

Singularity

for curious artists
and scientists

ART

February 2012

From the editor

In this issue, we're going to explore a little about what it means to be an artist. It has more to do with what you put into your work than creativity.

So Chinese New Year 2012 was just over. If you don't know, each Chinese New Year is associated with an animal on the Chinese Zodiac. For this year, the Zodiac animal is the Dragon. There are 12 animals on the Zodiac, so we get a 12-year cycle.

Chinese believe the Dragon to be an auspicious creature. As such, couples tend to have babies during the Dragon year, creating terms such as the "Dragon babies". This is equivalent to the "baby boomers" in America, except we get a "boom" every 12 years.

Technically speaking, each year is also associated with an element from: metal, wood, water, fire, earth. This year is a Water Dragon year. So a Water Dragon year comes about every 60 years.



Vincent Tan



Artists And Emotional Labour

What do you think of when you hear the words "art" and "artist"?

Paintings? Music? Sculptures? Books?

Drawing? Playing the piano? Carving wood? Writing on paper?

In the olden days, bards told stories and played the lute, capturing the attention of listeners. Court jesters juggle and told jokes to entertain the king and the imperial court.

During the Renaissance, artists (mostly painters) flourished.

Now, we still have storytellers and entertainers and painters and sculptors and writers and musicians and singers. The difference is there's now a business model. Some of the artists are much better paid than others.

This is different from what we had before, where most of the artists weren't paid (much). They were either unpaid, under commission, or under the patronage of a wealthy individual or group.

The recent [Stop Online Piracy Act](#) (SOPA) has made an uproar in the Internet community, because the main beneficiaries are the big media companies. Yes, the smaller content creators also benefit, but there's a difference in the measure of

the benefits. The financial numbers are just larger for the media companies.

The media companies are understandably concerned because they have a business model that profits from the talent of their artists. I will let you decide whether the artists are exploited or not, and whether the media companies as the middlemen is still needed.

Mona Lisa is famous because it is *perceived* as famous.

I bring this up because art has never really been paid for. Or at least it is difficult to judge the value of art, particularly financial value.

The Mona Lisa is perhaps the most famous work of Leonardo da Vinci, perhaps even the most famous painting in the world. But is it perceptibly better than any of da Vinci's other paintings?

How do you objectively judge how much a song is worth, or even whether it should be worth more than another song?

How do you objectively judge if a book will be well received?

How do you objectively judge if a movie will do well?

You don't.

Because art by its very nature is subjective. Different people experience the same piece of art differently, whether it's a song, a painting, or a poem. It's a matter of perception, which is how humans experience the world.

Mona Lisa is famous because it is *perceived* as famous. Which makes the painting even more famous.

The value of art is amorphous, harder to calculate than the "hard" disciplines of maths, science, banking, engineering. Which might be why some parents frown when they hear their son wants to be a painter or that their daughter wants to be a singer.

"There's no money in art!" they think.

The more profitable endeavors are more profitable because they're more measurable. You plow the field because every grain you can harvest means a corresponding increase in profits. The Industrial Revolution had efficient factories because factories had a system that had easy-to-tweak variables with easy-to-see results.

But we still have artists who continue to create art. So here's a different definition of artist given by [Seth Godin](#). In his book Linchpin, he calls artists people who exert emotional labour.

A waiter who makes sure the tables are clean and the customers feel comfortable. Not because he's paid (although there's that), but more because he wants to.

A book clerk who cares enough to help a customer find a book, even to the point of asking the customer what the customer is really looking for.

Painters, musicians, writers. All invest emotional energy into their work.

And emotional labour is not as easily measurable as physical labour.

In the 21st century, where an increasing number of humans no longer need to toil the fields or stand at an assembly line, physical labour is now supplemented with knowledge work and creativity.

Humans now care more about whether other humans care about them.

So I follow a group of people on YouTube, and recently, they were talking about emotions. Emotions were metaphorically compared to eggs, and people lay eggs. At one point in the conversation, one of them compared laying eggs to engaging in artistic work.

Here are 2 video links for you:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7vJHldEHI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaL5DCsWsHk>

Emotional Labour



Singularity is an online magazine



Please read it online

Sudden flight







Architectural curves

Looking up sometimes is interesting



NOTICE

THE STREET SOCCER FIELD IS
ONLY A TEMPORARY USE AND WILL
BE REMOVED WHEN THE SITE
IS REQUIRED FOR DEVELOPMENT



Here's the link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itARidDqdcI>

For extra fun, try turning on the closed caption option on YouTube. I applaud the efforts of YouTube and Google in auto-transcribing, but some of the transcriptions are just hilarious. Especially when transcribing the Chinese words...

While Chinese New Year 2012 is over, technically there are 15 days to the holiday. But if Chinese completely shut down all businesses for 15 days, a lot of bad things can happen... So only the first 2 days are officially (public) holidays.

If you click on the video on the left, you'll learn 3 Chinese New Year greetings. Most greetings are 4 words, like Chinese idioms. And as I mentioned in the video, Chinese New Year greetings are both quite specific (than a generic "Happy New Year") and mostly to do with wealth (and the like).

Here are two more (I'm using Hanyu Pinyin instead of Anglo-Latin phonetics):

财源广进 - pronounced "cai yuan guang jin". This means "wealth coming in huge amounts", or some such.

步步高升 - pronounced "bu bu gao sheng". This means "every step bringing you higher".

Frankly speaking, most Chinese greetings can be used outside of Chinese New Year. "Every step bringing you higher" can be used for your children's school grades or to wish someone getting a promotion.



We have a Facebook page!

If you have a Facebook account, you can "[Like](#)" the page, then follow interesting news and articles that may not have made it into the magazine, and join other Singularity readers in a discussion.

Post any questions you have or topics you'd like to be covered, and it might be featured in the next magazine issue.

You can also share your comments about any of the magazine articles, and even interesting links of your own.

Click on the square on the left or [here](#) to start!

Tell your friends about Singularity.

<http://polymathprogrammer.com/singularity/>

Talk with me on [Twitter!](#)

Vincent

You're given the right to distribute the magazine electronically provided you don't change any of the content or charge for it.



A publication of
Polymath Programmer