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By CultureWork, on January 20th, 2012

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Crowdsourcing and the Evolving Relationship between Artist and Audience

[Daniel Linver](#)

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The artist and audience depend on one another to fulfill their roles, artist as creator and audience as recipient. Sometimes they act as co-creators. While the first part of these observations remain true, the roles of artist and audience have been evolving as technology affects the relationship between artist and audience. Historically, as different technological tools are incorporated into the mainstream, the audience has been provided with more options and possibilities. These new possibilities can offer the audience the opportunity to become more involved in the process of art creation. Generally, this has brought the artist and audience closer together, no longer positioning the audience as just the recipient.

This article is an initial step into interrogating the current and future relationship between the

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artist and audience. Understanding how different technological advances have affected the relationship between artist and audience is also key to getting an idea of how the relationship has changed and what factors have contributed to the ways in which artists and audiences currently relate. The new methods and approaches that have followed these technological advances have shaped both the manner in which art is being created as well as the way in which art is being funded.

The Internet has been the most recent technological manifestation of this evolving relationship. Artists and audiences have applied crowdsourcing, a method of harnessing the power of many to perform a task, in the creative process. As a culture worker, it is important to understand the current and future relationship between the artist and audience and what role technological advancement plays in it.



Facilitating Crowdsourcing

Crowdsourcing is a method of harnessing the power of the crowd in order to perform a task, one method that both artists and audiences are engaging in to produce art. Crowdsourcing was fostered in the new environment of disintermediation/decentralization that Web 2.0, a second iteration of the World Wide Web that features interactivity and openness for content creation, editing and sharing, (Macnamara, 2010) facilitates. Much of crowdsourcing builds on various theoretical approaches that see the audience as a critical part of the artistic process; without it, the artist's creation is never fully realized and remains a part of the artist's internal creative process (Perricone, 1990). Crowdsourcing also builds upon various practices, as in Boal's (1985), *Theatre of the Oppressed*, where the actors interacted with the audience by coaxing them into becoming part of the production.

Building upon these theoretical frameworks, new media tools have created contemporary environments for both the artist and audience that have redefined the ways in which the two relate. Two examples from the recent past were how the phonograph and the radio impacted the relationship between artist and audience. The phonograph introduced a new way for the audience to access a performance and provided an opportunity to expose audiences to a broader scope of music than what was offered previously. The radio then built upon the phonograph's performance accessibility to provide the audience an added layer of convenience for listening to a performance in a location of their choice. The most

recent technological advance has been the Internet, and especially, Web 2.0 tools such as blogging platforms, collaborative wikis (Wikipedia), video sharing sites (YouTube), and other Web based technologies that have allowed people to connect with one another in extensive and profound ways.

This environment has facilitated a shift of certain areas of power away from some of the traditional production and dissemination gatekeepers of the old infrastructure towards the new technologies and networks. These new networks present both audiences and artists with more choice and flexibility in creating their own works and accessing works of others not directly connected to larger media monopolies (Cook, Huttler, & De Michiel, 2010). While many see this shift as a positive outcome, some have found this shift dangerous. The danger they see has been that crowdsourcing has the power to adversely alter the creative process by redefining the role of the artist and the audience. Another fear has been that expert knowledge will be devalued while the views of the “crowd” will be revered.

Coming back to crowdsourcing specifically, many creative endeavors using this method have engaged audiences as active and willing participants in artistic works. Other artists have tapped the knowledge of the “crowd” to create their art without cueing the audience into their participation in the artwork. Creative endeavors such as Ridley Scott’s 2010 film, *Life in a Day* (Sweney, 2010), and *Eric Whitacre’s Virtual Choir* (Whitacre, 2011) are two examples of a fully engaged audience. For *Life in a Day*, Scott asked individuals to upload videos of a moment in their lives on July 24, 2010 to the website YouTube (Scott cited in Sweney, 2010). This example of crowdsourcing, asked those with the means and technical ability to upload footage of life around the world on a single day, which were then compiled into a documentary-like film.

For *Eric Whitacre’s Virtual Choir*, the audience/participants were asked to upload videos to YouTube as part of the project, and Whitacre created a musical piece from those uploads. There were extensive instructional videos to guide the participants through the process of taking part in the project so they would create a finished product that would mesh well with the other videos submitted. Although the audience/participants were technically not the ones who organized this project and, therefore, were not “the artists,” they all had to have some musical ability to take part in this project, thus, giving them the dual status of both artist and audience.

Bicycle Built for 2,000 (Koblin & Massey, 2009) and *Narcissus Regret* (Eyelevel BQE, 2010) are examples of art that was created by not cueing the audience into the process. *Bicycle Built For 2,000* was developed by Koblin and Massey (2009) and used 2,088 voice recordings collected via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk web service. Amazon’s Mechanical Turk is a crowdsourcing web service that asks workers to complete a task for a small monetary reward. For *Bicycle Built for 2,000*, the Turk workers were prompted to listen to a short sound clip, then record themselves imitating what they heard without knowing what the final product would be. The individual tracks were then assembled into a crowdsourced rendition of the song “Daisy Bell,” a song written by Harry Dacre in the late 19th century and the first song ever sung by a computer in 1961.

Narcissus Regret, a piece by Borissov, appeared in his *Crowd Source* show at the Brooklyn art-gallery Eyelevel BQE in 2010 (Eyelevel BQE, 2010). For *Narcissus Regret* Borissov created a hack of Chatroulette (a website where participants randomly get matched up with strangers to video chat) and collected hundreds of hours of rogue footage of users being shown their own image upside-down. This project examined, among other things, the participant’s response to the unexpected encounter of his or her own gaze. Borissov explored the authenticity and sheer amount of connections that have been created via Web 2.0, and the audience’s role as active or passive participant. While Koblin, Massey, and Borissovs’ works were crowdsourced, they differed greatly from the previous projects mentioned which invited aware participants into the creation process.

Funding Through Crowdsourcing

The relationship between artist and audience has been affected by crowdsourcing not only

in the creation and facilitation of arts experiences but, also, in funding those experiences. This approach of using crowdsourcing to fund artists has come to be called crowdfunding. **Crowdfunding** has occurred without any intermediary: artistic entrepreneurs “tap the crowd”, raising money directly from individuals. Crowdfunding has helped fund creative projects by utilizing Web 2.0 tools and has facilitated financial relationships between audience and artist.

The internet has changed ways in which we communicate. Web 2.0 tools, in particular, have integrated the audience more fully into the artistic experience. While the phonograph and radio created new platforms and opportunities for audiences to take in an artistic experience, they did not incorporate the audience into the experience to the degree made possible by the internet.

Through crowdfunding, artists have found that they are better able to capitalize their projects. Shedding the constraints of the institutional model of support, they have been able to take control over the use of their funds raised—and over the art itself. The audience can directly put their money where their preferences lie, instead of relying on an institution to make decisions for them. This disintermediation in the creative sector has allowed crowdfunding to give the power to audiences and artists in ways very different than before.

The creative sector should continue to embrace the use of crowdsourcing and crowdfunding in artistic creation. The intimate relationship between artist and audience as facilitated by Web 2.0 should be allowed to thrive. There is reason to believe that as audiences recognize the increasing value of participation in artistic works, their investment (both financial and emotional) into the artistic process and product will also increase. While encouraging the audience’s participation to grow, the artist must simultaneously be conscious of the presence of their own voice. As the instigators of the artistic work, artists need to drive the vision of the work and balance that with the audience’s participation. Artists and audiences who can successfully realize this balance are most likely to create work with lasting value.

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