

The Space inside Digital Signals Factory Nights, Conversation & Process

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“The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph.”

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media.

The former Crabtree Factory in Walsall is a space of our industrial history. Although now occupied by the Lyndon House Hotel, the building still resonates with its industrial past. The Factory Night organised within this building brought together creative practitioners to investigate its past as the site where John Ashworth Crabtree designed and patented the first quick make and break switch.

Ironically, the complexity of Crabtree's invention was one of reduction and simplification. His switch design attempted to recreate digital logic in the physical, analogue world. Basically, the peaking current levels during the switching on process are contained with little risk to the user. It provides illumination instantly and neatly.

By using mechanical principles, Crabtree attempted to erase the levels in-between, providing a simple method of supplying the most basic of products, light. It traverses from 0 to 1 abstractly and without process.

In electronics, an ideal switch is just this, purely digital. Measurements, often expressed in binary form (1 or 0), are treated as Boolean operations, either ON or OFF. Theoretically sound but, in practice, impossible. It is the ultimate form of measurement and category, *this* or *that*, *one* or *the other*.

Creative practice, however, cannot be categorised by digital means. Put simply, it would exist as follows: An artefact of creative production, an object, resulting from a pure instant of conception. Dealing with creativity in this way is to strip out process, surroundings, and any other multitude of conditions that lie within.

In contrast to this, the analogue signal is one of infinite complexity. All values, no matter how indistinguishable are recorded. However, a *pure* analogue signal also resides in theory. The concept of measurement, by its nature, ensures that potentially infinite levels of resolution can never be achieved in practice. Analogue signals tend *towards* a value, but never arrive. Patterns emerge and can be understood, but they are always assumptions. In a digital system we get close enough to that value and accept it.

Factory Nights resides in-between the binary logic of conception and completion - the spaces of conversation and process. An event for which the whole purpose is to allow a space for discussion and collaboration, remaining unrestrictive to potential outcome. Asymptotic to conception, Factory Nights provides as few boundaries as possible, creating the situation and then withdrawing into the background. It acts a catalyst, providing encounters and spaces for creative reactions to occur, without polluting the discrete parts.

Artefacts are inevitably created from this process. Although they remain inexorably linked to

Factory Nights, they become separate entities in and of themselves. As the digital revolution progresses, participatory events such as Factory Nights become increasingly important. Here, collaboration is encouraged at its most fundamental level, that of discussion and speech. The surroundings are unearthed to participants and creative conversation is established. The directions that projects take after this point are unknown. There is great simplicity in this approach: Provide a space for collaboration and see what happens!

Simplicity, however, should not be confused with lack of importance. In fact, creativity requires this space in order to flourish. As our realities become increasingly virtual, curated forms of participatory creative practice become ever more important.

24 October 2012 marks the end of analogue broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Along with the rest of the World, there is a pure shift towards digital technology. The instantaneous dissemination of information across vast geographical spaces is now a reality and often taken for granted. However, one thing remains; the physical act of coming together within places of history cannot be recreated through the extensions of man. For all our instant messaging, Skype and FaceTime we can never replace the role of participation on a human level in creative production.