Artful Design Ch4 pp 186-205 writeup
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I was struck by principle 4.7, "Aesthetics is not a passive thing -- but an active agent of design!" because this describes how I have been working on a recent art piece of mine: 12 Sentiments for VR. I began with the idea that I wanted to created something that had 12 distinct movements, each embodying a different emotional aesthetic, and chose the 12 aesthetics. (For example, one is "lightness, flowing"; another is "melancholy, weak.") From there, I brainstormed many possible stories and found one that I felt could be divided up into 12 sections that fit those aesthetics. I chose the color for the sky in each movement from a jewel tone palette, and chose other colors I would use in each scene by computing related colors (triads, etc.) and choosing the ones I felt best represented the aesthetic. While making design decision, I referred back to the aesthetic -- for example, the controller vibration in "intensity, awe" is stronger than that in "lightness, flowing." The aesthetics I picked at the beginning of the project totally pervaded every aspect of the experience.

This makes me wonder why we think about tech corporations as capable of change. For something like Facebook, the interaction aesthetic of manipulating someone to stay on the site and look at as many things for as long as possible has been a part of the product ever since the corporation decided that its business model was to make money by selling ads. So has the aesthetic of treating users like a product. These foundational conditions pervaded millions of lines of code and uncountable policy decisions. Now, Facebook claims to want to provide ads that look like content, and specifically content that users are interested in seeing. It also claims and works very hard to convince people that it cares about their privacy. Even if Facebook does care about these things, I find it hard to believe that it could ever overcome the great inertia it has from the aesthetic-driven design decisions that are woven deep into the fabric of the organization.

Sometimes I wonder if this is true of governments, too. The U.S. didn't start out as a two-party system, but it fell into that pattern and has never escaped it. These days, we see increasing combativeness and inability of politicians to make compromises or to work together to best represent their constituents. We are in the midst of the longest government shutdown in history. I sometimes wonder if the disaster of this current presidency will splinter politicians into smaller groups that have to learn to work together, or if we will be left with this combative political system until a more radical event happens that allows a full redesign of the government.