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Doing - Making - Meaning: Processual Visual Literacy in Recent Digital Cultures

It has been over a decade since the first generation of digital artists and designers began sharing their visual work via the World Wide Web. Prior to that time many were experimenting with software applications that expanded the creative palette. This paper argues that the exchange of information about tools and practices, along with the digital visual artifacts themselves, has been tantamount to an open discourse that encourages a processual engagement – to participate one must often create something visual. The act of production affords the individual ample opportunity to scrutinize not only specific artistic practices but also cultural production in general. As much of this generation's culture has become increasingly mediated by network technologies, this processual visual literacy then becomes a method of making meaning. The dynamic of visual exchange becomes problematic, however, when one considers the changes in some creative sub-cultures at the end of the 1990s. For instance, the influx of venture capital fostered changes in web design practices that ultimately impacted other networked creative producers as well. Through the analysis of processual visual literacy we can view how the digital artifact bears traces of the struggle over cultural production and meaning making in the early web era.