

Gene Youngblood

The new renaissance: Art, Science and the Universal Machine

Summary of a lecture

In this lecture Mr. Youngblood addresses philosophical, political and aesthetic issues raised by the notion of art and technology, both traditionally and in view of the computer/communications revolution.

The computer is characterized as a universal machine or "virtual instrument" that can contain and become all media, conferring autonomy upon the user and erasing the distinction between professional and amateur insofar as that is determined by the tools to which we have access as autonomous individuals.

A revolution in computing technology over the next decade could precipitate a communications revolution whose consequence would be the rise of autonomous "reality-communities" – social groups of politically significant magnitude realized through telecommunications networks and defined, therefore, not by geography but by consciousness, ideology and desire.

The concepts of virtuality and simulation, derived from computer science, are offered as paradigms for the practice of audiovisual art in the communications revolution. The possibility of widespread access to tools for simulation (computers) and conversation (two-way computer/video networks) suggests that constituents of autonomous reality-communities might both produce simulations of possible realities (art) and also control the cultural contexts in which these simulations are published and perceived (politics). Only in this way, Youngblood suggests, can we begin the process of resocialization that must occur before we can effectively address the profound socio-political challenges of our time.