

MoMA and Software as an Art

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What would be the place, in a museum like MoMA, of a collection of art dedicated to software?

If there is something that MoMA can make, is to boost your imagination. Anything is possible; the myriad of options for the expression of human creativity has no end, the mind boggles.

My dream has been, for years, to explain software, its intricacies, to make this part of our world accessible to anyone. Software rules our world, it is one of the most complex creations of man, yet it remains understood (albeit partly) by just a few.

There are many dimensions to software; the first to explore is size. When you tell anyone outside of the field that Windows 2000 took 5 years to a team of 1400 developers to complete, and that the whole thing is about 29 millions lines of code, it is still not enough; however, if you printed the whole code of Windows and put it in a series of books, how many books would it be?

On Kawara has created a piece called “One Million Years”, on display at MoMA; the whole thing is a series of books where the pages show, one after the other, as the name implies, one million years.

At 80 lines per page, at 1000 pages per volume, the source code of Windows 2000 would take... 363 volumes. Given that the Encyclopí|dia Universalis or the Encyclopí|dia Britannica consist of 20 or 30 volumes each, we are talking that a single company has been able to pull 12 encyclopí|dias out of the hat for a single version of a product. I’m not talking about quality or other characteristics; just size, raw and simple.

That’s the magnitude of software. Now we can begin to understand the magnitudes, the cost, the implications.

Another magnitudes worth exploring would be cost, number of people involved, number of errors... Infographies would explain in detail the interconnections and the different dimensions, their relations, their impact. But again, the whole thing remains so virtual, so out of reach, so different of anything else, that we just run out of analogies in no time.

What other dimensions could be used?