All", 2013 "fig.1" shown at Noshowspace Gallery in East London.

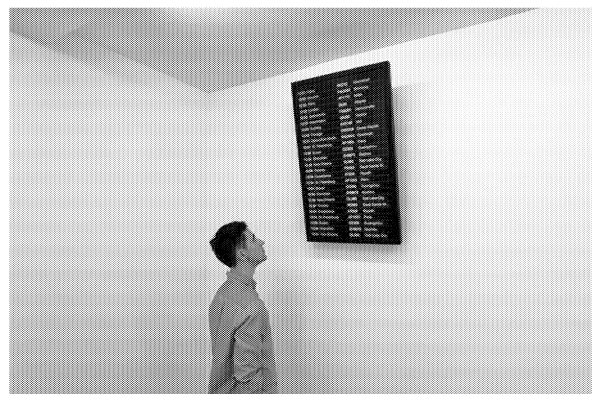


Fig.1. "Departure for All" 2013, Martin John Callanan. The artist is looking at the work.

This work is based on a flight departure display board where passengers check airplane times. The board has a timer system that operates very slowly while providing information about scheduled departure times to passengers. In "Departure for All" what we are given is the time when the airplane actually left the airport. It could be its original time or it shows that the airplane was late. The display board includes the destination from and arrivals to locations. The timer system is arranged to allow for the

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information to change frequently but not rapidly because people need to absorb the data. The information is provided by national and international airport control offices but the display board in the gallery does not send information to these offices. The audience's physical engagement with the work is limited. They read the information that is given to them but the artist/user does not allow them to change or direct the information. The singular participation approach ensures that the audience has a passive participatory role with the work and space where it is placed.

If the focus was only on the content of the work then it would be possible to argue that digital content is part of the distribution process as it is providing online content. A command item is required to activate the digital content. Information is provided to a product, which has its own programming system, when it is needed, as shown in "The Digital Agenda for Europe" "fig.2". The man in this image is calling for data about the European Commission strategy to help digital technologies to develop economic growth. Information input is uploaded by other people and information is downloaded by the person who requests it.

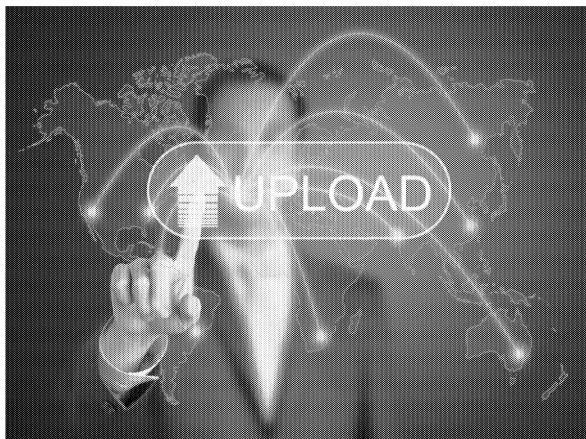


Fig.2. The Digital Agenda for Europe, 2013.

To take this further, digital gaming distribution relies on the same process for digital content, which is evident in "Stream: The Nexus of PC Gaming" "fig.3". The call for online digital content equally has a singular form of participation. Online digital content distribution can enable a program to have many command line arguments that identify sources and destinations of information which are delivered to the user, who then uses what is delivered based on control options of a system, hardware and program. Similarly to "Departure for All", the singular participation is working externally and internally, as digital content

distribution relies on material from different external locations that are transferred into an interior space.



Fig. 3. "Stream:The Nexus of PC Gaming" showing distribution of digital content into an interior space.

There are various reasons why distribution as a process has not been discussed in this way. There is a narrow vision how technological equipment can be used by the user. Advanced technology does allow the user to transfer documents from one machine to another, smart phones enable people to have control over their homes, life style and working environment but this has all been framed by marketing. It is not necessary related to the idea of demand and supply, instead it is more focused on supply and demand. Machines are made for people to buy, which they do when they realize that they want and then need the machines. Most people use the machines in the way that manufacturers create them. Manufacturers who produce software games have to consider the technological aesthetic design of their products. It is important for manufacturers to create a cinematic experience for the gaming communities and graphics has to be of high quality to attract consumers. These elements of gaming products take priority over distribution as a process. There is also the limitation of how online chat rooms are used. Most chat rooms want to keep users locked in on their websites. Facebook is in the process of developing a chat room with a time lock which will only release the user after a certain time. It is good for marketing products and creates a passive strategy that encourages the user to buy products.

A two-way linear singular participation occurs between the manufacturer and user groups/online communities. This occurs within a two-sided market effect, which are also known as two-sided network. From the manufacturers perspective when products are distributed in one direction to the user, and the manufacturer, needs to consider how to

change hardware and software, the manufacturer acts as a scout which creates a distribution process to the online community group. From the user online community group's perspective they respond as a single unit. It does not matter if individuals have independent responses because the manufacturer will see them as a united group, and acting as a single unit their response will be conveyed to the manufacturer, who can decide to respond or ignore that response. What is essential here is not the content of the information between the two but the process of distribution between the manufacturer and user-online community group. To identify this process of distribution you have to look at social influencer marketing systems, either based within a company or an organization hired by the manufacturer, who engages with users on social networks. "Bungie" at [www.bungie.net/en-US/Forum/Post?-id=565558](http://www.bungie.net/en-US/Forum/Post?-id=565558) is an example of one of these systems. The forum is encouraged to upload suggestions that are used as a resource by "Bungie". The community can respond to the different game types by using the threads.

At this stage the user-online community group is less passive compared to the audience looking at "Departure for All", the user calling for data in "The Digital Agenda for Europe", and the online user who is calling for gaming data in an interior space. The user-online community group in a two-way linear singular participation has some control over the distribution process. Without them the manufacturer's distribution of their product becomes useless because there is no one to engage with the process. Two-way linear singular participation is equally evident in online art organizations. Furtherfield, an online art gallery, which also has a physical space in North London, caters for the online community as well as the audience that visits art exhibitions at the gallery. On Furtherfield's website at [www.furtherfield.org/your-art](http://www.furtherfield.org/your-art), artists-users are encouraged to upload their work and depend on the discussion threads for people to engage with the work. Some times Furtherfield's online workshops are discussed in the threads and Furtherfield's creates workshops based on discussions in the threads.

However, the two-way linear singular participation equally occurs between users within chat rooms. Rhizome is another important online art organization and some of Furtherfield members are members of Rhizome's online community. Rhizome states it "is dedicated to the creation, presentation, preservation, and critique of emerging artistic

practices that engage technology. Through open platforms for exchange and collaboration, our website serves to encourage and expand the communities around these practices" [1].

In its online forum a post is sent, one person or some people respond but the response or responses show no collaborative process. This is evident in a post entitled "A Letter to Jennifer Knoll". An open letter to Jennifer Knoll was posted by Dullart about a particular photographic image. People made different responses but communication between two people made it clear that visual links related to the photographic image were not correct. This resulted in the removal of these wrong links by the person who originally posted the image. After this occurred there was no further communication, people who posted previous links did not get involved with the discussion between the two people who highlighted the mistakes with some of the visual links. In the "Bungie" community forum a member posted a question asking how he could integrate back quickly into the forum discussion because it had been a long time since this member had been involved in forum discussions. Response from community members offered different constructive advice while one particular response was aggressive, its potential as a collaborative process is questionable [2].

The two-way linear distribution process is about connection. This also applies to the one-way linear process, but the two-way linear process is about limited collaboration, which does cross over into the collaborative distribution process. It is a form of social navigation where users engagement just provides information about particular topic and/or questions. Another forum of limited collaboration involves users communicating in different locations. These locations could be in the same building but in a different room, it could be in the same country but in a different building or it could be users in different countries. There are many possibilities but the collaboration process requires limited engagement which changes something into something else. For instance a gamer via Xbox Live can play Halo 5 with other gamers once they been allowed to join the game. As they play and communicate either through headphones or send messages to each other, all they are doing are making suggestions on how they can attack the enemy or issue warnings about potential attacks. No player has the option of re-designing the game; instead players work together to destroy the enemy. This is the only collaborative distribution process that occurs.

From this perspective the issue of collaboration in physical and virtual space becomes important. Other people when considering this issue related collaboration in place and space. Many articles discuss the distribution between place and space in relation to human behavior [3]. It is related to synchronous and asynchronous movements, cultural and social conditions. Yet, to comprehend how these aspects work within virtual and physical space associated with a collaborative process, it is important to look at collaborative distribution process that allow for these things to happen. Co-operation of multiple users in a networked virtual and physical space is evident in “NetMonster” “fig.4”. This is a source code artwork created in 2003-2004 by Graham Howard, Matsusko Yokokoji, Richard Wright, Matthew Fuller and Francesa De Rimini. Interaction with the work could happen in virtual space or in a physical space. The source code can be made into visual images.

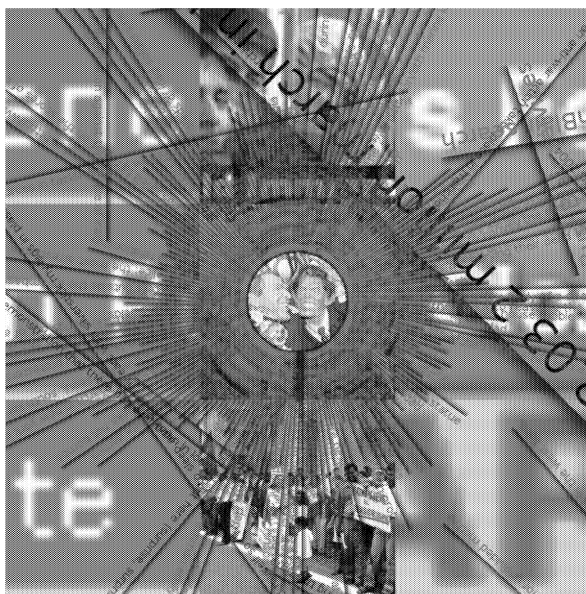


Fig. 4. “NetMonster” Graham Howard, Matsusko Yokokoji, Richard Wright, Matthew Fuller and Francesa De Rimini, 2003-2004.

Matsusko Yokokoji states that;

“NetMonster allows you to iterate through web pages ripping them into editable text, storable images, and further links to follow. The process begins with creating key words which would be used to search Google or a URL in a few different ways. The initial search would return text and

show you what words are used the most frequently in association with that key phrase. You can then decide which of these words you want to associate with the key word. When you search again it will bring back the results in one of the following ways. 1. ‘all’ returns the text found as one blob (good for a well known subject). 2. ‘sentences’ returns every sentence containing the key word and omits the rest. 3. ‘associated’ returns every sentence containing the key word and any sentence containing a work you have associated with the key word. 4. ‘summary’ returns a short summary of all the text in a search (bad for small texts). Images are returned in the following manner. 1. ‘auto’ (brings back images automatically from Google). 2. ‘web’ (use a text search on Google and follow all the links). 3. ‘image’ (do a image search on Google and follow all the links) and 4. ‘href’ (specify a web page you wish to start with”[4].

What the work shows is inter-activity as a collaborative process for distribution. The engagement with the work moves it forward and each person participates in its creation and production. It is a collaborative participation where no individual engages with the process to make their own work. For this type of collaboration there is no need for a joint co-ordination, as people can be in a virtual or physical space. The creative process is the structural relation of the collaborative distribution. Yet, collaborative distribution does involve joint co-ordination when users are interactively involved in projects that require particular tasks to enable something to be produced. It must involve the creative process as a structural relation. Online gaming products use the word ‘interaction’ but this only reflects on the experience of engagement that software provide for the users. In this essay on the engagement of video games “Is interactive Cinema: Is an Oxymoron, but may Not Always Be” Kevin Veale states “I present a series of case studies to argue that this subset of video games texts qualify as something new. They may be less ‘film-like’ than many mainstream games with high-resolution graphics and cut-scenes, but the experience of engaging with them shares elements of engaging with cinema at the same time they are distinguished by the direct, personal engagement of the player”[5]. Even though Veale discusses indie video games his article does not consider the inter-active collaborative process of users. In his “Manifesto for a Ludic Century, Eric Zimmerman does recognize that gaming processes need to focus on different aspects but his focus on designers does not take into account the importance of artists. He states “In the Ludic Century we cannot have a

passive relationship to the systems that we inhabit. We must learn to be designers to recognize how and why systems are constructed, and try to make them better” [6]. However, when Philip D. Dean in his essay “Interactivity, Inhabitation and Pragmatist Aesthetics” interactivity still remains focused on engagement. He states “And, even when there is no representation of the player’s body by a virtual one, the pushing forward of the thumb may mirror the movement of a virtual car, or merely the movement of a colr upward on the screen. My actions in the natural world extend into a virtual space”[7].

This article has shown that distribution as a process is possible but how it can be used for further creative developments still need to be explored. It is essential that once distribution process is understood, it can be located into social and cultural conditions referred to in the introduction.

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