

Drawing on the Web

dane@eatmydata.com

Flash! Saviour of the universe? Well perhaps not. As a proprietary format the software does present ethical problems about the control of information but Flash does offer artists new aesthetics. These are not necessarily new ideas, the concept of object orientated programming has been around since Plato's universals and particulars, but their application in artistic product is new. In this paper I will outline the issues that concern me as an artist making work for the web.

There is obviously a conflict of interests in producing a printed description of web work, you should view the work on line at <http://www.eatmydata.com>

Vector graphics == small file size. Great! Now everyone can create a "skip intro" home page. But vectors do more for drawing than looping a line across the screen. Vectors create disembodied information; instant pop art but without Warhol's carelessly brush strokes or Liechtenstein's uneven dots. There is no touch of genius in flash, in a swf movie the viewer can't see the hand that created it. The personal mark making of the hero has been removed, just as type denied the scribe a final flourish.

Pop art fell short by selling limited editions that were messed up by the master. Instead of entering a world of signs pop art entered the market place and sold themselves. Digital work cannot be commodified because it is infinitely reproducible. If I copy an artist's DVD, let's say number 29 in an edition of 100, does my clone of number 29 inaccurately represent the artist's work?

Vectors are even less of a physical commodity; they are just the outline of an idea. Vectors indicate a thought, or suggest a sign instead of pixelating some physical stain.

So is flash just illustration. Traditional fine art media has a strong association with specific materials, ie: the canvas, oil paint but digital media doesn't differentiate between the medium and the message.

Isometric perspective has no vanishing points so objects do not recede into the distance. Cool. This makes it easier to animate objects in a virtual space. Which is great for simple gaming like the zx spectrum or even for complex games like Age of Empires.

The knight can kill Persians in the south and maintain the same dimensions he was when killing Celts in the north. So after all that fuss in the middle ages the world really is flat. Everything is equal. Where Renaissance composition used perspective to draw the eye to important points in the picture plane, to important points in the propaganda, isometric space tells the viewer that everything is equal.

Isometric space places images into the perspective of our world. With the end of Communism and Christianity there are no big narratives, just small lobbying interests. There are no heroes to save us. An elevated map reflects the need for information rather than instruction.

As everything is equal so everything is also isolated. The browser enforces the vignette. Objects float in the middle of the screen with no relationship to either the edge of the browser or the monitor. The designer can justify top and left but that still makes the object a partial vignette. Objects are related to other objects by links and associations but they have no spatial relationship to what is outside of themselves.

In print the paper comes first and the drawing fits the page. On the web the idea comes first and the user views it through one of many browsers. When drawing objects for the web the artist must start in the center and work out. Which is difficult when you've been whacked in life studies for drawing the body floating in space. But web objects do float in space; they have no environment to relate to, they are not part of the browser, the browser is just a spy glass.

Browsers are portals to ideas and the ideas should not be artificially framed they should exist as freestanding thoughts or signs. Unlike bitmaps vectors are scalable and adapt to the user's browser and screen resolution, they have no fixed dimensions.

The web is goal orientated. Despite the great multi-media experience that the web once promised it has become a functional information retrieval system. In fact there are more ways to retrieve information than there is information. This is another old idea; the map being bigger than the land it surveys. But now it's a reality and cultural forms must address database navigation, which is difficult when we've been conditioned by the gratuitous content creation of the Twentieth Century. How many times can we watch the hero take twelve steps to get from A to B? What if the hero is an isolated individual, the same as everyone else with a multitude of options?

The hero is confronted with a vast warehouse of information and making choices becomes difficult. Equality of information is difficult unless people are skilled in choosing. Flash isn't marketed as tool for conceptual artists, it's a "Lets Make an animation for the web" design engine. Flash could be used to create intelligent navigation systems. Flash could be used to make art.

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