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HANDLING NEW MEDIA, H72.1805
Assignment #1

I would like to look at the new media clip that we watched in class, "My Trip to Liberty City," which gave a tour of the city in "Grand Theft Auto" in comparison to the "Proun" work of El Lissitzsky. I think one of the main points stressed by Manovich's article was the way in which new media emerges as a sort of intersection of material art and it's methodologies on the one side and the digital computer codes and methodologies on the other side. In a sense, Lissitzky's "Proun"s were an attempt to take architectural drawing and make it into art - to use a form of rendering objects to be built, and then to use this format to create visual art which does not really represent anything practical or utilitarian that one would or even could build. I feel that there is a certain similarity pointed out by "Liberty City" - that we are seeing a virtual city that was never meant to be used as a tourist site, and examining all the ramifications of that idea, as well as taking note of all of the city details that have been encoded into a virtual environment which is not meant to be used for examination as a cityscape.

I think it is also useful to determine whether a work was initially created in a digital medium or in one of the earlier material media. I am also not clear on whether we should be making a distinction between analog video and digital video. In any case, while it is certainly possible to pull up a "Proun" on the internet, they were created prior to the age of digital media, and not native to a digital environment. They can be translated into digital format and distributed by digital means, or put up on web sites, linked to larger size variations or to other work by Lissitzky. In their native state, they are not hyperlinked, however, and as art forms, they do not make use of the advantages or possibilities of digital media. The piece reconfiguring "Grand Theft Auto" does seem to have been born digital - the video game itself exists primarily as a digital object or program, and the reconfigured city tour lives on the web and linked to other sites.

Lev Manovich makes the important point that new media involves giving the user choices, and mimicking the operation of the mind - without actually giving the user the freedom of organizing data according to the patterns of her own mind. The "Liberty City" tour makes a point about this - using the video game's built in options and choices of action and direction, while questioning those options that the game fails to give. The narrator comments once on being given the option to attack someone, which was not part of his tourist plans, and also mentions that certain paths are either not encouraged or involve virtually falling in the water and drowning or being severely injured. "Proun"s appear slightly less dangerous, unless one actually attempts to read them as architectural designs and build one of them. Some of them resemble organic objects such as an eye that seems to be looking at the viewer.

David Ross' transcribed talk gave the impression that one of his concerns in any new form of art was what the ramifications were for the experimental artist and the individual's access to the practice. Lev Manovich also wrote about access to the media and the extent to which digital works are more accessible to a wider range of people and thus more democratic. It seems to me that this forms a similar myth to the computer as the mind myth. The computer is not really designed to work according the patterns of each person's mind, nor is it designed to give each individual equal access or even access at all. I'm not entirely sure that digital born works are easier to access than non-digital works that end up in digital format or on the web. I had an easier time looking up "Proun," on the web.

There seems to be an idea that any recent medium for art brings controversy with it. I think it matters much less what the medium can do than what people are doing with it. I think there are certain things that digital media can tie into that traditional / earlier media don't tie into so easily. Distribution and display by internet and digital methods can be much easier, as David Ross points out, it saves dumping 300 copies that had a typo. It is possible to reach a wider audience and to reach them more quickly by digital means. I would have to argue that print advertisements may be more memorable than flashing windows or blocked pop-ups on a computer screen. Also, people are much more likely to get to an event when they have a flyer in hand than when they forget to print out the email about time and place. I haven't often heard it brought up that the digital media arena has limitations as well - one has to be at a computer, and at a computer which has the appropriate software to access the files. If the files are a few years old, the entire program may not work. One also has to make sure that one's web site is up and is accessible.

I would also argue, in reference to Benjamin, that even non-digital art has been reproduced. If I talk about seeing "Proun" I could mean that I saw one of the original art works in a museum, I could mean I saw a reproduction in an art book, I could mean I saw a poster or I have a poster on my wall, or I could mean I have a JPEG or I have an image of a "Proun" as my computer's desktop or screensaver picture. I think the idea of the art work was already complicated when it could be reproduced as a poster or image in a art book, and that it becomes more complicated when I can upload it to the web and send it in emails, or use it to create a multi-media artwork.

I wonder if works like the tour of the video game will still be accessible or relevant when the video game loses popularity. Is one indexical to the other? Will people watch the digital work and wonder what the video game was like? Will we lose all these artworks when other types of files or computer programs come into use? When art has to go through such complicated encodings and transformation into ones and zeros, isn't

there a greater risk of loss than with paintings, sculptures, and older films, which can last several decades if not centuries or millenia? With new media, preservation can not be simply a matter of climate control and conditions, it has to include knowledge of programming systems, of hardware, software, operating systems.