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UNCERTAIN SPACES

VIRTUAL CONFIGURATIONS IN
CONTEMPORARY ART AND MUSEUMS



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Edited by

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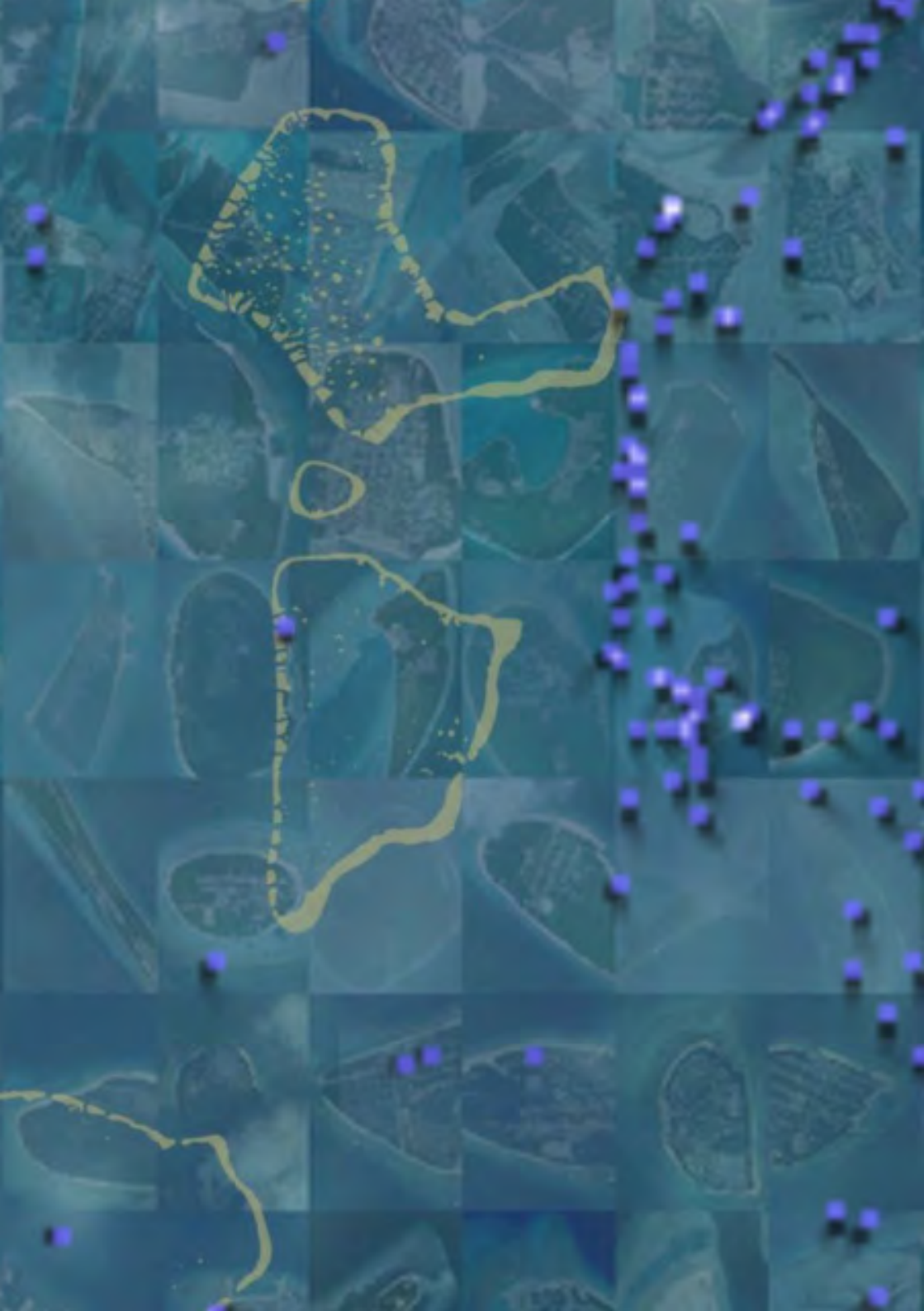
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The background is a grid of microscopic images of biological cells, likely from a microorganism. A prominent yellow path winds through the grid, starting from the top left and moving towards the bottom right. On the right side of the grid, there is a vertical column of small, glowing purple dots. The overall color palette is a mix of teal, blue, and yellow.

**INTRODUCTION:
ART MUSEUMS AND UNCERTAINTY**



INTRODUCTION: ART, MUSEUMS AND UNCERTAINTY

Helena Barranha and Susana S. Martins

Artists have always been interested in exploring the potentialities and limits not only of the media that they use, but also of the communities that they interact with. In this sense, open experimentation and questioning are not exactly new categories in the art world, but are instead an integral part of it. Over recent decades, however, and especially since the worldwide spread of the Internet, different media paradigms have emerged, raising further questions and bringing with them unanticipated forms of sociability, communication, fluxes and exchanges. Unsurprisingly, artists have not remained indifferent to the impact of these transformations. And neither have museums. Movements such as Digital Art or Internet Art clearly demonstrate how these technological means have shaped challenging new territories for contemporary art, not only in terms of its creation, reception and participation, but also in terms of its preservation, collection, curatorship and exhibition.

In the so-called Post-Internet era, museums seem to have dealt reasonably well with the digital revolution and its promised democratisation of knowledge: most of them have improved their websites, promoted virtual tours, or digitised their collections into increasingly open-access databases. However, while these renovations have decisively changed the image of many museums, several references to the 'physical' still seem to prevail, somehow preventing them from fully embracing the potentialities of an effective

virtual turn. Faced with such contradictory dynamics, it is therefore important to ask to what extent this resilient physicality continues to affect the nature of virtual art works and environments. How can we deal with the under-representation of Internet artists in major museum collections worldwide, and what are the differences, if any, between digital visualisations of an existing museum building and a strictly virtual, Web-based exhibition space? How are we to study, classify, preserve and exhibit Internet Art works and collections? Is the emergence of the 'intangible' actually affecting the ways in which we understand heritage, exhibition design, art practices and public participation?

These were some of the questions originally at the heart of the International Conference "Uncertain Spaces: Virtual Configurations in Contemporary Art and Museums", a two-day event that was hosted by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in Lisbon, in late 2014. This conference, organised under the scope of the unplace project, brought together the valuable contributions of different scholars, artists, curators, conservators and cultural professionals, who have been actively, and generously, promoting a stimulating discussion on those topics. While it seems impossible to transform one medium entirely into another one, the current e-book stems from this conference, but it does not seek to replicate it. It does, however, configure not just a form for dealing with transience, but it is also a significant opportunity to share with a wider audience some of the critical and inspiring ideas that were examined during this forum.

Perhaps one of the most consensual thoughts arising from the different essays gathered together in this book is that the distinction between purely virtual and purely physical displays of art no longer seems to make any sense, since they are gradually beginning to exert a mutual influence on each other. The spaces of art are therefore

uncertain in nature, since museums appear to have lost their walls in favour of an intense networked circulation that is taking place elsewhere, on the Internet and through the widespread use of digital media. This present e-book thus sets out to assess the ambiguities of these new forms of art, by investigating the challenges they bring about in terms of cultural practices and critical thinking.

The first section of this book, “Virtual Museums and Exhibitions”, brings together three essays concerned with the impacts and implications of the digital turn upon the notion of the museum, and upon its functions of safeguarding and public display. The book opens with the contribution by Alexandra Bounia and Eleni Myrivili, “Beyond the ‘Virtual’: Intangible Museographies and Collaborative Museum Experiences”. In this chapter, the authors examine the idea of the ‘virtual’, proposing a broad understanding of this notion released from the typical and dominant influence of digital phenomena. They argue that the ‘virtual’ is a fruitful analytical concept that can help us to think more profoundly about the museum as an institution and a practice, and in this way they also examine how virtuality is, and has long been, an integral part of museums, collections and objects. This article also contributes to the debate on virtual museums by philosophically addressing the ‘virtual’, not as something opposed to the real, but rather as an immanent and creative part of it.

While virtual museums may have always existed, the essay “Curating in Progress. Moving between Objects and Processes”, by Annet Dekker, focuses more concretely on contemporary art practices involving computational methods, examining how curators and art institutions are dealing with them. In particular, Dekker analyses computer-based artworks that are intrinsically processual in nature, not only to stress how they are not concerned with specific results or outcomes, but especially to highlight how crucial the notions of

change and transience can be in the contexts of digital art. Moreover, her essay also investigates the challenges posed by the mutability of processual artworks, as they often escape the principles of control, and evolve in unexpected, non-institutional directions. Despite such unstable features, the author suggests that the museum may still be an interesting option for computer-based art projects, particularly if it can adapt to these new circumstances and embrace, as a living space, the overwhelming dynamics of networks and digital media distribution. Computational aesthetics therefore raises unprecedented issues that completely defy the normal museum archiving and preservation practices. Additionally, the question of memory and media obsolescence in the digital age, which configures one of the most intriguing debates of our time, is the central topic of the article by Giselle Beiguelman “Corrupted Memories: The Aesthetics of Digital Ruins and the Museum of the Unfinished”. Drawing on her own art practice and on other contemporary artistic examples, Beiguelman focuses on the processes of recycling and malfunctioning to propose a particular idea of ‘ruinology’. At a time when it is commonly said that the Internet never forgets, her essay further inspects the limits of a digital aesthetics of memory, also proposing an insightful reflection on the inevitable processes of loss, disappearance and forgetfulness.

While the tension between what is meant to be forgotten and what is to be kept for future remembrance is not easily resolved, museums regularly have to face the problems of large-scale information, in terms of both its management and its communication. The second group of essays in this e-book, “Online Archives, Collections and Databases”, tackle the malleability of the digital models in this respect, but, at the same time, go beyond the concept of the museum as a simple database of images that is accessible anywhere and at any time.

In “The Planetary Datalinks”, Andrew Brooks explores the nature of the archival impulse across the new media, by questioning how much of our information world is actually being recorded. At a time when virtual spaces are intensely monitored and mined, it seems important to think about who actually owns the servers or runs the repositories where the massive collection of digital information is stored away. Moreover, Brooks examines how technological diversity allows for data documentation and safeguarding (museum information included). His analysis also demonstrates why the notions of power, dominance and freedom call for urgent re-evaluation.

While this essay draws attention to the widespread influence of a few silent agents in our current networked societies, the chapter “Curators’ Network: Creating a Promotional Database for Contemporary Visual Arts”, by Sören Meschede, suggests a different perspective on the positive possibilities offered by contemporary hyper-connected systems. In his paper, Meschede explores how improbable cultural relations can be fostered through the Curators’ Network – an online platform that promotes the international relevance and interconnection of art professionals from the so-called peripheral centres of contemporary art. In his analysis of this peculiarly insecure curatorial environment, the author not only addresses issues of scale, impact and visibility, he also proposes an inspiring understanding of the database as a powerful network of affect, ruled by principles of friendliness and trust.

Such an optimistic view is then followed by Stefanie Kogler’s essay “Divergent Histories and Digital Archives of Latin American and Latino Art in the United States – Old Problems in New Digital Formats”. In her text, the author investigates the historical backgrounds of the categories of ‘Latin American’ and ‘Latino’ in the context of the online digital archive *Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art*. Given that this project was promoted by institutions based in the

United States, Kogler argues that both categories – Latin American and Latino – offer suggestive keys for examining power plays and the diplomatic interests that prevail over the parameters of artistic innovation. Furthermore, in her study of the collaborative effort produced in the *Documents Project* by several institutions across the US and Latin America, she highlights how important it is to look critically at terminology and classification, in order to avoid reductive interpretations of complex histories.

Finally, the third part of the e-book, “Network Cultures, Politics and Participation”, pays closer attention to digital phenomena of sharing and collective action in an increasingly interconnected and global world. Although globalisation has been differently and widely understood – not only as a condition or process, but also as a system, a form or an era – the three contributions brought together in this section explore different forms of collaboration and participation in the creative, social and globally political dimensions of art.

In “Right to the City! Right to the Museum!”, Luise Reitstätter and Florian Bettel look at various movements of urban participation. Inspired by Henri Lefèbvre’s ideas on urban experience, the authors investigate several contemporary art movements and works that seem to emerge from this active involvement in city life. Their paper further proposes that contemporary artistic practices, such as Erdem Gündüz’ *Standing Man* (2013), for instance, are not just deeply influenced by urban protest movements; they can also promote an intense negotiation with the museum, together with the city. Investigating several other artistic examples, Reitstätter and Bettel try to understand the processes of citizens’ participation in cities and museums, and consequently their essay offers an insightful approach for considering art practices at the critical intersection of politics, urbanism and culture.

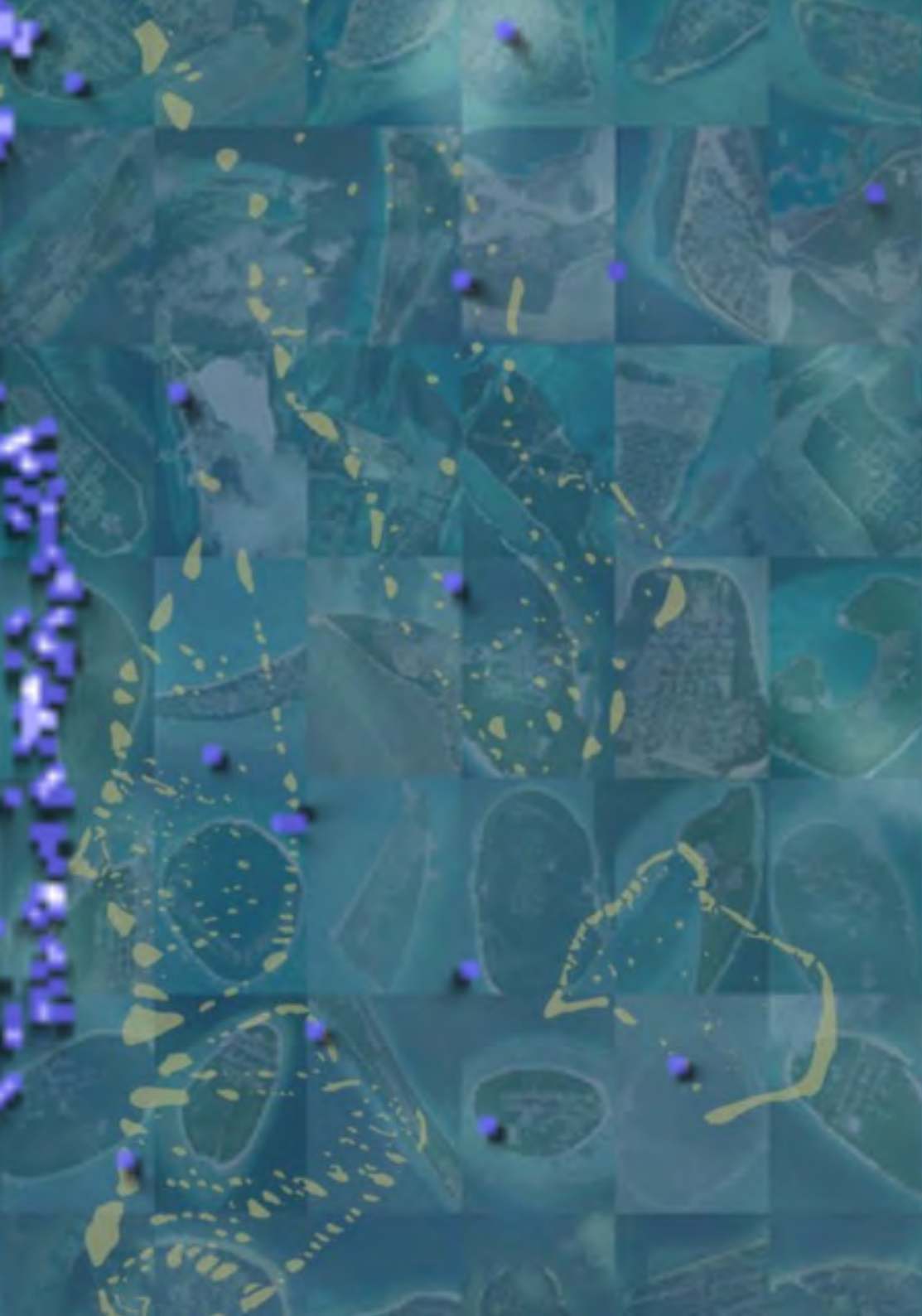
A turn toward less distinct spaces is proposed by Roberto Terracciano in his contribution “On Geo-Poetic Systems: Virtual Interventions Inside and Outside the Museum Space”. Terracciano is particularly interested in exploring how the production of space has been so deeply affected by digital media, and his essay inspects the political and artistic uses of cyberspace. The article provides a detailed analysis of two collective projects – ManifestAR and Electronic Disturbance Theatre 2.0 – which question the notion of the border (understood here as the border of the State as well as that of the Museum). While the first one makes use of digital layers to criticise art market spheres and institutions, the second one transforms the use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) into a Geo-Poetic System that is able to disturb the notion of border and propose a new kind of digital public art. Paying special attention to issues of (re-)coding, preservation and performance, this text examines the troubled ambiguity of perception in the production of digital/physical spatialities.

The e-book closes with the chapter “Art Practice in Collaborative Virtual Environments”, by Catarina Sousa and Luís Eustáquio. Their essay studies the fluid and unstable nature of artworks developed in Collaborative Virtual Environments (CVEs), and proposes an effective description of the several modes of collaborative creation that can be found in CVEs, despite their difficult categorisation. In particular, they assess the specific characteristics of virtual spaces and underline how they promote rhizomatic links between projects, artists and platforms. While this research offers different approaches to the concept of shared creativity (which can be collective, distributed or collaborative) and to that of shared identity, Sousa and Eustáquio ultimately propose an understanding of the notion of *avatar*, not just as a thought-provoking art practice but also as a stimulating human metaphor.

Although there is certainly much more still to be done and to be learned about the interdisciplinary connections between art, museums and digital processes, we believe that overall the voices gathered together in this e-book offer an insightful standpoint for addressing the complexities and challenges of the virtual dimensions of contemporary art and museums. For this reason, we are, of course, indebted to the many contributing authors who have kindly joined us in this project and shared their experiences, backgrounds and trains of thought, in order to participate in such an enriching and open-ended debate. And we can only hope that this collection of essays provides an illuminating position that will pave the way for further reflection upon this topic. As long as the discussion continues to take place, the spaces of art and museums will probably remain uncertain. And fortunately so.

The background is a dense collage of various manuscript pages, likely from a historical book or a collection of documents. The pages are arranged in a grid-like pattern, overlapping slightly. The color palette is dominated by shades of teal, blue, and purple, with scattered yellow and light blue highlights. The text on the pages is mostly illegible due to the low resolution and color filtering, but some fragments of words and lines of text are visible. The overall effect is that of a digital archive or a virtual museum display.

**VIRTUAL MUSEUMS
AND EXHIBITIONS**



BEYOND THE 'VIRTUAL': INTANGIBLE MUSEOGRAPHIES AND COLLABORATIVE MUSEUM EXPERIENCES

Alexandra Bounia and Eleni Myrivili

This article contributes to the discourse on virtual museums and intangible museographies by philosophically addressing the 'virtual', not as a notion opposed to the real, but rather as an immanent and creative part of it.

Introduction

The term 'virtual' is often associated to and conflated with the digital, and, to be more precise, with the *extension, imitation and substitution of reality* (Giaccardi 2006: 29, 30; Giaccardi et. al. 2006: 96). Consider the notion 'virtual museum', along with terms that usually accompany it: 'virtual images,' 'virtual reality,' 'virtual community,' 'virtual visitors,' etc. All these terms refer to and are used to describe these three processes. The virtual museum is often conceived of as an extension of a 'real' one – a transferral (often including expansion and elaboration) of physical space along with all the institutions' functions, and services, to their virtual counterparts in cyberspace. The processes of imitation and substitution function in a similar way: elusive and intangible digital entities like virtual museums replicate the 'real' institutions. In a virtual museum, an 'unplace' of extensions, imitations, substitutions, digital surrogates of artefacts are placed in a simulated three-dimensional environment with interfaces that allow movement and manipulation, providing the user with the illusionistic experience of exploring the rooms and displays of an imaginary gallery.

However, conflating the 'virtual' with digital 'extensions,' 'imitations,' and 'substitutions,' constitutes a serious theoretical reduction; our understanding of 'the virtual museum' has to dissociate itself from technological appendices. We need to think harder about the content and the use of the term 'virtual.' We need to go beyond the strict demarcation between real and virtual that keeps informing our understanding of 'objects' and 'audiences,' and keeps accentuating the difference between original and surrogate objects in our minds (see Benedetti 2002; Dietz *et al.* 2004; Dallas 2007; Giaccardi 2006).

This paper aims to contribute to the discourse about virtual museums by examining the *idea of the virtual*. We argue that the term 'virtual'

can be used as an analytical device for understanding the museum as an institution and a practice. A better understanding of the 'virtual' may lead not only to a different perception of future virtual museums, but also to more profound thinking about contemporary ones.

The 'virtual museum' is a reality that has always existed in the history of museums and collections. It should not be read either in the context of technological development or as the opening up to multiple interpretations and/or the (de)constructions of meaning alone. Such approaches ignore a rich philosophical tradition of ideas that inform the notion of the virtual, which can take researchers a step further into the understanding and studying of museums.

In order to pursue this argument further, this paper will develop in two parts: firstly, we will present a theoretical discussion that will define the 'virtual' in philosophical terms, arguing that virtuality constitutes an integral part of objects, collections and museums, as well as a significant analytical tool. Secondly, we will discuss the implications of such an approach to 'intangible museographies' and the creation of collaborative museum experiences in contemporary museums (and other cultural institutions) as well as the virtual museums of the future.

Beyond the 'virtual'

The materiality of the object tends to be readily 'bypassed' by theorists such as Deloche (2001) and Pataud-Celerier (1994), who discuss the notion of the virtual museum. In their work, the emphasis lies on the representational power of the object, on its role as a substitute and as a reproduction. Their starting point is André Malraux and his seminal *Musée Imaginaire*, conceived and explored in the middle

of the 20th century (1947) (reproduced in 1951 and translated into English in 1967). For many authors Malraux's 'museum without walls' prefigures the virtual museum as it shares crucial characteristics with it. The museum is here liberated from the notion of materiality and it is, above all, an idea. Thus the 'museal,' that which is characteristic of a museum, is understood as being a quotation or reference rather than something material.

Malraux suggests that we should think about the museum in terms of 'decontextualisation' and 'recontextualisation.' This is how museums operate: by taking artefacts and cultural objects out of their context and by introducing them into another, specifically constructed, context. The aim is to produce 'exhibits.' In this sense, every exhibit, even if it is an original work of art, is in itself the object and the product of a substitution: placing the object into an exhibition space and using exhibition media (frames, cases, etc), denaturalises it, converting it into an image or into a fact. Putting the objects on display (*mise en montre*), or making the objects images (*mise en image*) are two sides of the same coin (Deloche 2001: 183-4). Contemporary notions of the virtual museum capitalise on this idea of the object 'as image' that can freely circulate and participate in all kinds of actualisations, as do other pieces of weightless information in cyberspace. The basic problem here is that both the idea of the 'musée imaginaire' and that of the 'virtual museum' are directly related to the idea of substitution, to the notion of an original 'real' and of the virtual or the imaginary as extension, imitation and substitution. The 'museal' and the 'virtual' both participate in and reiterate the political economy of representation and the relations of power therein.

It does not have to be so, however, which is precisely why the decoupling of the notion of the virtual from its direct reference to



Fig. 01 - André Malraux. Photp: Maurice Jarnoux. Available from: <<https://neatlyart.wordpress.com/2013/05/30/andre-malraux-chez-lui-maurice-jarnoux-over-the-last/>>.

digitality is so propitious. The 'virtual' is a mode of being that shifts its ontological emphasis away from the reign of 'presence.' Michel Serres in *Atlas* (1994), has given us a remarkable analysis of the virtual as an indefinable, unspecified space, the 'hors-là,' the 'outside-of-there,' which he sees as the very condition of human existence. Long before the advent of digital networks and information technology, he argues, it was memory, imagination, knowledge, religion, language and communication that took us out of the here and now.

Pierre Levy, in *Qu'est-ce que le virtuel?* (1995), suggests that the virtual, as seen in Serres's analysis, refutes the Heideggerian being, the 'dasein,' ('being-here'), by opening up the possibility of existing without a 'here': existing in an 'unplace' (such as the space where a phone discussion takes place) or existing without being exclusively 'here' (as is the case with every thinking being) (Levy 1995: 18). The process of setting a person, a team, an action or a piece of information 'out of place,' is a principle modality of, what Levy calls, 'virtualisation'. The process of virtualisation is a dynamic transition from the real to the non-real. It is not a de-realisation (1995: 24). It should rather be understood as an integral part of the creation of reality.

Moving from the actual towards the virtual, consists of "an identity change, a shift in the ontological center of gravity of the object in question: instead of being defined primarily by its actuality (being in place and time), the entity now finds its essential constitution in a field of problems" (ibid.). Thus instead of defining a museum as a particular space, an actual building, one or more of its collections, the body of knowledge it contains, its people, or even its schedule, timetable or special events, the process of virtualisation transfers the ontological emphasis of the museum towards the questions, the complex problems, the nodes of tension and shifts of forces to which

this actual museum answers or provides a solution. This virtual side of the museum is always there; it is the dynamic part of and point of reference for [any condition, event, object or being] every actual museum.

“Virtualization of an entity entails the discovery of a general problem/question to which it refers, the mutation of the entity in the direction of this problem-setting, and the redefinition of the actuality (our starting point) of this entity as a [mere] solution/answer to a particular version of this general problem/question” (Levy 1995: 25). Namely, moving from the actual museum to a virtual one entails discovering a general problem/question that the particular actual museum refers to (for example, ‘how can we share memory?’). It mainly entails transforming the museum, the notion of the museum, in the direction of the problem/action (rather than the specific manifestation of the actual museum). Finally, moving towards the virtual museum would entail the redefinition, the understanding of the actual museum we started with, as a specific solution or answer to a particular version of the general problem or question that is the museum. On the contrary, virtualisation is paramount to the creation of reality.

Levy’s work – based on the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze, which we will discuss shortly – brilliantly elucidates the ways in which the large wave of virtualisation is currently transforming our world. This is being achieved primarily, but not exclusively, through the digital revolution in information and communication. The wave of virtualisation is also equally strongly affecting and transforming the human body, economic transactions, collective sensibilities and the exercise of intelligence, as well as the formation of social and political communities: virtual identities, virtual communities, virtual democracy.

However, the perspectives that understand the virtual as a digital phenomenon, where museums are concerned, still dominate. Such technological approaches to the virtual museum place great emphasis on digital affordances while enthusiastically celebrating the new democratic capacity to access, interpret and interact with the collections. One of the few people who support the technological approach through a more subtle theoretical perspective is Benedetto Benedetti (2002: 56), who argues that “information and communication technologies empower the creative interaction among the tangibility of a museum piece (the ‘physical’), its current interpretation (the ‘cultural’), and its future meaning (the ‘virtual’ in the sense of the non-yet-actualised)”. “The first applications of the concept of virtuality to the museum” he claims, “did not take into account ‘the complex reality’ of cultural objects; rather they (the first virtual museums) enhanced the virtual component that is inherent in the museum by making physical artefacts digitally accessible”. He aptly argues that even though these applications have contributed to the development of new forms of learning and knowledge construction by allowing more personal explorations of museum contents, they have been narrowly focused on duplicating pieces of reality, recombining digital contents or interconnecting different museums (Benedetti 2002; Giaccardi 2006; Giaccardi *et al.* 2006). As such, however, they have failed to empower creative interaction among the different levels of reality that compose the cultural object itself.

This thesis is notable because it effectively transfers the emphasis from the virtual museum being an extension of reality to the virtual museum being a field where different components of the notion of the cultural artefact interact. It also manages to keep the object intact in the process. However, it begs further investigation into the idea of the virtual and into the many ways it is pertinent to the museum.

The 'virtual' prominently appears on a philosophical level as one of four forms of being, which are presented by Deleuze (1994) as two oppositional pairs: the possible and the real, the virtual and the actual. The former opposition is used to refer to quantitative probabilities. In the latter opposition, the term virtual stands for the realm in which the forms of existence and attributes of an entity take shape. It is the network of problems, tensions and forces that brings about the qualities exhibited or the modes of action performed by an entity at a given setting. The actual, on the other hand, is the specific form of being and the attributes that are identified when a thing is grasped and recognised as an entity in a given circumstance. The actual is constantly revisable – different ways of ordering the world in the realm of the virtual might render the actual entity entirely different. So, in a sense, the actual, what we make of something here and now, is a kind of solution to the virtual, a way of achieving a settlement, a provisional nature.

The Deleuzian virtual, as described above, is not an appendix to or a copy of reality, as we have hitherto known it, nor is it juxtaposed to the real as being other to it. Deleuze claims that: "The virtual is opposed not to the real but to the actual. The virtual is fully real..." (Deleuze 1994: 208). It is not an extension, an imitation, or a substitution of reality but rather a part of it.

Deleuze further elucidates the relationship between the virtual and the possible, two concepts that are often conflated. His distinction is structured on three points: firstly, as already mentioned, the virtual is not opposed to the real, as it possesses full reality by itself, and it generally follows the process towards actualisation (Deleuze 1994: 211). The possible, on the other hand, is what is opposed to the real. For Deleuze, this terminology is not a "verbal dispute", but rather "a question of existence itself". Whenever the question of existence

arises in terms of the possible and the real we are forced to “conceive of existence as brute eruption, a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing”, since, he says, “there can be no difference between the existent and the non-existent if the non-existent is already possible”. The virtual, however, is the “characteristic state of Ideas: it is on the basis of its reality that existence is produced” (Deleuze 1994: 211). Secondly, the virtual and the possible are distinguished by the fact that the latter refers to the “form of identity in the concept”, while the virtual designates “a pure multiplicity in the Idea which radically excludes the identical as a prior condition” (Deleuze 1994: 211-12). The third way in which Deleuze distinguishes them is in terms of the possible’s possibility of ‘realisation’: the possible is “understood as an image of the real, while the real is supposed to resemble the possible”. This is what he calls the “defect of the possible”: that in fact it is produced after the fact, “as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it” (Deleuze 1994: 212).

As opposed to the realisation of the possible, the crucial point about the actualisation of the virtual is that it always occurs by “difference, divergence or differentiation” instead of resemblance (Deleuze 1994: 212). Actualisation, for Deleuze, breaks with both resemblance as a process and with identity as a principle. Actualisation (or differentiation) is “always a genuine creation” that is not limited by, nor results from “any limitation of a pre-existing possibility”. He claims that to actualise a potential virtual object, “is to create divergent lines which correspond to – without resembling – a virtual multiplicity” (Deleuze 1994: 212). In this sense, and for these reasons, the notion of the virtual breaks with a representational model. It is not about resemblance, identity, simulation or representation. It is, rather, about creation within the real. It is the difference and repetition

in the virtual which “ground the movement of actualization, of differentiation as creation” (Deleuze 1994: 212).

The mistake that is often made in areas such as new media studies, and other fields where new media studies apply, such as the ‘virtual museum’, is precisely this confusion of the virtual and the possible. This then leads to the virtual replacing the possible in its opposition to the real. This mistake cannot be over-emphasised; it is crucial – because in effect here the virtual is accommodated to the order of simulation and representation, and therefore loses its reality. In this accommodation, we lose the principle of operation of the virtual – the virtual, in effect, loses its virtue, in the sense of its creative power.

In short, through Deleuze’s concept of difference, we can analytically observe the ways in which the virtual can be reduced to the possible, which means as a result that the virtual is not real and therefore must be ‘realised.’ Consequently, technology is understood as a ‘realisation’ of the possible. Yet in this aspect the reality of what is virtual is then overlooked. Our understanding of technology, and specifically digital technology, is also impoverished, as it comes to stand in for the process of ‘realisation’ instead of the dynamic, transformative and contingent force of actualisation. Erasing the reality of the virtual has the direct result of marginalising the radically creative process of actualisation. And, unfortunately, more often than not, this reductive view of technology – being that which realises the possible – produces most celebrations of digitality. Instead we should realise that the most de-territorialised forces of our times, the most virtualised communities of our world are those that belong to techno-science, to the financial sector and to communications media. These are the ones that shape our social reality with extraordinary force, innovation and creativity, but also with unprecedented speed and violence.

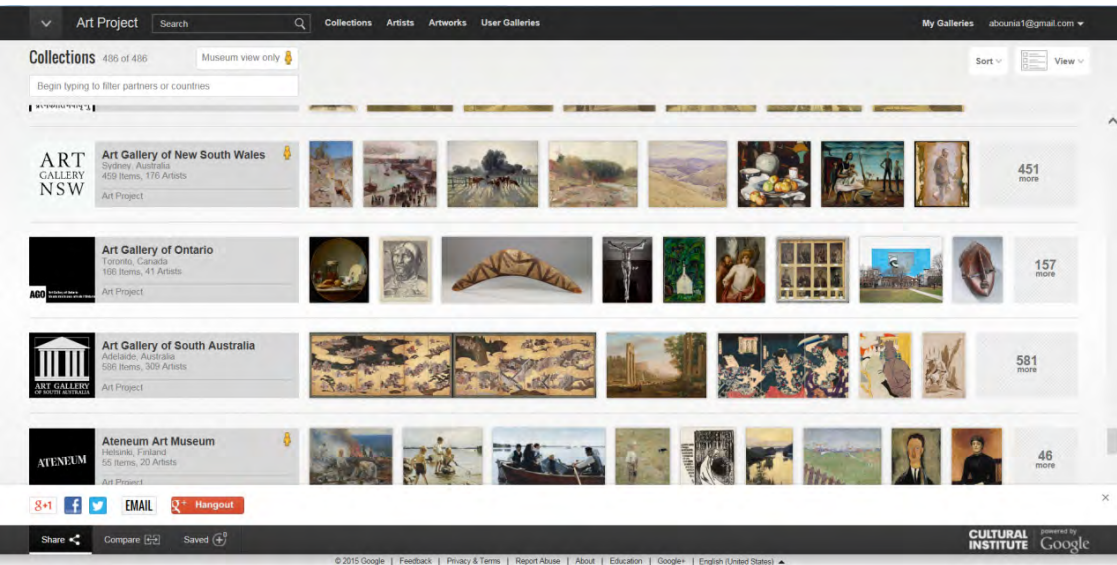


Fig. 02 - Google Art Project: a new direction of contemporary virtual museums.

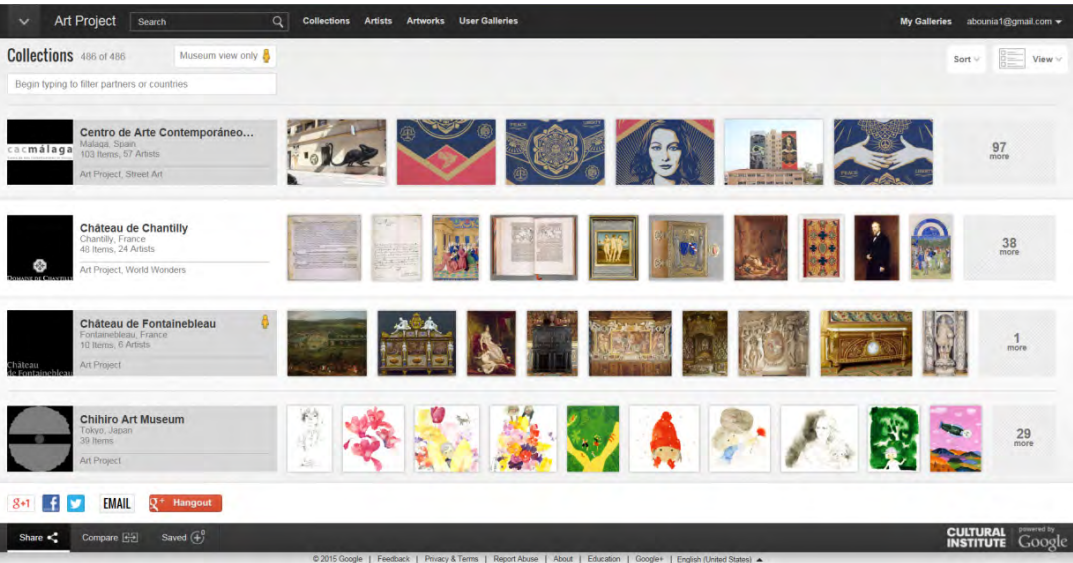


Fig. 03 - Google Art Project.

Intangible museographies and collaborative museum experiences

We can now address our proposition of the virtual museum. Deleuze's concept of the virtual describes a zone of potential, one which contains the real material or content of, and above all the idea of what becomes the museum. 'That-which-would-become the museum' becomes the museum through the struggles within culture to manifest the desire for understanding the world through material objects. In order to do this, this desire continually refers beyond the present by attempting to grasp something that is not yet, something real but intangible or in the process of realisation. The virtual in this sense describes a movement towards the object that is in the process of coming to presence. In the case of the museum, this is the coming to presence of the idea of collection, being manifested as a discursive desire to collect.

We consider the notion of the 'virtual' essential for the understanding of 'museums', 'collections' and 'objects' because it constitutes an integral part of them all. Not unlike the virtual museum, the virtual object is not a new technological object, nor is it a new perspective that reveals another way of 'reading' an object or a collection. Considering the object as immanently 'virtual' reaffirms and opens up to the idea of the object by placing it outside the economy of signs and representations; that is, the unrelenting desire for origins and its reanimation through mimetic and hermeneutic practices. The virtual object makes how it becomes what it is visible, as well as the movements and relationships which are opened up or foreclosed upon by it. The concept of the virtual allows space for a radical ambiguity inherent within objectivity.

The term virtuality makes the processual aspects of an entity visible. When virtuality meets the museum, it opens up issues such as the

following: How does the museum as a social institution become oriented to, defined and used by participants? How are social relations remediated and reworked by a given material object? What are the apparent boundaries between actors and materials, practices, technologies and settings in this particular incarnation of the museum? What are the parameters of 'intangible museographies'; and, what the content of such a term is? What possibilities for action are structured by the current networked relationships and what possibilities are foreclosed upon? The virtual can offer a sustained analysis of the complex organisation that constitutes the museum, as well as the complex entity that constitutes the object.

Virtual museums cross previously inflexible boundaries of communication. Action and interaction, producers and users, presence and absence, mass and interpersonal, audience and user represent a "both/and" logic, which contributes to the convergence and hybridisation that we can witness online. The effective blurring of boundaries leads to the re-examination of authority, voice and point of view. This leads to communication which is also a socially-produced space that encourages multiple, user-centric collaborative activities. In this sense, virtual museums represent the collective memory (Giaccardi 2006), but also a place (unplace) or space, where use and re-use, assemblage and manipulation of information resources are open to any visitor or group of visitors. But it also goes far beyond that; if the virtual object, as already argued, is an entity 'open' to realisation, then visitors can go beyond authority and activate possible meanings, its inner reality.

In other words, virtual museums opt (or should opt) for architecture (museography) which is flexible, transparent, distributed and open to collaboration and multiple realisations. The museography of the universal digital memory, intangible such as it is, comprises of all that

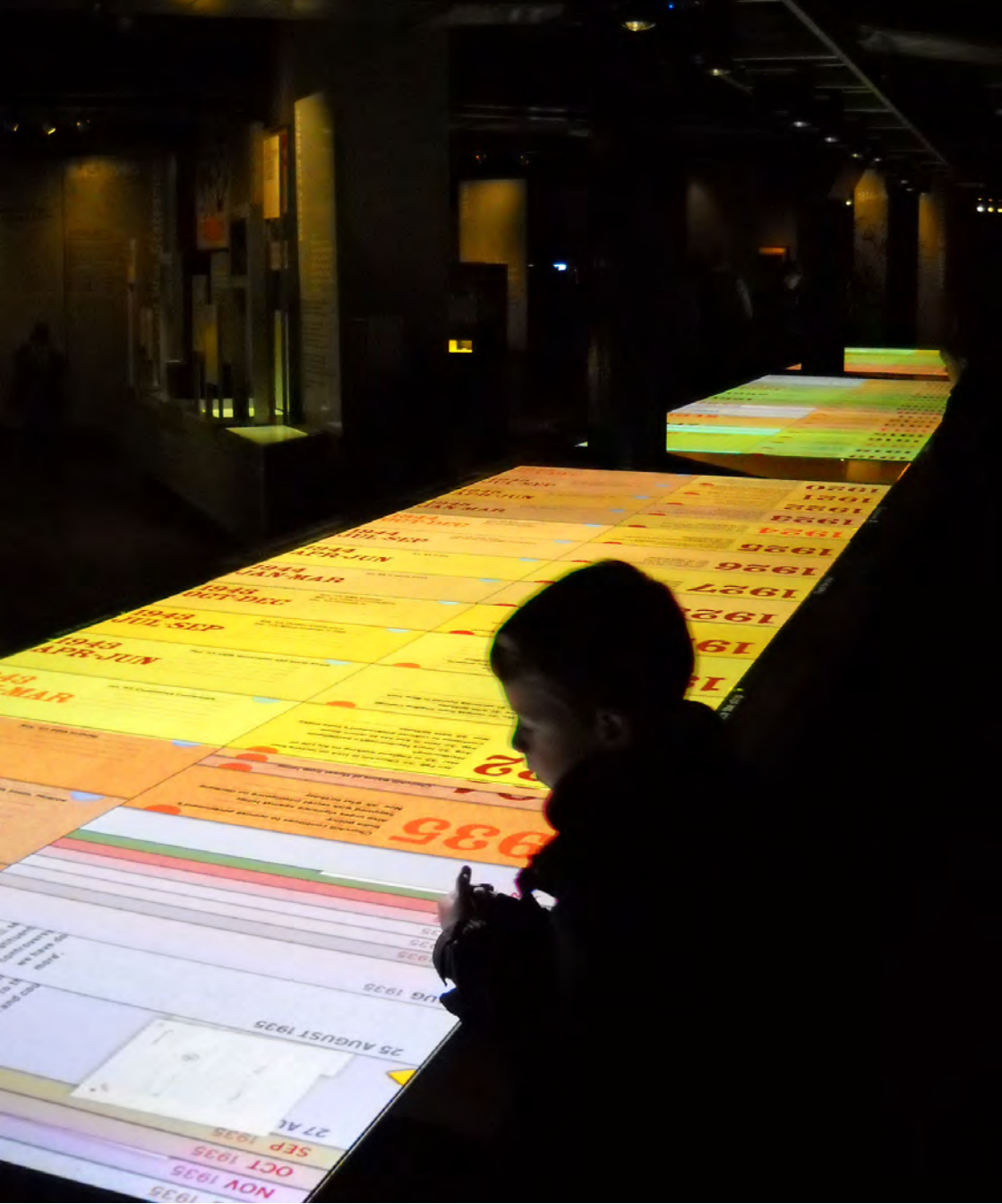


Fig. 04 - New media in exhibition spaces. Churchill War Rooms – IWM, London, 2010.

is humanly memorable, in which all virtual communities of authors, visitors, and users can meet, interact and collaborate. Being able to view and study objects through non-traditional perspectives, we allow for a viewing and studying in an infinity in terms of dimensions and space that changes objects and meanings completely, since these can be organised around a multiplicity of possible viewpoints, constantly re-actualised and re-interpreted. As Levy argues (Dietz *et. al.* 2004) memory institutions can thus for each visitor produce a virtual representation of the views of others, being inseparable from their own views, and as such universal cultural memory can lead to increased cultural expression for all ages, which would develop without territorial restrictions, and which would stage the world of ideas and memories in an interactive and open way.

Summing up

In this paper we have chosen to concentrate on the idea of the virtual in order to open up new perspectives for the museum of the 21st century. Through the 'idea of the virtual' we avoid essentialising the museum. We believe that this is an analytical category that allows us to understand the museum not as a closed entity, not as a concept which realises itself in this or that form, but as an open question. The virtual character of the museum is a continual struggle to articulate and actualise the different incarnations of the idea of the museum. The creation of new associations, as well as full knowledge are highly essential to addressing some of the most important and complex issues that we face as a society, but also as museum professionals. It allows for the museums to be spaces of collaborative experiences, in a real and most profound sense.

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CURATING IN PROGRESS. MOVING BETWEEN OBJECTS AND PROCESSES

Annet Dekker

This essay focuses on the practical design and function of computational processes in contemporary art, examining how curators and art institutions are dealing with artworks that are intrinsically processual.

The term 'process' is used to signify the creation or development process of a work, which may or may not lead to a specific outcome. In art history this is known as Process Art, a movement from the 1960s, when artists emphasised the 'process' of making art by stressing concepts of change and transience. In computing, a process occurs when a computer programme is being executed. It contains the program code and its current activity. The process happens in between an input and an output. Simply put, a process is a series of actions, changes, or functions that produce a result. Although there can be an end point, this is not always the case. Furthermore, processes are often unstable. During execution, noise can develop, causing errors, uncertainty and misunderstanding. Nor are processes independent: they address themselves and are connected to other elements and dynamics. As such, the nature and power of processes is graspable in relations.

My main focus here is on the practical design and function of computational processes in art. Therefore, I will examine the creation and development of contemporary art to investigate how computational processes are used and how such examples can influence social and cultural conduct. Examples range from integrating Facebook APIs in gaming, addressing commercial e-book publishing companies like Amazon.com, and using Web 2.0 commenting strategies. Whereas some of these artworks include computing processes, the examples are not restricted to the computational. Often these projects extend beyond the systems they examine and use. In particular, I will consider how curators and art institutions deal with artworks that are intrinsically processual, simultaneously questioning whether dealing with processes requires a different attitude and, if so, how the art world can adapt to the changing requirements of the mutable artworks that it presents and collects.

Continuous process rather than outcome

Art processes are often continuous, and single objects or projects might emerge, but as I will argue throughout this essay, these individual expressions have little value by themselves and only function from and within the larger network. As such, processual relates to a study of processes rather than discrete events. For instance, in their project *Database Documentary* (2009-2011), YoHa (Matsuko Yokokoji and Graham Harwood) set out to investigate the workings of National Health Service (NHS) databases in the United Kingdom. To comprehend how databases change our conduct, they followed the process of modelling, creating, implementing, completing, ordering and using databases – particularly those used by health services. They traced the databases' processes by interviewing midwives, following database administrators and organising workshops. The outcomes revealed specific points of authority and agency, leading to new perspectives on empowerment. As such, the project demonstrated that database processes motivate all kinds of narratives and are connected to histories, economies and ideologies. In other words, while processes can be highly formal, they are also contingent. As such, they are expressive actants that function through systems, designs, and histories, which can simultaneously be influenced and executed through other processes and/or users.

The Project Formerly Known as Kindle Forkbomb (2011-2013) by Übermorgen is exemplary in this sense¹. Übermorgen wrote scripts for bots to harvest comments to YouTube videos, which were then compiled in 'narratives' and uploaded in vast quantities as e-books in Amazon's Kindle shop². In this project, the entire book publishing procedure is the story: from coding and platforms, to writing and distributing texts. The stories are outcomes of relations between

texts and the different context that they are part of; thus, narratives are both human and machinic. The project both illustrates *and* produces reality. Übermorgen makes poetic use of the trappings of systems that produce new literature, while critically exploring the changing process in and infrastructure of the writing, production and distribution of books. Or, as Übermorgen say, a “new breed – humans and algorithms alike – writes within the cloud as the crowd and publishes in the cloud to the crowd”³.

These examples imply that what is most important is the process and not necessarily the outcome. Übermorgen’s books will likely never be read. YoHa’s dialogues with midwives, administrators and participants in the workshops were more important than a final outcome, as these exposed the effects and pitfalls of database structures and systems. A process can be endless, continually moving from one stage to another. Although a process is often made visible through an outcome, or by the actions of users, these are merely (re-) presentations of a temporary state.

Process of making and setting in motion

As mentioned before, the processual is not exclusive to technology. Earlier experiments can be seen in process art, some examples of Land Art, Fluxus, Conceptual Art, and Mail Art, but technologies have made it easier to accommodate processes⁴. Technologies have made whole new spectra of processes possible. Some of these examples have been taken into art history, but most projects that deal with processes do not fit comfortably into art-historical contexts. To an extent this is because they are part of an assemblage of works that can be difficult to read outside their environments. Or, because of the

inclusion of brightly coloured stuffed animals, stickers, magazines, animated GIFs or corporate logos, they are considered to be closer to Pop and mass culture with little 'art aesthetic sophistication'. Another challenge is that a process can continue; it can sometimes evolve into new directions. It is difficult to predict where some processes will end, as others could continue taking specific parts in different directions. The significance lies in the process of the making, instead of what is made, or even by whom. This is not to say that these factors are unimportant, but that meaning, authorship and authenticity extend to a larger context. This method is clearly visible with a new generation of artworks that were made in the late 2000s. To clarify what I mean, I will describe three examples that represent specific characteristics of this kind of processuality, which I distinguish as: using social interactions, distribution and re-use, and recombination and mutation.

Processuality as social interaction is well exemplified by Constant Dullaart's work *YouTube as a Sculpture* (2009). The work is based on his previous work *YouTube as a Subject* (2008), a series of animated videos with the YouTube play button as its subject. Positioned against the black background of a loading YouTube video, the play button icon starts trembling as if suddenly in an earthquake, bouncing from side to side, changing colours, strobing like a mini disco lightshow, and falling down off the screen. Lastly, the icon slowly blurs. Within the spirit of comment culture and its practice of versioning (meaning a change or translation from one thing to another through social interactions) that was prominent with 'surf clubs', Ben Coonley was one of the first to respond with a series of videos that featured the dots that signal loading time as his subject. In 2009, I co-curated the exhibition *Versions* at the Netherlands Media Art Institute in Amsterdam and we asked Constant to translate his work to the physical space⁵. He decided to version the online discussion by

creating a physical copy of the loading dots, *YouTube as a Sculpture*. This time, eight polystyrene balls were hung in a circle against a black background, lit in succession by eight spotlights. Visitors were given the feeling of entering a loading YouTube video, and filmed the balls and uploaded them to YouTube, “thereby completing the circle of production and reproduction” (Thalmair 2011). The dialogue first occurred online, then offline and returned again to the virtual, where yet again new versions of ‘loading balls’ videos were made. The process of versioning continues. According to Dullaart: “The success of the sculpture meant that audience members documented the sculpture and finally became the uploading medium for my participation in the visual discussion set in motion by *YouTube as a Subject* a few years earlier” (Thalmair 2011).

An example that reinforces distribution and re-use is *19:30* (2010) by Aleksandra Domanovic. Domanovic grew up in Serbia when it was still part of Yugoslavia. Surprisingly, the strict regime that controlled the country allowed its national television stations a lot of creative freedom, which resulted in stable, high-quality entertainment and information programmes. Many people watched the news that was broadcast every evening at 19:30 (hence the title of Domanovic’s work). When ethnic tensions intensified in the late 1980s, it became the focal point of the day. Watching the news was part of a routine and a shared experience, which contributed to the omnipresent memory of the musical and graphic introductions to the news. Although the fall of Yugoslavia marked the end of this collective memory, it was music in the mid-1990s, and in particular raves, that created a new shared memory. For a large group of people, raves provided a sense of community. In 2009, Domanovic returned to Serbia in an attempt to connect these different time periods and stress the importance of collective memory. Domanovic learned that many well-known composers had worked on the experimental scores for

the news jingles. She uploaded her assembled archive and encouraged DJs to use them in their music tracks.

The work was first presented as an audiovisual installation consisting of two screens: one shows documentation of techno parties and the DJs using the tracks and the other shows the compilation of news jingles. The research and documentation of the events can be viewed online, where the old jingles and new tracks can also be heard and downloaded⁶. Old memories are triggered through the process of creating different versions that are (potentially) continuously distributed. At the same time, it should be asked whether the video installation is the work, or if the video is just documentation of something that happened (and perhaps continues) elsewhere? For an exhibition in 2011, Domanovic further abstracted the memories by adding stacks of paper with fragments of images from raves printed on the sides of the paper. In the 'paper-stacks', or the 'printable monuments' as Domanovic calls them, the issue of monumentality is as important as the visualisation of content sourced from the Internet: they exist in two states, a virtual one (as an online PDF document) and its physical manifestation. Their subjects, varying from images of football hooligans, the crowds at Balkan raves to the ruins of the former Hotel Marina Lucica situated on the Croatian coast, belong to the symbolic iconography of the new states that emerged after Yugoslavia was dissolved. As such, the stacks signal the monumentality of former Yugoslavia's architecture, while also emphasising the fragmentary nature of the Internet, the place from which the images came, and where they end up because they can be freely downloaded and (re)used. At once resembling the solidness and the instability of monuments and commonality, the stacks mainly symbolise a transience that evokes former Yugoslavia.

Although the stacks of paper, the video installation and the website

can be presented separately, for an understanding of the work it is important to see the connections between the different parts. One way to more easily grasp these links is to move beyond conventional art aesthetics and concentrate on processual (or network) aesthetics. Instead of the material promise of a medium, or its substantial form, such aesthetics should be seen as “a method and a force that, through rules, constraints, and capacities for expression, continually re-negotiates its own structures and existence” (Fazi and Fuller 2015). In other words, a computational aesthetic is an aesthetic that derives from the design of processes, networks and distribution.

Finally, the Facebook game *Naked on Pluto* by Aymeric Mansoux, Dave Griffiths and Marloes de Valk, is exemplary of recombination and mutation. *Naked on Pluto* is a multiplayer text adventure that uses the available data on someone’s Facebook account and constructs a game around it. I will not examine the project’s goals and aims here, but remain on topic and show how it functions with regard to processuality. In addition to the online game, the project can be experienced as an installation that presents certain components of the game, a research blog, books and workshops. For the artists, *Naked on Pluto* is a specific comment on Facebook and the state of social media at the time, but if that context changes the game loses all meaning. So, when talking about future installations, rather than the game play, interface or installation, the artists emphasise the organisation of workshops with the game engine.

The game engine is for them the core of the work – even the most crucial creative part of their work. It is a platform for making new works. This is also one of the reasons why they developed *Naked on Pluto* in open source: all the data and code is freely available for re-use. In other words, following these open-source ideologies, *Naked on Pluto* can be characterised by the processes of distribution and

re-use of concepts and ideas. More importantly, the work can change or mutate into something else.

From acquiring objects to engaging in processes

The idea of materialising Internet processes can be seen as a way to grasp a complex and continually changing world that reveals its fragility and fleeting nature. It can be argued that by creating and at times presenting physical objects, artists – or curators – are attempting to transform the processual into a ‘poetic’ time freeze. However, this sidesteps the notion that these artworks arise from collective processes situated in continuum with other works, references and commentaries⁷. These assemblages are characterised by the processes of distribution and re-use of concepts and ideas. The work, if it can still be referred to as such, only becomes evident through multiplicity, enumeration and evolvment. In other words, the significance of the work does not revolve around one presentation, or even one author.

This does not imply that the earlier mentioned artists do not have a preferred way of exhibiting, or documenting the work. It means that there are no fixed rules. As such, anyone can present, exhibit, preserve, document, or do as they see fit with the project without permission from the artists. Potentially, even an acquisition could happen just as easily, where a gallerist or distributor could sell a work to anyone⁸. However, some of these artists see the acquisition process in reverse: the process and the development is what they are paid for, and the outcome is for everyone else to use. This means that ‘acquisitions’ by institutions are related to an engagement with the practice, and not to the outcome of that process. If adopted, this



Fig. 01 - Dave Griffiths, Aymeric Mansoux and Marloes de Valk, *Naked on Pluto*. Installation at Arco Madrid 2012. Photo: VIDA Team.

would extend the role of the museum to one of being a producer, or facilitator, of artworks.

The production of artworks by museums is not necessarily new; museums already have a tradition of commissioning artworks. However, in most cases these works have a different status. They are not part of the collection archive, which means that the museum is not required to present, take care of, or preserve them⁹. Similarly, museums acquire performance or conceptual artworks, so they know how to deal with fragments or ephemeral 'ideas', 'concepts' or 'instructions' that characterise these artworks. But in most of the examples just described, the institution will acquire a development – and possibly an evolving – process. What are the consequences of this reversed practice for curators? How to present or handle processuality?

Whereas some parts of these artworks can easily be presented – the installation version of *Naked on Pluto*, Domanovic's stacks of paper and videos, or Dullaart's polystyrene balls – such efforts need to recognise their contradictory or paradoxical status. Similar to documentation, these objects are reconstituent traces. Ideally, and to keep to the 'process' or the method of versioning, one should open up to new explorations and discoveries. As such, a museum becomes a place where the old goes hand in hand with the production of the new – in other words, an 'open method', which means engaging with the work on its own terms, and thus following multiple directions.

An open approach and the museum

An open approach (in the sense of re-creation and reinterpretation) to presentation seems to follow perfectly the method and practice

of curating. It would have to be acknowledged that multiple versions – or even parts of a work – exist and are scattered across different platforms. Within certain restrictions, freedom of choice to present any possible construction will likely lead to interesting results.

This is not a new insight or perspective. Examples of curating-in-progress, or even museums-in-progress, can be traced to the early 20th century, for example, to the German curator Alexander Dorner. Dorner began his career as a curator at the Niedersächsische Landesmuseum in Hannover in 1923, and two years later was appointed its director. He was one of the early avant-garde art collectors in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s concentrating on Constructivist art for the collection, focusing on Piet Mondrian, Naum Gabo, Kazimir Malevich, and El Lissitzky. More importantly, Dorner juxtaposed traditional art with other objects from other periods. With these installations he proposed a new method for presentation in art museums, and argued that “the museum would have to be flexible, both as to building and as to inner arrangement; flexible not for the sake of being always ‘different’, offering constant novelties, but for the sake of transforming its own identity under the pressure of life’s continuous and autonomous change” (Dorner 1958: 146). As such, he envisioned a new type of art museum, which “must not only be not an ‘art’ museum in the traditional static sense but, strictly speaking, not a ‘museum’ at all. A museum conserves supposedly eternal values and truths. But the new type would be a kind of powerhouse, a producer of new energies” (Dorner 1958: 147).

An example of this ‘powerhouse’ idea is the commission Dorner gave to El Lissitzky in 1927 in which he asked him to build a modular room for abstract art. The installation was a non-permanent intervention, using the art that was already in the museum as a tool for creating new readings, understandings, or even misunderstandings. Around

the same time, and perhaps not coincidentally, Aby Warburg presented his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, an installation consisting of 40 wooden panels covered with black cloth, on which were pinned and juxtaposed nearly 1000 pictures from books, magazines, newspaper, *et cetera*, that could be re-arranged at will. His method became especially popular in art-historical discourse where he was seen as someone who sought the meaning and the functions of art for various societies, its role for different social classes, and the energy of the cultural memories it preserves. Unfortunately neither of these projects lasted very long. Warburg died just two years after the opening, leaving his work unfinished, and Dorner had to flee to the United States in 1938 because of the National Socialists, who were not amused by modernist methods and approaches.

Nevertheless, artists, rather than museum directors, have usually been the catalysts of institutional innovation. A case in point is the artists who became known for their process art. One of the first curators to bring some of these artists together was Harald Szeemann, in the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) at Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland. Szeemann tried to highlight the processual character of the artworks that were being made at the time. Although it can be, and has been, debated whether this staging was successful, more surprising was the restaging of the exhibition in 2013 during the Venice Biennial. Rather than presenting the process in the artworks, the objects became a way to entirely restage the exhibition: a reconstruction of the exhibition space rather than looking at the content of the artworks. Something similar had happened two years earlier, in 2011, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where curator Magriet Schavemaker organised a restaging of the 1969 exhibition *Square Pegs in Round Holes [Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostructuren]*¹⁰. At the time, the 1969

exhibition by Wim Beeren also focused on presenting Process Art (Beeren's Stedelijk show opened one week before Harald Szeemann's *When Attitude Becomes Form*). Beeren wanted to reflect the spirit of experimentation that informed the works on display, and draw attention to ephemeral performances and conceptual interventions outside the walls of the museum, any of which were intended to critique both art and the museum (Dippel et al. 2005: 282-285 and 473-483). Whereas the press release of the 2011 restaging points to a flexible approach, the exhibition drew foremost on archival and documentary materials that were shown together with some works that were acquired after the exhibition in 1969. In other locations in the museum – the sites of the original exhibition – people could view documentation of the original artworks by using their mobile phone and an AR plug-in. Unfortunately this AR tour cannot be accessed anymore.

Whereas these ideas and exhibitions introduced new contexts and readings of existing artworks, or breathed new life into a collection, the artworks did not change, and when they did, due to material decay, their 'fragments' or documents formed the centre of attention. A more interesting proposal in this sense is made by Rudolf Frieling, curator at SFMOMA. Frieling describes a position where the museum as a 'producer' is able to re-exhibit works via performative strategies, including commissioning other artists to conceive new installations for artworks in their collection. An example is the re-installation of the Internet art project *learning to love you more* by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, which was re-interpreted by Stephanie Syjuco, who decided to show all the results of the assignments in pairs in a semi-secluded space. According to Frieling, the museum "understands the term 'production' not just as an emergence of something that is not a 'given', but as the emergence of something that is 'changed'" (Frieling 2014: 147).

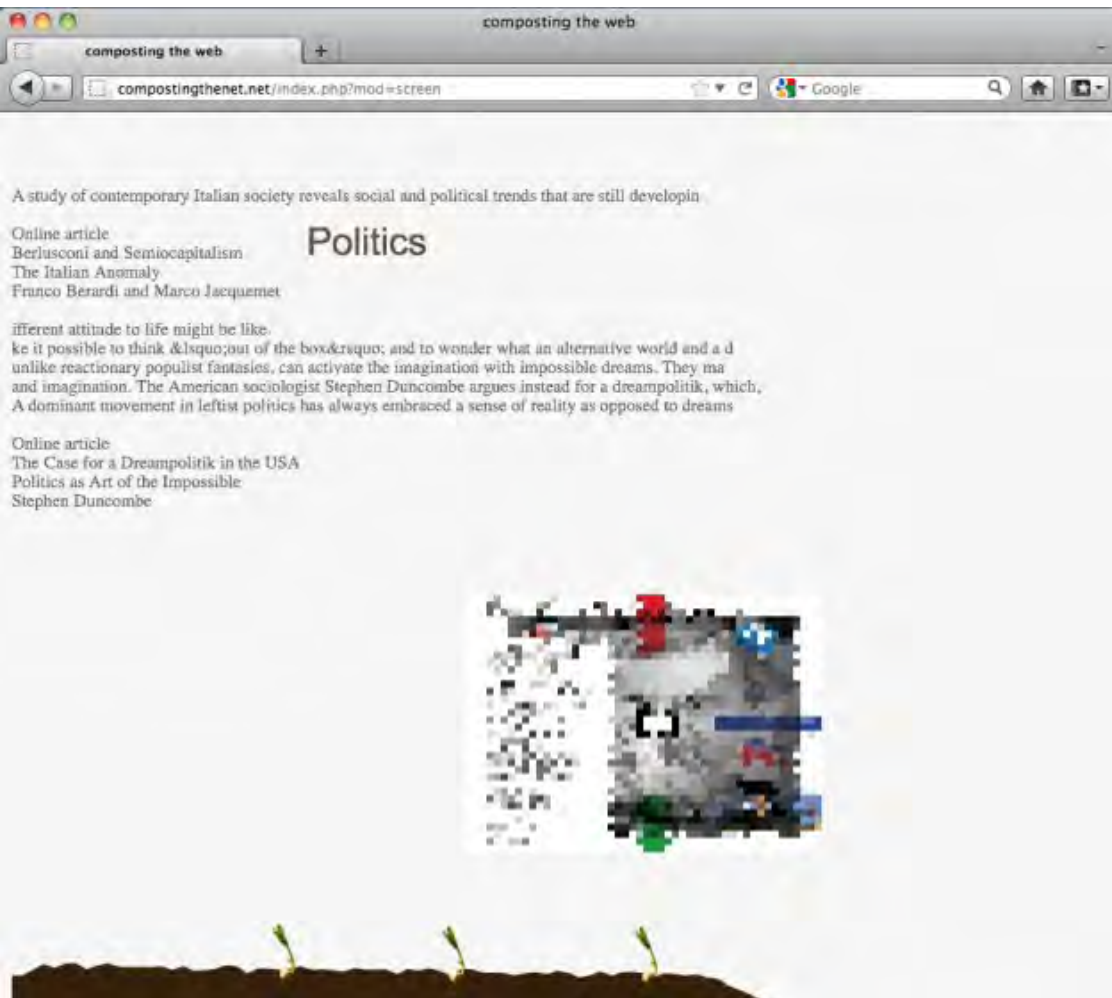


Fig. 02 - Shu Lea Cheang, *Composting the Net* (2012) website screenshot.

It can be argued that these practices imply an endorsement of loss and forgetting. Instead of seeing this as a negative statement, I prefer to embrace the 'art of forgetting'. Such an art of forgetting is demonstrated in the work *Composting the Net* (2012) by Shu Lea Cheang. Whereas most art projects that deal with waste and trash paint a rather negative picture of the present or future¹¹, *Composting the Net* takes all the content of a website or e-mail list and shreds the words and images into 'compost', turning the archives into forgotten instances of history. But, the actions of digital worms generate fresh sprouts that refuse to be trashed and buried. Seemingly, dead data is fertile and open to new perspectives. It could well be argued that allowing things to be forgotten is not a bad thing. What Cheang proposes is a cycle, which "is durational, generative and repetitive. A cycle is a natural process, while 'recycle' implies 'the making of something else', which inevitably generates more waste" (Dekker 2012). As such, a cycle represents a more natural approach to preserving the past, departing from the assumption that without repetition there is no learning, and without learning what remains is a fleeting yet endless desire to get to the next new thing.

A practice of iteration and recombination

Remaining with Cheang's work, let us dig a little deeper into the meaning of waste. The subjects of compost and trash are recurring aesthetics in her work. Here we find die-hard open source coders and circuit benders scrambling through utterances of code, tracing dead links, building something from scattered parts, and trying out endless emulations. This is the scenario of *I.K.U.* (2000), Cheang's movie (which later was cycled into *U.K.I.* (2009), a game and performance depicting an Internet porn enterprise, GENOM Corp., which

introduces orgasm-on-the-go for a mobile phone chip: dumped in an e-trash environment, coders, tweeters and networkers are forced to scavenge through techno-waste to collect old and forgotten human orgasm data. If an artwork breaks, the software could be fixed or adapted to the environment once or twice, or emulated, but in time and after attention fades, it is neglected, thrown away and replaced by a new version. What remains is waste, digital litter, and hardware junk. It has been argued that garbage and waste belong to the domain of forgetting. Archaeology is the prime field that thrives on scattered fragments and perpetuates through assemblages. The trope of archaeologists is that they focus on past artefacts, behaviours, attitudes and beliefs, but according to Shanks et al. (2004), 99 per cent of archaeology depends on looking at traces through waste or refuse¹². A condition of waste is common to all things, and it is through examining and arranging waste that meaning is created (Shanks et al. 2004). Although it can be argued that this is also an archaeological trope, what is interesting is that both of these notions regard waste as the end state of objects. However, emphasising waste as redundant, a residue, a remainder, obscures a potential ongoing status of the object itself. For example, analysing the installation *Tate Thames Dig* (1999) by Marc Dion, William Viney (2010) demonstrates that waste is not a fixed state but continually changes due to the materiality and handling or presentation of the material; a process that is frequently mentioned in accounts of the conservators who worked on the installation. In other words, it denies what objects are yet to become.

Jill Sterrett, head of conservation at SFMOMA, suggests applying the concept of the 'archaeological find' in reverse by using the mechanism as a method to trace the engagement with an artwork and to reveal its life over time (Sterrett 2009: 227). This resonates with the suggestion that an archaeological find does not only

communicate aesthetic values; it also has information potential and semantic values (Berducou 1996: 248-258). Instead of rigid solutions or records, Sterrett advocates 'planting finds' (documents with information value), which account for the variables that are included in the presentation and conservation of many contemporary artworks. This could lead to a new situation where museums would need to re-assess their finds each time from a new context, or as Sterrett says, it will adjust "the burdensome tone of authority that museums inherit as sources of objective truth by actively committing to seeing and seeing anew over time, [and it will] cultivate, among other things, ways of manoeuvring with variable speed" (Sterrett 2009: 227).

By following such an approach, presentation will be a mode of iteration that is underwritten by absence and loss. It shows an intention to reframe discourses and opens up alternative possibilities. Instead of asking what to save, present, or preserve, the first question becomes what to relinquish, erase, or abandon. Rather than relying on a past, the notion of traces relates to a future, the function of a trace being that of a 'carrier' of information whose significance is more appropriately valued in a 'not yet' context. A less permanent and more insecure approach such as this takes into account a future perspective, and leads towards a propensity to change and development. It opens new ways of thinking about what presentation means and leads to new ways of dealing with the structure and function of museums.

To summarise

The examples I have mentioned are recombinations. Parts of a work can disappear, change or mutate over a short time span. Whereas the notion of incompleteness is not new and is reminiscent of, for example,

Conceptual Art, the way material is compiled, found, changed, and distributed has changed. The result is that these works are heterogeneous processes of creation, which act beyond a single object. To achieve any significance, these works rely on an understanding of computational aesthetics. In other words, a physical realisation of the process, a work in an exhibition space, is a derivative of the main core of these works, which are the social interactions that determine their process. Much will be lost if this is not taken into account, especially the energy, surprise effect, fragility of the illusion, and the transience of the moment. So, even for the 'unplaced', a museum can still be an interesting option, but it will succeed best if it adapts itself to the artworks, rather than adapting the artworks to fit its own current structures and systems. As such, a museum shifts from a custodian of 'dead objects' to a 'living space', where presentation, preservation, discussion, and active exploration go hand in hand.

Notes

¹ In 2012, Übermorgen collaborated with Luc Gross and Bernhard Bauch to build the web robot. After they parted, Gross and Bauch released their own version of the project as *Kindle'voke Ghost Writers*, <<http://traumawien.at/ghostwriters/>>. Currently both versions exist alongside each other.

² Amazon Kindle's e-book shop functions through 'Whispernet', a cloud service that stores all reading data, i.e., what, when, where one reads, and potentially which notes and underscores are made.

³ For more information about the project, see <<http://uuuuuuuntitled.com>>. About the infrastructure of digital publishing and its implications, see Andersen and Pold (2013).

⁴ See, for example, Saper (2001) on mail-art, and examples of Fluxus and Conceptual Art in Chandler and Neumark (2005).

⁵ The other curators were Petra Heck and Constant Dullaart. A number of artists were invited, for whom online commenting influenced their work process. We challenged them to temporarily exchange the Internet for the static space of a gallery. Questions about the significance of appropriation,

authenticity and agency in the era of 'comment culture' ran like a thread through the exhibition. <<http://nimk.nl/eng/versions>>.

⁶ For more information see <<http://nineteenthirty.net/>>.

⁷ For more information about these processes on social platforms, see Burgess who described these videos as 'carriers for ideas' that relate to "a 'copy the instructions', rather than a 'copy the product' model of replication and variation" (Burgess 2008: 108).

⁸ Aymeric Mansoux, personal conversation, December 2012 in Eindhoven.

⁹ For more information about these kinds of contracts and the difference between collection and commissioned work in relation to the Whitney Artport, see Verschooren (2007: 5-6). This is not to imply that museums are not trying to change this situation. For example, Whitney Artport (curated by Christiane Paul) is trying to bring the commissioned net artworks into their collection. Other museums undertake similar initiatives, for example, Variable Media Network and Matters in Media Art.

¹⁰ The English title does not really capture the essence of its Dutch counterpart, which much more reflects the instable nature of the artworks – literally the Dutch title translates to "On loose screws: situations and crypto structures".

¹¹ See, for example, Kroker and Weinstein (1994) and Mark Napier's project *Digital Landfill* (1998), which anticipates an exploded digital super-highway that is littered with road kill and taken over by spam.

¹² The connection between archaeology and garbage (archaeologists studying garbage) was made in the 1970s when William Rathje started the science of Garbology at the University of Arizona. For more information, see Rathje and Murphy (2001), and Shanks et al. (2004). 'Waste' as a scientific topic has boomed for about a decade. See, among many others, Scanlan (2005), who examined the language and symbolism of waste as the background to the predominant culture of novelty that is brought to life as the monstrous, the sublime, or simply the eclipse of human endeavour.

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CORRUPTED MEMORIES: THE AESTHETICS OF DIGITAL RUINS AND THE MUSEUM OF THE UNFINISHED

Giselle Beiguelman

This paper addresses the aesthetics of memory emerging on the horizon of digital culture, discussing the notions of ruin, conservation and archive, in relation to contemporary processes of “documentary overdose”, loss and planned obsolescence.

A brief archaeology of the aesthetics of memory

Since the 1990s, we have been witnessing the emergence of transnational policies relating to memory. Unconnected events, such as the 50th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War and the beginning of the Second World War, the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of Latin American dictatorships and of apartheid in Africa, have been celebrated together through the recognition of special anniversaries and various commemorations worldwide. In parallel to the discussions that these events have aroused, new architectural works have been constructed, together with new designs for cities, while new commissions have been made for works of art, and countless books and films have been produced, both relevant and frivolous ones. In short, we could say that the most disturbing feature of this 21st century culture of memory is that it simultaneously stresses both the multifaceted and the banal aspects of these celebrations. Everywhere, there are critical discourses and superficial products created by the complex network of the culture industry. Memory has become both an intellectual challenge and a commodity for easy consumption (Huyssen 2014; Peris Blanes 2011).

Although the aesthetics of the spectacle of memory is a recent phenomenon, we cannot say the same thing about the relationship between artistic practices and memory. Taking an archaeological look at Western thought, as defined by Foucault (1992), we can say that the dialogue between artistic practices and memory has been a recurrent theme since the very dawn of modernity. Classical funerary art, such as the tombs and sarcophagi of the walls of the Medici Chapels in Florence, sculptured by Michelangelo and his disciples, the famous Renaissance portraits and the way in which they expressed a “choice of how and by whom one might be immortalized” (Rubin 2011: 6),

as well as the prestigious iconography that accompanied the whole fabrication of Louis XIV's public image (Burke 1994), are just some examples that serve to clarify this hypothesis.

The Renaissance portraits depicted an elite that was isolated in its individuality, and they "largely record and represent their interests and their values" (Rubin 2011: 13). The portraits fulfilled the role of 'correcting' any deviation from the accepted standards of beauty to ensure that the image would be perpetuated in time and history. Among other examples that seem appropriate here, I should like to mention one of the portraits painted by Raphael, in which the artist attempted to reduce the fatness of Pope Leo X's face through the effects created by light. The use of *chiaroscuro* made the Pope's forehead more prominent, giving him an air of superiority and intelligence. Even the Pope's myopia is minimised by the representation of the specific moment when he raises his eyes from the manuscript he is reading. His forward-looking gaze gives him an air of authority that would certainly be diminished by his use of the magnifying glass and the bending of his body over the book (Wölfflin 1990: 147) (Fig. 01).

In the case of Louis XIV, the process is more complex. Burke (1994) shows how his public image was carefully fabricated, using all the media available in his time – paintings, statues, medals, journals – and how institutions were specially founded or reorganised in order to record the monarch's achievements. The king's most valued adviser, Colbert, was responsible for managing the finances of the realm, but also controlled public patronage, transforming art into an important mechanism of political propaganda. Among all the records that were made in honour of the 'Sun King', none have endured more effectively than the Palace of Versailles, the centre of the court from 1682 to 1789.



Fig. 01 - Rafael, *Portrait of Pope Leo 10 and his cousins, cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi*, [Ritratto di Leone X con i cardinali Giulio de' Medici e Luigi de' Rossi], 1518/1519. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Available from: wikipedia commons - the free media repository.

The diversity of the resources used is remarkable – ranging from theatre to tapestry, and including poetry, music and ballet, as well as literature, painting and sculpture. However, the multiple media that were used all expressed the same contents – victory and triumph – in their attempts to reach different audiences. Medals, for instance, were meant for smaller audiences; printed texts and images were intended for wide-scale distribution. In keeping with the tradition of triumphal forms, the artists that were commissioned by the State combined the Roman models of equestrian statues in public spaces (in which the king, sitting astride his horse, was depicted defeating his enemies, who were usually positioned under the horse's feet), with portraits painted in the Renaissance style. These kinds of portraits were developed according to a 'rhetoric of the image' which depicted important personalities in a natural scale (or even larger), either standing or seated on the throne. Moreover, the subjects' eyes were always higher than those of the viewer, in order to underline their superiority. The use of armour in paintings and sculptures as a symbol of courage, or wealthy clothes and objects associated with power, particularly in the backgrounds of portraits, emphasised the carefully constructed legacy of Louis XIV's public image (Burke 1994) (Fig. 02).

Until the end of the 18th century, talking about the aesthetics of memory means talking about the strategies that were used to perpetuate through the arts the image of some individual for posterity. Throughout the 19th century, in European and American cities, as national independence was gained, despite the prevalence of monuments erected in celebration of individual personalities, the aesthetics of memory expanded to an urban scale. In the transformations that followed the Industrial Revolution, the arts became intermingled with architecture and with urban planning itself, taking on new roles as references designed to guide the collective



Fig. 02 - Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV [Louis XIV en costume de sacre]*, 1701. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Available from: [wikipedia commons - the free media repository](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louis_XIV_en_costume_de_sacre.jpg).

memory. The reurbanisation of Paris promoted by Haussmann was paradigmatic of this process. Choay reminds us that the old *quartiers* were “considered [at that time] to be obstacles to health, traffic and the *contemplation of the monuments of the past that he caused to be removed*” (my emphasis, p. 176).

Other illustrations of this process can be found in works with such diverse styles as Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square (London), built between 1840 and 1843 to honour the memory of Admiral Horatio Nelson, who had died at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, and the Eiffel Tower built to celebrate the first centenary of the French Revolution. In the USA, it is enough to remember the iconic Statue of Liberty (1886), the Washington Monument (1894), and the Obelisk designed by Robert Mills in honour of USA’s first president, George Washington. In South America, the urban and sanitary reforms of Mayor Pereira Passos and the health officer Oswaldo Cruz, carried out in Rio de Janeiro between 1902 and 1906, converted the ‘City of Death’ into the Marvellous City, with all the accompanying costs of this violent process of ‘social hygiene’.

As we can see, until then there had been a direct relationship between the monopoly of power and the monopoly of memory and its forms of artistic expression. This monopoly, however, was not absolute. In contrast to the celebratory aesthetics of the memory of great names and glorious acts, there were also other points of view. The romantic images of ruins, which saw in the past a grandeur that was supposedly far greater than the misery of the present, are just one such example. Although this was not so relevant at that time, we must similarly not forget the innovative approaches adopted by Baudelaire, who preferred painters of customs and physiognomies, such as Charles Meryon and Constanti Guys, to the great masters of his time, for their ability to “extract the eternal from the transitory”

(Huyssen 2014: 105-108) (Brissac Peixoto 1996: 228-230).

The aesthetics of memory that offered an alternative to the works of art produced within the central apparatus of power only became consolidated from the 1960s onwards in the field of contemporary art. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover the foundations of the art-archive binomial in the 1920s, and three works are fundamental for understanding the genealogy of this process: “The Arcades Project of Walter Benjamin, the Mnemosyne Atlas of Aby Warburg and the photographic series of August Sander, (...) three projects that share in common their condition as unfinished works without any definitive form, as well as the absence of sequence and/or linearity” (Guasch 2005: 160) (Fig. 3).

Despite these prominent works, it was from the 1960s onwards that a new aesthetics of memory began to proliferate in different formats and languages. In their diversity, it is possible to say that there are two basic components: site-specific practices that involve a profound reconfiguration of the paradigms and concepts of public art, and a whole ‘wave’ of artists whose work is dedicated to the theme of archives, an aspect that we focus on here. This is because it is possible to glimpse, in these archival arts, procedures that will be incorporated and reviewed within the digital arts, especially those taking place in networked environments.

From the notebooks of the German artist Hans-Peter Feldmann to the works of the Brazilian artist Rosângela Rennó, but also including the artistic production of Marcel Broodthaers, On Kawara, Christian Boltanski, Bernd & Hilla Becher, and even younger artists such as the Brazilian artist Ícaro Lira, there are countless ways in which contemporary art, as Osthoff suggested in the title of her book, transformed the idea of the archive “from a repository of documents to an art medium” Osthoff (2009).



Fig. 03 - Aby M. Warburg, *Mnemosyne-Atlas*, 1924-1929. Plate 79. La Rivista di Engramma, Mnemosyne Atlas online, 2012. Available from: <<http://www.engramma.it/>>.

These transformations range from Feldmann's deconstructions of media to new approaches to history, as in the case of Lira, who has documented life in the concentration camps built for the isolation of poor sick people in Fortaleza (Ceará, in Northeast Brazil) in the 1940s, Boltanski's personal memories of Nazism in France, the European process of de-industrialisation registered by the Becher couple, to the appropriation of anonymous personal memories that became raw material for the fascinating narrative rearrangements of Rosângela Rennó. Among other projects by this artist, I should like to highlight here *The Last Picture* [A Última Foto] (2006). In this work, the whole history of photography and its relationship with the contemporary tourist industry are questioned, along with its tendency to privatise the landscape. In order to realise her project, Rennó invited 43 professional photographers to photograph the monument of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, using mechanical cameras of different formats that she had collected over several years. The project *The Last Photo* consists of 43 diptychs, each pairing the cameras with the last photo that they registered. Conceived at the time when Kodak announced it would stop selling the films traditionally used in cameras, this project raised a disturbing question: are these cameras capable of storing the history of photography that the digitalisation of images has changed the direction of? Moreover, with the increasing corporatisation of nature and of what we can see, how much longer will we be allowed to photograph Christ the Redeemer for free? Are these also our last photos of this famous landscape? How long will this statue remain accessible to our eyes (Fig. 04)?

For Rancière (2004), the fight for visibility is one of the main topics of the political struggle that is taking place in the contemporary world. And, in that sense, the game of archival appropriations, which calls into question the monopoly of memory, also contests the images

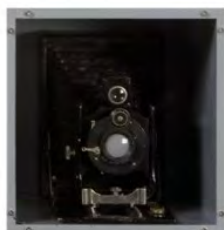


Fig. 04 - Rosângela Rennó, *The Last Photo*, 2006. Pedro David, Ica. Framed color photograph and photographic camera Ica (diptych).

of power that are projected into the public sphere. But, since the beginning of the 21st century, this public space has also become an informational space (Castells 2009), and, in that sense, it allows us to ask this question: what are the aesthetics of memory in the age of the digitalisation of culture?

Digital ruins

The above question seems absolutely essential to me. Never before has so much been said about memory as nowadays, and yet it has never been so difficult to have access to our recent past. This is undeniable. Few words have become as commonplace in the 21st century as 'memory'. Being confined until recently to the fields of historiography and neurological and psychoanalytic thinking, memory has become a basic aspect of everyday life. It is now considered to be a form of quantifiable data, a measure and even an indicator of someone's social status. There is a 'memory' fetish, as if it were a 'thing': How much memory does your computer have? And your camera? And your cell phone? That much? Is that all?... Memories are bought, memories are transferred, memories are erased and get lost.

We are not only experiencing a super production of memory, but also a documentary overdose. Every minute, 100 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube and 27,800 photos are uploaded to Instagram. As for Facebook, another 208,000 photos are posted in the same amount of time (every 60 seconds). In a recent presentation made by an analyst from Yahoo!, it was claimed that as many as 880 billion photos were supposed to have been taken in 2014 (Limer 2013).

Where does all of this go?

It is common sense to say that the Internet never forgets, but the

digital culture does not allow us to remember. We produce and publish on petabyte scales, using services that can disappear at any time. Our equipment crashes at the speed of a simple click and a strange nostalgia for an unlived past invades the circuit of popular consumption. How to deal with memories so unstable that they become depleted together with the lifespan of our equipment, and whose different types do not correspond to the cataloguing models used by museum and archive collections? What memories are we building on networks, where the more immediate present seems to be our essential time?

These are questions that artists are asking themselves. On the one hand, they question the overdose of documents, through projects related to database aesthetics and to the processes of information curatorship. Good examples here are the recent studies undertaken by artists/researchers such as Lev Manovich and Aaron Koblin, among others¹. On the other hand, they place in circulation approaches to digital ruins that provide a possible parameter for thinking about museums and archives at the present time. My point of departure is that the imminence of loss and the potential impossibility of restoration and retrieval have become the 'default', and not the exception, in the digital storage ecosystem. To learn how to deal with this permanent state of absence can be crucial for a new understanding of the basis of historical preservation. After all, as Henri-Pierre Jeudy wrote in one of his essays about historical conservation, "a contemporary aesthetics of abandonment would consider the 'ruins of modernity' to be something other than a disaster" (Jeudy 2005: 70).

This path makes it possible to think of the ruin as an opening to the future and to consider it within critical paradigms that operate as an aesthetic counterpoint to our linear visions of progress. It also allows us to rethink technology from points of view that are immediately

less euphoric and less conservative, frequently contextualising it in relation to perspectives of instability and social disarrangement. Artists working on these themes and thinking about these questions seem more inclined to approach technology and the future in a more critical, more ironic and less desperate way. For me, a major point of reference in this discussion is Ernesto Oroza, a designer and artist who was born and grew up in Cuba, with a degree from the Instituto Superior di Diseño Industrial de la Universidad de Habana. He now lives in the US and is the creator of concepts that have proved particularly meaningful for my reflection on historical conservation, such as ‘architectures of necessity’ and ‘technological disobedience’. Both are different dimensions of a vast ‘ruinological’ process (‘ruinology’ is another concept I’m borrowing from him) and, in order to understand them, we must remember that in 1991 Cuba’s economy began to implode, after the announcement of Perestroika. The Special Period in Time of Peace [Período Especial en Tiempos de Paz] was the Cuban government’s euphemism for what was the culmination of thirty years of isolation. This isolation had begun in the 1960s with the US Boycott.

Oroza studied the mechanical devices created by the Cuban population for their survival from the 1990s onwards and began to collect some of these machines. Later he was to contextualise them as ‘art’ in a movement that he dubbed *Technological Disobedience* [Desobediência Tecnológica]². He stresses the subversive potential of those creative machines, saying that technological disobedience is a concept that allowed him to “summarize how Cubans acted in relation to technology. How they disrespected the ‘authority’ held by these contemporary objects”. By doing so, they desacralised technology and ruins at the same time. Every time I see these devices, I remember the statement of the Brazilian artist Helio Oiticica at the opening of A

Nova Objetividade Brasileira (The New Brazilian Objectivity) (1967) – one of the most important avant-garde exhibitions of the 1960s and, furthermore, held during the military dictatorship: “On Adversity, we live!” (Da adversidade, vivemos!) (Fig. 05).³

This point of view is important if we are not to surrender to a simplistic analysis that would be compliant with the scarcity or precariousness existing on the one hand, and at the same time not to romanticise the way in which technology is produced and delivered to us daily. These questions arise in different ways in many artistic works, but I will concentrate here on *Chipped Movie #1: Minhocão* [Cinema Lascado #1: Minhocão] (Beiguelman, 2010) and *Broken Things* [Das Coisas Quebradas] (2012) by Lucas Bambozzi.

The videos of my series Cinema Lascado focus on devastated urban environments, where raised viaducts have led to social fractures in the cultural territory of the cities in which they were built. This is the case with the *Minhocão* (“Big Worm”, officially known as the Costa e Silva elevated highway) built in 1969, under the Brazilian dictatorial government⁴. In *Minhocão*, images follow on from one another through a movement scanning the landscape, mixing hi and low tech, combining HD video with the technique of animated GIF⁵. The result is a series of sequences that deconstruct the space, which is then recreated as visual noise, guided by the predominant colours of the surroundings. In an intermittent way, it plays with saturation and suppression to reconstruct the perception of the surroundings and the city, the old and the new, up and down, the tool and the device.

Conceived to be a video installation showing the *Minhocão* simultaneously from above and below in an art gallery, in the context of the *arte.mov* Festival in São Paulo, the final project is the result of a sequence of accidents, which included problems in the recording



Fig. 05 - Ernesto Oroza, *Technological Disobedience Device*, Rikimbili, 2007. Bicycle + gasoline pump water, fumigation devices or gasoline engines chain saw. For more Rikimbilis, go to: <<http://www.ernestooroza.com/rikimbili/>>. © Ernesto Oroza.

of images, software bugs and browser crashes. If, at first, my intention was to make an incursion into the urban ruins of São Paulo (or to discuss the lack of urban planning in the city as a process of sociocultural ruination), within a few weeks, the project had become a parallel and overlapping aesthetic discussion about the making of technological ruins today.

When I arrived at the gallery to set the piece up all the artists had already defined their own spaces, and there was only a very small room with very tall walls left for me. The only way of showing the piece was to pile the two videos on top of one another. This final 'error' situation led me to re-edit the video that portrays the bottom of the viaduct upside down, which produced the effect of a continuity of the vertical lines in the video installation. The accidental way in which I arrived at the final set up of that piece signalled not only my first contact with the glitch aesthetic, but the discovery of how similar the materiality of the code corruption was to the noisy social attributes of some of South America's big cities, above all São Paulo. Long afterwards, when reading Rosa Menkman's book about the glitch aesthetic, I recognised myself in many excerpts, which could have been used as epigraphs or explanations for my own work. She says: "As an exoskeleton for such (post-utopian) progress however, the glitch does not just take place on a critically ruined surface. The choice to accept the glitch, to welcome it as an aesthetic form, means to accept a new critical dialectic that makes room for error within the histories of 'progress'" (Menkman 2011: 44) (Fig. 06).

Brazilian artist Lucas Bambozzi has been exploring these ambivalences in different works. In *On Broken Things* (2012), he deals with the flow of communication turned into waste around us. The piece is an autonomous machine, which makes its own decisions based on the intensity of the electromagnetic fields that hover above us. The

project refers to the tensions found in the relationship between consumption, consumerism and planned obsolescence, avoiding a paternalistic discourse about an allegedly ecological practice based solely on individual goodwill. It is a physical simulation of a continuous mechanism, which operates between the networks, and the real world, where autonomy eventually expires and everything becomes obsolete, leading us to realise that we live in the era of the 'Internet of Broken Things'. Bambozzi explains:

"On Broken Things is an installation-machine, whose autonomy makes use of the electromagnetic flows existing in the space where it is installed. Insistently, in a dramatic and ironic way (if such things can be described as machine attributes), it repeats the action of smashing obsolete mobile phones. The machine has as its input the variations in the reading of the signals circulating in the airspace (Radio Frequency signals, or fields/waves known as Extreme Low Frequency ELF or Electromagnetic Fields), whose saturation in certain environments can be troubling in several ways. From these data, the system accelerates and performs movements that culminate in a destructive action of the equipment stored on the machine, which for many may be a kind of revenge of the consumerism associated with technologies that we observe today" (Bambozzi 2012).

The piece was commissioned for *Tecnofagias*, the 3rd 3M Digital Art Show (2012) curated by myself, an exhibition that was held in one of the most important Brazilian contemporary art centres, the Instituto Tomie Ohtake. This was the first digital art show to have been held there and, in spite of the fact that the exhibition as a whole was remarkable for the institution and attracted large audiences, this piece in particular greatly excited the visitors to the exhibition space. Besides the crowds of people protesting about the destruction of mobile phones, it was common to hear them making comments,

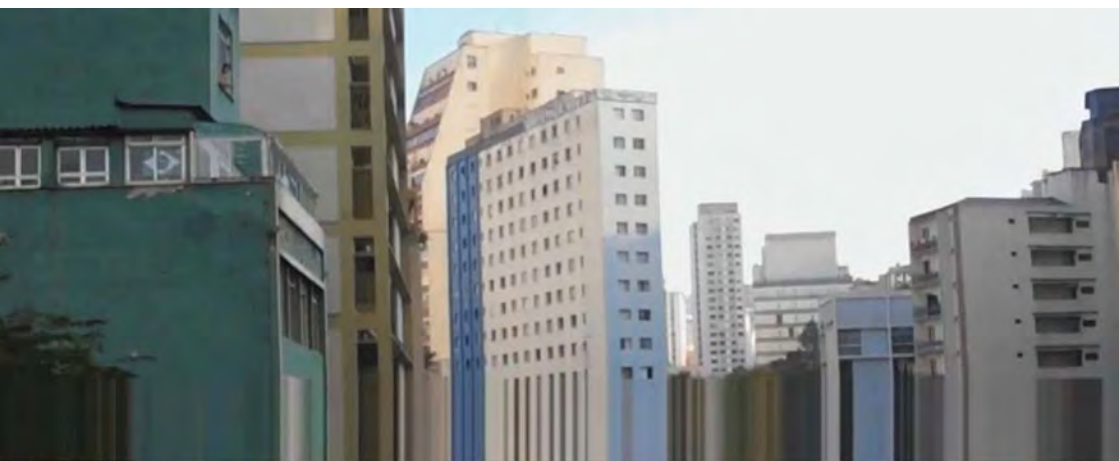


Fig. 06 - Giselle Beiguelman, *Cinema Lascado 1: Minhocão*, 2010. Video installation view and other information available on the website <<http://www.desvirtual.com/cinemaslascado>>. © Giselle Beiguelman.

sometimes with a certain nostalgia, pointing to the phones as they came down the ramp towards their 'execution': "wow, I used to have that model"... "I remember that one"... "My mother gave me one of those", etc. (Fig. 07).

Museums of the unfinished

Obsolescence, loss, devices and files not found. This seems to be the more perfect picture of the digital culture and the aesthetics of abandonment that prevail in its realm. Maybe the imminent disappearance that is constantly to be found everywhere all the time justifies the apocalyptic tone that is suggested in the most basic commands for handling digital editing programmes, which invite us to 'save' files all the time, and not simply store them. Networks have no time. A system of permanent urgency prevails over them. The most recent publication is supposedly more relevant than the previous one. Now is what counts. And this 'now' has an increasing intensity. Try to find that very important comment posted by your friend thirty days ago on Facebook, that photo you 'liked' in some remote day of 2012, or that remarkable event in which you shared a video back in 2008. Don't even try it. You won't find them.

It is true that all data can be tracked. Scandals related to electronic surveillance, such as Prism, involving the US government and companies such as Google and Facebook, can confirm this. But this is far from meaning that we have the right to remember whatever we want about ourselves whenever we want. Not that the models existing for the traditional cataloguing and retrieval of data are better, or even that they are the only possible ones. They are historically engendered and are related to forms of power and to the political, social and



Fig. 07 - Lucas Bambozzi, *On Broken Things*, 2012. A short video of the machine in use is available from: <<http://vimeo.com/50655716>>. © Lucas Bambozzi.

cultural authorities that define the criteria for conservation, the ways to institutionalise memory locations and to decide what is or is not left to be told as history. It is not a coincidence that the protagonist of one of the most brilliant short stories by Jorge Luis Borges – *The Book of Sand* [El Libro de Arena] – chooses precisely the National Library as the place for losing the book that tormented him. Putting it on a random shelf was like hiding a leaf in a forest. It could never be found again.

But this human scale restrained by institutions is now shaken by an overdose of documentary production that is unprecedented in history. If there is any question about this statement, let us make a comparison between the volumes of data stored in the world's largest library collection – The Library of Congress of the United States – and the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, an independent service that archives web pages daily. The Wayback Machine contains 3 petabytes of data (equivalent to approximately 700 thousand fully loaded DVDs and this is only part of the 9 petabytes of the Internet Archive as a whole) (Drinehart 2012). If the Library of Congress had its entire collection of books scanned (32 million volumes), there would be 32 terabytes archived, considering 1 megabyte per scanned book (Lesk 2005). The Wayback Machine was created in 1996. The collection of books from the Library of Congress dates from 1815. The Wayback Machine grows at the rate of 100 terabytes per month, which is almost three times the size of the whole book collection of the Library of Congress in bytes accumulated over almost two centuries.

In an anthological essay – “The Historiographical Operation” – Michel de Certeau wrote a concise History of Historiography and summarised what this operation consists of in a few lines: “In history, everything begins with the act of separating, gathering and turning certain objects that were otherwise distributed into ‘documents’. However, this separation is always done after the work of the archivist, who is

responsible for the selection and organisation of documents that will be kept at the expense of those that will be discarded” (de Certeau 1982).

But, given the media avalanche we produce every day on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other similar social networks, how do we choose what will be stored? And what if they were simply deleted by a system error or a discontinuation of the product? How to deal with so much unstable and fragmented information produced by us and about us? Is all this information really relevant? And what can we do when it suddenly becomes unavailable? Could museums be a solution in a context like this or should we remember Adorno, who wrote a long time ago: “Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. [...] They testify to the neutralization of culture” (Adorno 1988: 173).

It is clear that, in this age of documentary overdose we are living through, “accumulating data is like breathing: involuntary and mechanical. We don’t choose what to keep, but what to delete” (Quaranta 2011: 8). Nevertheless, it must be stressed, all that we cannot keep is on the probable horizon of permanent loss. And this includes personal memories, private and professional information, relevant data, a lot of futility for sure, and culture, art, and uncountable (perhaps fundamental?) unfinished works. Of course it is important to prevent loss, but it is impossible to store everything that is produced nowadays.

Until practically the end of the last century, according to Michel Melot, one of the world’s leading authorities on archival and library science, budget constraints “in their wisdom” prevented institutions from literally overflowing. In an article suggestively entitled “Des archives considérées comme une substance hallucinogène” (Melot 1986), he pondered what would happen if every citizen became a

collector and a curator and we could keep absolutely everything in the name of future historians. We would arrive at a paradox, he concludes: “History finally produced solely for historians and also blocked by them, like the surgeon who immobilises his patient in order to operate on him” (Melot 1986: 16). After all, as we learned in another short story by Borges (“Funes the Memorios” [Funes El Memorioso]) thinking is generalising, not only archiving and adding yet more and more data.

Just as important as paying attention to the instability of the cultural system we are living in, and understanding how it demands new preservation methods, is realising that these are only provisional and palliative solutions. Due to the continuous speed with which technologies are discarded in shorter and shorter periods of time, the solutions provided for the time being are bound to create the same problems we seek to resolve. The transposition and adaptation of works to new equipment or their reprogramming does not result in definitive solutions. On the contrary, these procedures indicate the need for continuous updating, which, at some point, may also produce a quite distinct result from the work created by the artist in a given historical context. From now on, loss, change and even replacement will be more and more part of our conservational practice.

We are facing a noisy ‘datascape’, which goes far beyond our screens. Its signals and inputs/outputs are everywhere, and they amount to much more than just some reading or coding mistakes. The peculiar ‘ruinology’ of the art works discussed here is a constituent part of this digital epistemology. Because of this, they can point to alternative directions for thinking about the emerging politics of memory in the age of new monuments, museums and archives. As Robert Smithson wrote, “Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the

future. (...). They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages” (Smithson 1966).

Paraphrasing his words, then, we could say that, instead of celebrating a progressively more stable future, by preserving fragments of the past, museums of digital art should be the museums of the unfinished, the unrepaired, and the unretrieved. By doing this, they will allow us to deal with the social and emotional perception of loss without counting on an imminent process of disappearance.

Notes

¹ For more examples and commentaries about database aesthetics, see Hanns (2014).

² There is a short documentary about Oroza and Technological Disobedience available from: <http://youtu.be/v-XS4aueDUg>.

³ The full text by Helio Oiticica on the exhibition and its artists, entitled “Esquema geral da Nova Objetividade”, is available from: <http://tropicalia.com.br/en/leituras-complementares/esquema-geral-da-nova-objetividade>.

⁴ Besides the *Minhocão*, in São Paulo, the project portrays *Perimetral*, in Rio de Janeiro, and the *Radial Leste* in São Paulo. *Cinema Lascado 2*, *Perimetral* is a work that has been in progress since 2013, following the urban rehabilitation of the port zone of Rio de Janeiro (*Porto Maravilha*, Marvellous Port), which is supposed to be completed for the Olympic games in 2016. A trailer of the project was first presented at the 10th São Paulo Architecture Biennale (2013) and as an installation at Digital Latin America exhibition, in Albuquerque (USA, 2014). Available from: <<http://www.desvirtual.com/perimetral-de-cima-a-baixo/>>.

⁵ The title in Brazilian Portuguese *Cinema Lascado* can be translated into English as *Chipped Movie*, but as a result it loses its double meanings. *Lascado* refers to the Palaeolithic age, or to thin slices, also meaning “in trouble” and, in some contexts, “very good”. The way in which it was produced, combining techniques from the ‘paleoweb’ with the post cinema period, lies at the origin of its name (‘lascado’).

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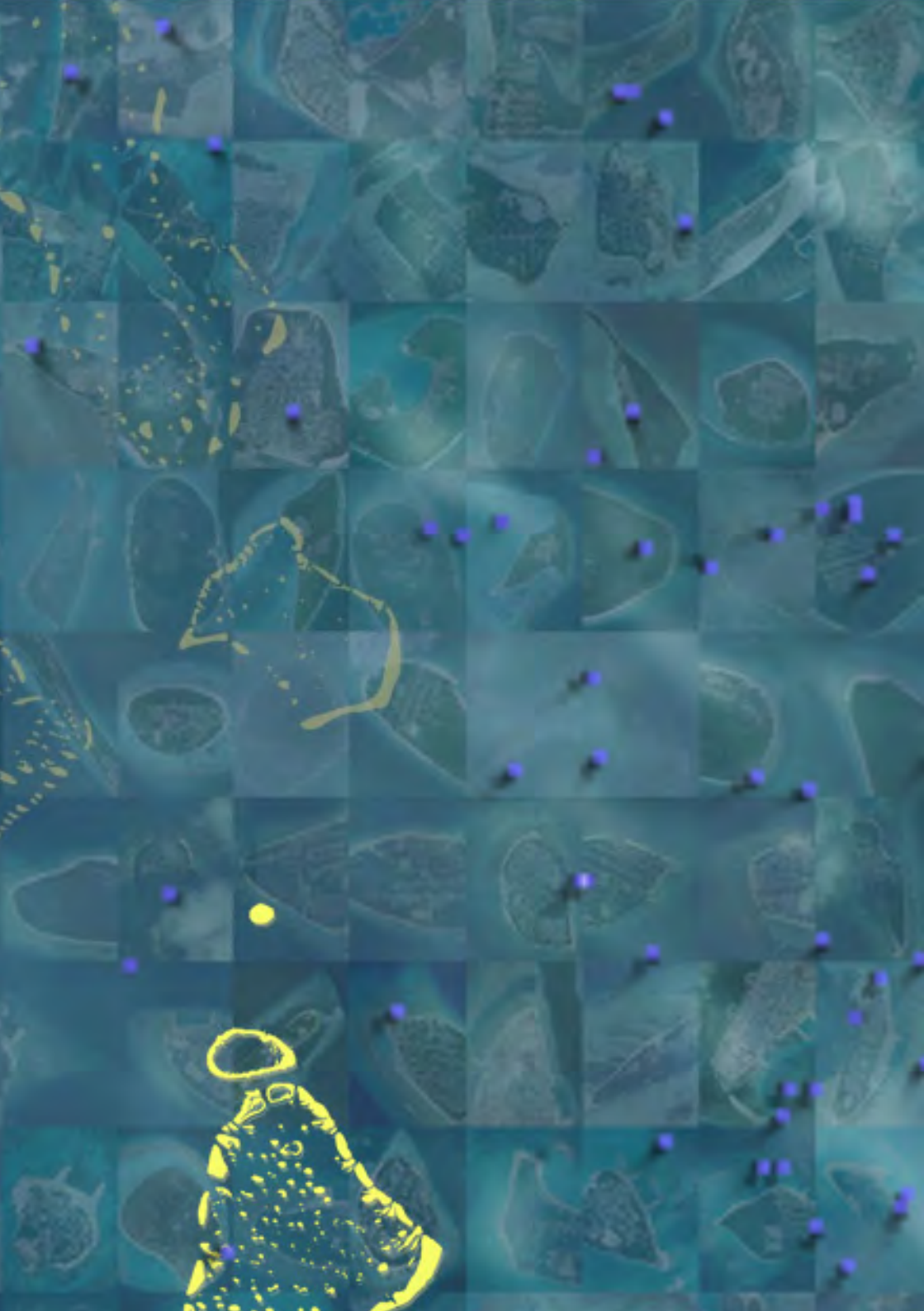
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The background is a grid of microscopic images, possibly of cells or tissues, overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color. Scattered throughout the grid are numerous small, glowing particles in shades of purple and yellow. The overall aesthetic is scientific and digital.

**ONLINE COLLECTIONS, ARCHIVES
AND DATABASES**



THE PLANETARY DATALINKS

Andrew Vaas Brooks

This paper explores the aesthetics and social constructs which translate across interactive media, questioning how museographical engines may adapt to new behavioral patterns of manoeuvring through virtual spaces.

Recursion

The public social spheres of the world seek and protect their sacred autonomy. However, what constitutes sacredness and publicness fluctuates; as sanctity can only ever be subjectively defined and thus is reduced to an aesthetic value system, it is lost in the chaos of social prioritisation. This fickle process evolves haphazardly through folkloric (and corporate-loric) channels, each advocating their own incompatible ideology. For this reason, the competing array of personal and public utopias compete within a singular heterotopic space (Foucault 2008: 14).

Has Earth's sacredness actually fractured with time? Is sanctity thus divisible? If the intersectionality within our urbanised loci cannot be reduced without great cost to its understanding, I argue that the aesthetics of sacredness are just as prone to our destructive anti-patterns.¹ In spite of our bounded rationality, limited by lifespan and cognisance, we courageously continue – generation after generation – to synthesise all of civilisation into a hyper-organismic extension of itself. In rapidly shifting parts wetware, software, and hardware, the resulting ineptitude of such a machine (when personified as our technological servant) has fostered a culture of pessimism and distrust despite all the possible benefits of its decentralised architecture. The acceleration of its virtual component has likewise played an invaluable part in revolutionising the formation of our (sacred) identities and the methodologies of control.

In order to understand how aesthetics and other social constructs translate across the interactive media of our datalinks, we look to Christopher Kelty's idea of the *recursive public*, defined as such:

“A recursive public is a public that is vitally concerned with

the material and practical maintenance and modification of the technical, legal, practical, and conceptual means of its own existence as a public; it is a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives” (Kelty 2008: 3).

Conceivable as a think tank involved in innovative risk mitigation for the sake of its constitutive individuals, every recursive public, however it is nested in the global heterarchy², demonstrates humanity’s desire for spaces that are sacred and localised to their identity as distinct from others. To re-examine a cliché: if privacy is indeed dying, it is can only be because spatiality itself has been invaded. Not merely by the eyes and ears of other social spheres – though this is happening – but by the rest of space. Telecommunication and the telepresence of virtuality collapse space into a new commons, creating new vulnerabilities in our identities as well as our physical safety.

The recursive identity functions much like outdated media: aspects of itself survive vestigially even though the playing field continually bleeds into uncharted territory. Because of this, “no medium, it seems, can now function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning.” (Bolter and Grusin 2000: 55). The global culture thrives, against the better judgement of its distinct parts, creating a single narrative that indiscriminately regulates and threatens the expression of identity, however it is mediated through art, action, and space. Yet the awareness we possess (at all) of the global narrative hints at a threshold of identity, hyper-organismic in scope and soon to be crossed by the pervasiveness of virtual media and our paradoxically competitive-collaborative nature, now extended onto all of the datalinks. Every space, every virtuality, every fiction, has become political. The Videodrome³ is a testing ground for both transgression and signification.

Insecurity

In the case of the museum, who advocates in favour of its relevance? Who speaks for museography? Hierarchies present in a museum's staff speak to power relations before we even address the processes of curatorial audience engineering, visitor crowd control, collection acquisition, (intellectual) property rights, merchandising, the museum's architecture, the presence of food courts, etc. Whatever sacred role the museum plays in our societies, the finest collections are becoming little more than an overpriced ornamentation, whose presence is supposed to be enough to justify the relevance of their containing space.

A museum stripped of its collections is what? This is impossible to know, save for the apocalypse or mass theft; they are engineered to hold collections, to direct the flow of visitors, to inspire reverence, to offer something. Take that content away and you are left with a space pointing to its own inadequacy without supplementary substance – a multimillion dollar shelter. Digitise that content, and although the shelter remains relevant, the power of unicity is shared through every replication, every simulacrum (Fig. 01). This exposes the nature of the museum operating as a whole, owned as a whole, but never given as a whole. It is a private institution; it is property; it is a business. Art, however, remains the only act capable of either saving the museum or understanding its demise. It engages with the hyper-organismic. It prods at aspects of itself; it can delimit the attitude of an era. Museographical/archival practices thrive with every technological threshold reached, but the same cannot be said of understanding.

Humans learn vicariously. In this sense, we are all are case studies of our own life, with the artist having a very particular *kind* of life. One can never escape being a statistic, so artists envisage the reception of their



Fig. 01 - Smithsonian 3D Digitisation. Only a few objects will have been spared digitisation. Although we prioritise some over others, such as artefacts, the last one without virtual equivalents will highlight those blind spots in our aesthetics of relevance. Available from: <<https://www.facebook.com/3d.si.edu?fref=photo>>.

own experiments (incidental art notwithstanding). Our internalised conception of the demand of the *viewertariat*⁴, however formed, is met by none other than the archetypal curator and critic, two roles now commodified by the explosion of democratised virtuality already fostering *the* revolutionary recursive public. The artist is marginalised in the shadow of the every-audience; critique and curation are only creative insofar as they are manipulative of extant art-objects. This is a secondary kind of aesthetic, applying to the metaknowledge of human art altogether. The arguments in favour of art mutually exclusive of the arguments in favour of museums. Were it not for the critic's rhetoric, how would the museum's fight for relevance be fought? All the existential crises of impending obsolescence that such institutions may have reveals more about *their* public's insecurities than any care for the global commons and its engagement with art-making.

The museum has long since been a highly relevant construct of datalinking, with history as well as the imagination being curated by a privileged few; archival preservation was an aspect of their institutional self-preservation as businesses. Authority is always threatened by emerging technologies unless it is sure it can adapt to them, survive through them – ultimately, use them to maintain relevance. Thus, the museum's *imagined* enemies are the consumers they can no longer attract. A true death sentence in the life of the Spectacle⁵. We should not lament the analogue museum's struggling value in the light of new technologies that not only reveal, but also attack, its outdated, authoritative aspects. Whether or not specific institutions are pleased with this forced maturation, the museographical impulse is more than inspired; it is migrating elsewhere. But just as the net possesses its own sets of social and civil laws, the datalinks proves unable to grow beyond the limits of

human ownership. All motivations have their blind spots, but those of lucrative control are truly blinding.

Whether the next apocalypse is inevitable or avoidable, the pessimism of our society has turned it into a spatial play, not unlike utopia. The question has become this: *are the museum's messages relevant to our sense of doom?* What is obvious right off the bat is that these are questions of content, educative outreach and philanthropy, not of novel structure or presentation for the sake of impressing constituents. As of right now, the technological thresholds that have commodified the museographical space and disrupted the identity relations among curator, critic, artist, viewer, owner, collector and bystander, have their *own* relevance to prove despite a pervasive fetishism for novelty. Urban theorist and architect Paolo Soleri described this paranoia as stemming from mankind's "technocratic resolve of not letting any discovery lie idle" (Soleri 1981). The stimulus struggle⁶ still commands our media-hungry habits and has us all pointing our fingers at innovators and copycats alike.

Relevance

Novelty is inextricably bound to the aesthetics of relevance. They are not synonymous, though they inform each other. A result of hindsight is their remediation into the aesthetics of notability, a similar prioritisation of use-values now applied to posterity and the constructs of knowledge which we both create and pass on. Notability is the prime quality on which all Wikipedia content is judged (Wikipedia: Notability 2014). What we must remember is that relevance is not a scarce resource – all is relevant in the cosmic narrative – we simply do not have the time to sit around debating the finer thresholds of

notability. Wikipedia thus finds itself fractured into smaller recursive socialities such as the Inclusionists and the Deletionists, each advocating their own curatorial standard, respectively: Eventualism – the idea that data will always one day be useful – and Immediatism – the recognition of, and fear of, information glut.

“Factions, or parties, serve the purpose of making terminology describing issues and disputes simple enough for mass participation, and the pooling of a great number of people’s ideas. A bureaucracy, which practices antifactionalism always fails to be comprehensible to the layman, who always has the freshest perspective. Thus only factions can bring the ability to compete, and other political virtues to bear. Wikipedia is an inherently competitive process. Get used to it. Revel in your time. Prepare for edit wars of attrition. There is no community. All is content, forking off a static deliverable once in a while as the dynamic process continues” (Wikimedia: Factionalism 2014).

Relevance migrates with culture as the fulcrum of self-worth that we cannot help but empathise with and embody. Its aesthetics reflect the zeitgeist⁷ of labour-identity emplacement: our role as contributors of (social) capital. In the case of the museum, virtuality is nothing new; elders were the first archives. There is a term in the language Seri, *hant iiha cõhacomxoj*, meaning the “ones who have been told the ancient things” (National Geographic: Vanishing Languages 2012). Not all cultures have had their equivalent roles supplanted by media, yet storytelling is alive and well on the net. Entertainment and explanation are indeed co-dependent, but mediated archiving emerged because there was simply too much risk involved in keeping information solely in that *elsewhere* of the psyche that we still take to the grave. The human-as-archive fulfils the same function as the datalinks – we are an extension of it just as much as it is an extension of our knowledge representation. Except now, the scope, duration

and quality of the information may very well remain present, if not open and accessible to all (Fig. 02).

Obsolescence

Modern identity use-value competition is the endemic outcome of the technocrat's sluggishness and short-sightedness in recognising the relevance of an organism after its function can be replicated elsewhere. Samuel Butler, in *Erewhon*, referred to the 'machine god' in which humans had long been organelles in its larger, multifaceted, hyperorganic amalgam, consisting in shifting parts of flesh, metal, methodology, and mind (Butler 1872). A servo-mechanical extension of our own living teleology, replicating and augmenting whatever its functionality may be, automation transubstantiates human ritual into machines *more capable* of performing the desired tasks at hand. No matter what aspects of our forms we replace, our sentient functionality remains an innovator. We have already proven ourselves adaptive enough to incorporate other bio-machines into our routines through the process of domestication. The taming of both plants and animals makes it difficult to determine if our functionality actually ends before the greater organism begins. As a result, labour machines are personified – yet human agents are often marginalised into abstraction due to the scarcity of power-positions in our current social ecology.

This disenfranchisement is an innate consequence of seeing all mechanical functionality only as a derivative of the human-image prototype. The only logical conclusion is for us to continue supplementing the weakness of the other half. But we cannot expect such a paradigm to spontaneously fall into place without the wilful



Fig. 02 - "Beinecke Library at Yale University". Novel climate control and fire suppression systems could not stop items from being stolen. No archive is protected from the human condition. Available from: <<http://www.wimp.com/holdsecrets/>>.

consent of every agent in our society. Some weaknesses are only illusions sustained by the ego; we can be stronger *with* the machines yet we struggle against them. Where we don't, the Cybernetic is growing – already surfeit with near-cyborgs and budding biohackers. The rituals of self-transformation are ancient, but our datalinks and their transhumanistic projections of augmentation (of reality), immortality (of mind), and singularity (of being), already paint the human species as a passing phase within the universal metanarrative.

New thresholds of awareness emerge from the crumbling epistemes of yesteryear, or else migrate across the globe, again aided in part by the datalinks. Ubuntu, the South African philosophy of the group-self dichotomy-collapse is summed up poignantly as: *I am because we are* (Tutu 1999). Additionally, datalinking has allowed for the propagation of entirely *new* perspectives like the overview effect, a paradigmatic shift in awareness cited by those observing the Earth from space (O'Neil 2008).

Attention

These shifts in awareness permanently alter the rubrics of aesthetics. The integrity of our grasp on the global metanarrative is only as strong as the filtering technologies we employ in the self-curation of environmental information. Whether self-employed, or secretly mandated by a surveillance enclave, we can never see the truth – only infer what we expect it to be. Ontological commitments to any representational construct of knowledge beg the rooting out of whatever systemic vulnerabilities were intrinsic to its predecessor. Like empiricism, the alteration of one truth value begs the alteration of others, sometimes even the underlying logic itself (Quine 1964: 42-

43). The labours once performed by oral languages found themselves revolutionised and somewhat relieved (though not replaced) through the written word – their responsibilities overlapping, diverging and evolving. The word behaved similarly when yielding non-linearly to photography and video. Admitting Kryder’s Law⁸, everything could be kept; we will have redundancies of data as well as redundancies of expression.

The effects of this *infoxication* include, but are not limited to: information anxiety, option-paralysis, overchoice, poorer decision accuracy, a lessening of mental discipline, and a good number of pragmatic attempts that aim at erasing or exploiting the adverse consequences of such an environment (Iyengar and Lepper 2000: 995-1006). To contain the information glut is to attempt to focus the chaos of this compounding *everyday* as well as its stockpiles of the unsorted and deteriorating truisms of yesteryear. But we can assist this flow of data by accompanying it with methodology to aid, inform and expedite our own intuitive quorum sensing of the aesthetics of relevance, recreating the authority figures of education as the algorithm. Yet, no matter how well it is visualised, repackaged or parsed, not all information will be recognised as relevant to our daily lives, which are already pressured by labour specialisation. The Spectacle has made the life of the technopolitan a conflux of oppressively unavoidable narratives (some fictional), all being carried out simultaneously with roughly the same amount of vigour. Here, the information glut has not proven to be entirely detrimental – another such shift in awareness has been named *sonder* by the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. This is defined as:

“*n.* the realization that each random passer-by is living a life as vivid and complex as your own - populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness -

an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you'll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk" (*Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* 2014).

Accessing one narrative out of the polychronic many is only a matter of focusing collective-curation. Tim Berners-Lee, the *de facto* inventor of the World Wide Web and director of the W3C, has been leading an attempt at standardising the internet into a crowd-computed Semantic Web, which works with (and not against) the folkloric curation of the aesthetics of relevance. By adopting a system dubbed *Linked Data*, we could create an additional layer of user-supplied metadata that search engines would be able to parse in addition to their already extant criterion: "a web of data that can be processed directly and indirectly by machines" (Semantic Web Road Map 2014). The human element is necessary here: it would be pointless to outsource to machines something which we are (still) innately better at (the ability to recognise, intuitively, the substance matter of articles and images).

Berners-Lee offers this as a solution to what he sees as the challenges to any unifying logic that the web may possess the potential for: this being, its *vastness*, *vagueness*, *uncertainty*, *inconsistency* and its/our propensity for *deceit*. Such a layering *offers* a new standard, but does not mandate it. Semantic data is applied in addition, and is not foundational to the current ontological infrastructure of hypertext. Through the same stigmergic process that co-authors the Wikipedia, data-linking is an evolution of that social bookmarking, now extended from a few sites to the whole of the web. It should

not come as a surprise, then, to understand that the attention economy which recognises our bound rationality and its limited focus has already shaped the media environment as we know it. Already, some websites that allow user votes to determine content visibility perpetuate the aesthetics of notability as a runaway effect; speed reading apps which allow you to finish a whole book in mere minutes; chartjunk infographics and advertisements are designed with peak human-perception download rates in mind; the selling of video interruption rights; the invention of digitised reputation systems; datacaps that seek to leech money away from information addicts; apps that facilitate time and reputation management; drugs that increase focus; etc..

In summary, these variants represent the folksonomic⁹ portion of a technology that has yet to rear its head officially: the Attentive User Interface (AUI). Hypermedia was one such solution for the tailoring of the UI and the making-efficient of a user's time. This is, in essence, a curation of media that adapts to you. The AUI could monitor eye-tracking, screen real estate, the amount of time spent per article visited, the kind and frequency of links taken, adapting and creating new user models for different fields of inquiry (Horvitz 2003 : 52-59). Insofar as we remain independent agents (regardless of how we humans develop motivations or execute our still-debated free will), we may still have some agency in deciding how we want our machines to monitor our behaviour; we have little control over what actually happens thereafter. Any technologies which purport to weed out information for a user's benefit, could also weed out information at the behest of an ulterior agent. Whatever degrees of control we may have within the arena of mass media always turn out to be illusions of a sort, e.g. we only have privacy settings because fallible people put them there, no matter if they care to honour our preference.

The Snowden Leaks¹⁰ and its kin have taught us to be sceptical of the utopian design standards held by any well-to-do technocratic group, if we weren't already. The mass media now may not be any different to these adaptive systems – only clunkier versions of tomorrow's smarter model. While propaganda indeed rears its ugly head from time to time, the AUI is capable of fostering what I call *propaganda in absentia*. In other words: the manipulation of view points and public opinion based on the intentional *omission* of information.

The *sousveillants*, aka those engaged with governmental oversight via surveillance technology, are swamped by the scope of their mission. Any technologies that provide respite from the telecommunicative miasma offer only as much assistance as the *surveillants* are willing to allow. It is simultaneously fatalistic, though not all too incorrect, to claim that the price of technological progress has been the theft of human rights, the most notable of all being a constant monitoring of our behaviour. We all monitor each other's behaviour – it is a kind of vicarious learning we have long employed as a hyperorganic social species – but not like this.

Surveillance

“The need to be observed and understood was once satisfied by God. Now we can implement the same functionality with data-mining algorithms” – Morpheus, Deus Ex; the Conspiracy (Ion Storm 2000)

Considering the ubiquitous role that information plays in *any* learning, it shouldn't come as a surprise to know that the data-giants of today rely on the same tactics as fortune-tellers: profiling and performance (metrics). Not to mention the added toppings of placation, misdirection, and sleight of hand. The Target Corporation,

for example, employs behavioural psychologists and statisticians to alter your habits for their benefit. To get better and better at guessing what it is you will buy next before you are even aware of it. The curious thing is: it works insofar as people do not feel as though they have been spied on (Duhigg 2012).

It is clear that every human action involves some sense of foresight, even if drawing upon what limited pool of experience is held by us. So, in order to distance predictive analytics from superstition, it is not enough *just* to be more accurate, since accuracy is something sought after by both practices, and humans already have a natural predisposition to believe statements made about them, however vague (Dutton 1998). Thus, in order to be valid, the algorithms have become our generation's social scientists, operating on a corporate scale previously unheard of. Their actions reflect the ideals of verifiable scientific methodology, upholding the principles of non-contradiction and empiricism so as to tap into the backbone of all decisive human thought. If Transhumanism is our process of emergent *becoming* which we (seek to) gain more and more control over (through understanding it), then it necessarily becomes an ethical question of which transhumanists exert that control over the whole hyper-species. Can every human be as informed as the next? Can every human have as much power as the next? Not yet, evidently. The transgressions of the tyrannical will result in the same backlash and resurgence that history knows only too well – the polarising narrative between the haves and the have-nots.

Every such threshold of difference has the potential to rearrange society around it – every named demographic could cascade into a caste. Slavery is real; slavery is alive. The polarisation of difference leads to the worst kinds of caste-eusociality that many of us have long been conditioned to accept unquestioningly.

So, as the paywalls of civil services like education reach higher and higher into the clouds of the privileged, when will the rest of society turn their heads away from the forbidden fruit of that single tree in favour of the collective's open orchard? Must knowledge continually be scarce in order for us to pursue it? How can we layer the ownership of information to avoid the tyranny of polarisation? Like the museum, for any traditional institution to survive, it has to compete with the open learnedness granted by mere minutes spent on the net. A net full of organisations striving to keep their content (ad) free for the very service of the collective. That is their gift to the global commons: and it is a tinkered product as much as the museum's relevance is its own. Curators are lobbyists in disguise, each to their own recursive public. The financial miasma which plagues higher education stretches over every telecommunicative path. The neutrality of and information quality of the net is permanently threatened by the woes and wants of our analogue selves.

Permissions

"Beware of he who would deny you access to information, for in his heart he dreams himself your master". — Commissioner Pravin Lal, "U.N. Declaration of Rights" (Firaxis 1999)

In its efforts to survive in this existentially hostile new media environment, riddled with crowd controlling algorithms and a standardised belief in paywalls, traditional museography scrambles to remain relevant, recognising that novelty alone will not be enough to offer substance to its waning sanctity. The commodification of the museum experience, offered in part by the democratisation of the net, has not only allowed for an unprecedented degree of interactivity,

but also an equal amount of surveillance employed to better predict and control the desires of the viewertariat. The feedback they collect is not always voluntarily given, as in the case of the survey, but is datamined from every node of interaction. Ironically, we become so engaged with the novelty of interactive media, we easily forget the institution's motivations and become desensitised to, or remain unaware of, its watchful gaze.

Concerning the fear that digital museums do themselves a disservice when replicating their analogue equivalents (and nothing more), I argue that not a single museum has ever been replicated. The process of digitisation renders obsolete nearly every single convention that has naturally evolved in the physical gallery space. To understand how power dynamics translate across the virtual gap is to come closer to articulating, if possible, the shifting social ecology of the datalinks.

The impetus behind the old rules is gone. Permissiveness has exploded in the sea of cheap copies – easily replicable digistructured forms – as we delimit the new generation of rules and their capacity to anticipate or control the unexpected actions of 'we the people'. Across the virtual gap, preventive hardware simply takes on a new face, and traditional social conventions find themselves woefully vestigial. A digital world *needs* no such decrees or repetitive reminders of what you can and cannot do. Digital realms police interactivity as a function of their design. They replace moral education with moral restriction.

Of course, any barrier can be worked around given the resources, but there is a fine line between an exploit and a hack. Rules point to their antithesis, and a collective awareness of law enforcement's *grey zones* means little if the keepers of the peace are in a bad mood. Thus, threats enacted inside or outside the system may warrant a response on either or both fronts. Threats are even more subjectively

elusive on the net where we leave our bodies behind. The owners of these virtual engines, like today's systems of law and their recursive publics, adapt themselves slowly to root out the said threat of errors, loopholes, exploits – anything that strays from the project's mission. The public commons is rife with crowd control.

So due to the growing awareness of how our individual egos can collapse under the weight of collective mediocrity and docility, curators find new ways to keep the masses satisfied with their decisions. To keep them from *really* acting out; to keep them believing that they can actually affect the game at hand, even though the game is a world on rails – even the most open ended of them. We crave uniqueness – a kind of narrativistic integrity that provides us with pleasure, identity and ontological comfort. But every degree of freedom carries its own illusions, so, in order to see through them and delimit the authoritative algorithm, visitors to the curated space begin to act like guinea pigs and sacrifice something of themselves if only to know how well those systems can accommodate the unexpected act. But not all attempts at delimitation occur inside or attack such systems, as in the case of the 48-hour Facebook-Like fest; some try to escape the whole thing. Would you fight for the right to be forgotten? Such is the paradox of unplugging: the impossibility of total self-exile without total disenfranchisement. The reach of surveillance and datamining keeps even the most remote peoples as entities in the datalinks, as a statistic at least. The 4.4 billion people without an Internet connection may not even be aware of the level of oversight we possess (Ferdman 2014). Even if one *could* be removed from the machine portion of recorded history, to what degree does the *right to be forgotten* extend to obfuscation from the living half? If carried to its logical extreme, the degradation of human memory must be seen as a resource whose strengths and weaknesses are to be exploited, as much as the machine's

half already is. This process is a far more ubiquitous form of data-manipulation than physically entering or deleting information from a mere database. Cognitronics¹¹ is the antithesis of enlightenment.

Risk

The risks of cyberspace share little in common with the risks of reality, least of all opportunity cost and spontaneous death. The risks of virtuality simulate some existential risks whereas those affecting the psyche (and its health, however distinct from physical health) carry over almost perfectly. Of course, this does not preclude the ability for our actions in cyberspace to trigger some kind of karmic retribution later on. Risk mitigation and human civilisation are inescapably bound together. Abnormally high risk-taking is a very damaging thing on the individual level, and doubly so when leading to collateral death, another's trauma, etc., but on the hyper-organic level, understanding of the consequences associated with those risks is only heightened. This is humanity's quorum sensing – the process by which we remember (often with the aid of codified media) the consequences for acts that others have performed in our stead.

Our abundance of living stock enables (perhaps inadvertently) even the most suicidal risks, the direct and distant consequences of which become readily available for the living masses to study. Someone must first taste the unknown poison before another can name it as such. No system's fragility can be known until it has been broken. A priori knowledge is not empirical: it is paradoxical – merely form fitted from other, similar, events. The cautionary tales and morality plays of folklore are didactic lessons; they are still relevant even among the video datalinks such as YouTube, where I could learn more in an

afternoon than through years of the prepared curricula of mediocrity. Video games also teach life lessons; they do a better job at this if they are not even trying to (Abercrombie 2013).

Any kind of imagined, virtual space is a tool in make-believe. Predictions simulate the future. For all passively consumed media, its creators assess how the content may engage the audience – what impressions may be left unto them, or what lessons they will walk away with. For participatory media, the creators assess how the audience will engage with the content. In both cases, the effects of passive imagining are embodied. The difference is in precisely where the user is situated in that world, and what *control* is given to or claimed by them. Power is as nebulous as truth. We manage to find only concentrations of it, although it is everywhere in some form or other. Spontaneous and innovative acts which delimit the gaps and inadequacies of any closed system run rampant, and maybe always will, but even if piracy or revolution themselves were made permissive by the hegemony, would humanity still test, probe and dance with danger of the taboo specifically because it is taboo? There is (social and actual) power to be gained in the most subversive acts, after all.

Hivemind

The righteous need not cower before the drumbeat of human progress. Though the song of yesterday fades into the challenge of tomorrow, God still watches and judges us. Evil lurks in the datalinks as it lurked in the streets of yesteryear. But it was never the streets that were evil.” - Sister Miriam Godwinson, “A Blessed Struggle” (Firaxis 1999).

The more we delimit the capabilities of the virtual, the more we

delimit the flexibility of our own perceptions. No aspect of our consciousness is exempt: the sensory, the ideological, the taxonomic, the imagined, the believed, the revolutionary, or whatever other aimlessly exacting reductions you feel need to be included.

Any equivocations between gods, government and the surveillance complex refer neither to a causal relationship nor a metaphorical one. They enable each other, and their ilk has been with us ever since the dawn of humanity. While they may not substitute for each other, they are each, themselves, tools. The *trusted few* who mandate these tools operate under the collective assumption that order is scarce. That it must be economised by the diligent, the intelligent, the moral, the wise, the worthy, the merciful and their tools of order. Do not believe for a second that religion competes with Transhumanism. Ideologies cannot compete. But, as tools, they each possess unique historicism, which makes them better for certain tasks. Both are eschatological simulations – endgames in want of procedural support and respect, here in the interim where we live. Their goals are one and the same, yet our insecurities sustain the illusion of competition. When Transhumanism and its associated technologies, modes of operating and standards of discovery and ethics, begin to operate *like* a religion, the old religions will no longer just fear their irrelevance, but know it has arrived.

The datalinks are not the recording made by the victor; they are the recording of the war. Absolute in their subjective parts. Ripe for appropriation. Concerning the data we feed them, it is impossible to betray an omniscient watcher whose only purpose is to study our behaviour. Of course, our surveillance systems of today are not so powerful or infallible as we might think.

Notes

¹ A common response to a recurring problem that is usually ineffective and risks being highly counterproductive (Budgen 2003: 225).

² A system of organisation where the elements are unranked (non-hierarchical) or where they possess the potential to be ranked in a number of different ways (Crumley 1995: 1-5)

³ From David Cronenberg's 1983 film of the same name. Meant here literally as *the video arena*.

⁴ Defined as "viewers who use online publishing platforms and social tools to interpret, publicly comment on, and debate a television broadcast while they are watching it" (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2011: 441).

⁵ A "critique of capitalism in its newest, mediatized form" (Knabb 2006: 7545)

⁶ "The object of the struggle is to obtain the optimum amount of stimulation from the environment" (Morris 1969: 182)

⁷ Literally: *the spirit of the age*.

⁸ The rate at which information storage capacity increases (Walter 2005).

⁹ Portmanteau of *folk* and *taxonomy* meaning the collective annotation and categorisation of content (Peters 2009).

¹⁰ The disclosure of several thousand classified documents in June 2013, led by Edward Snowden (Greenwald 2014).

¹¹ "The biopolitical paradigm of distraction" (Formichov 2009).

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CURATORS' NETWORK: CREATING A PROMOTIONAL DATABASE FOR CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS

Sören Meschede

Focusing on the experience of the Curators' Network, this text explores the idea of the database as a 'network of affect', analysing the role of this type of online platform in the dissemination of contemporary art, beyond the normal promotional purposes.

Abuse of communication tools

The promise made by the digital revolution was that the whole world would be interconnected. And effectively, the Internet and new communication technologies have given us the opportunity to easily make contact with the most remote corners of the Earth. This commodity has not only made one-to-one conversations easier, but it has also paved the way for new forms of mass communication. Whereas, in pre-Internet times, the information provided by the traditional mass media (newspaper, television, radio) was limited and filtered by editors and journalists, nowadays everybody can be considered their own chief editor. Seen from the point of view of the sender, it has never been easier to provide such huge amounts of information about yourself and what is on your mind right now. Seen from the point of view of the recipient, it has never been more difficult to have to cope with the whirlwind of thousands of voices and to sort through so much information.

This is also the case with the art world. The average amount of information that art professionals receive on a daily basis would make it impossible for them to work on anything else, if they insisted on reading all the content that others have provided and considered it important to disseminate during the day. Newsletters from galleries and museums, Facebook posts and LinkedIn requests from curators and artists, as well as blogs about exhibitions, catalogue presentations, fairs, talks, performances... The art community – although it does not have such a large number of professionals compared to other areas of business – is surely one of the most productive in constantly communicating its activities. Just one of the most prolific newsletter services of the art world alone, e-flux.com, sends around four to five newsletters a day to its 90,000 readers (www.e-flux.com/about/,

2015 and www.e-flux.com/archive/, 2015).

It seems as if the collective excess of online promotions for the sake of self-marketing has had an adverse effect. The oversaturation of data ultimately brings recipients to the point where they probably end up disregarding information that theoretically should be of interest to them and exacerbates what I should like to call the 'island phenomenon': those who are not yet present in digital formats or cannot manage the art of digital self-promotion as competently as others are easily overlooked.

The semantics of searching

Imagine you need to research into emerging Romanian or Chinese contemporary art. Imagine also that you might not have the time or the money to actually travel to these countries on an initial research visit. How would you start your investigation? Probably with an Internet search. But what term should you put into the search field of Google (www.google.com), Bing (www.bing.com), Duckduckgo (www.duckduckgo.com) or Yahoo (www.yahoo.com)? As search engine enquiries are still entirely language-based, you need to have a word for the thing that you are searching for. If you do not know that the object you push or pull in order to open doors is called a doorknob, it is fairly unlikely that you will find images of doorknobs on the Internet. And what happens if the terms that you require for your search are even vaguer? And how do you say 'emerging artist' or 'contemporary art' in Romanian or Chinese? You can resolve this question by starting to translate conceptual search enquiries into other languages. But most likely you will try searching in the *lingua franca* of the contemporary art world, by using an English term.



Fig. 01 - Curators' Network Meeting at Matadero, Madrid, Spain, in 2011.

Anyhow, whichever path you choose, the immediate results will probably be disappointing and you, as the researcher, will need to adopt traditional methods in order to obtain a more thorough look at the emerging artistic scene of, let's say, Bucharest or Beijing: interviewing old acquaintances or checking out international exhibition catalogues, well-known galleries, reviews of art magazines, or other materials for references that are written in any of the languages that you speak.

Why is this information so hard to discover through an online search? Firstly because of a global limitation: search engines are answering machines and are (supposedly) designed to deliver the most useful results. When a person performs an online search, the engine scours its corpus of indexed websites and employs algorithms to sort the wheat from the chaff (relevance), and then to rank this information in order of quality (popularity). These algorithms often comprise hundreds of variables that try to predict search patterns and the user's idea of relevance and popularity (Broer, 2011; Google, 2015). This means that they tend to be fairly precise in their response to common queries, by giving you, for example, the programme of your local cinema, but are often prone to failure, if you wish to stray from the beaten track.

Secondly, because of a local limitation: it is not standard practice for many artists, curators and even local institutions to maintain an updated bilingual page. Instead of a website, artists might only have a Facebook, Tumblr or Instagram profile, or just run a number of blogs, or they might not even be present on the Internet at all. Very often, information in English is either missing, outdated or poorly translated, and does not give a true picture of the item being searched for. In particular, social networks such as Facebook tend to reflect the local networks of the profile holder and are run entirely in their mother tongue, as the interaction needs to be as direct and immediate as possible.

Still a much sought after tool: trustworthy databases for effective online promotion

Quite frankly, it is a pity that we do not have a better insight into many of these local scenes, because although the projects, exhibitions, work and events organised by local art professionals can remain relatively unknown to the rest of the world, the lack of international visibility and promotion creates vibrant and highly original local environments, where artists and curators work closely together.

This is a very common consideration and it is the reason why online databases of artists and art professionals are still highly sought after. But contemporary art databases are faced with two difficult challenges: as the contemporary art world is so highly volatile, information rapidly becomes obsolete. A necessary previous task (which is not easily accomplished) is therefore to constantly revise and update the content of the database. But this is not the only thing: what makes the value of contemporary art so difficult to grasp is that the conventional patterns that help to classify something as of high or low interest are not applicable in the field of art. Even for art professionals who have been working in the field for years, it is increasingly difficult to understand what causes a work of art to be well or poorly received, frivolously expensive or completely unsellable. This unclear criterion regarding the quality of an art work has accompanied art throughout history and has encouraged the development of a sophisticated system of tutorship in the arts, where the 'who's who' of the art world, as well as the codes of personal recommendation, reputation and trustworthiness, all play an important role. In other words, anybody who wishes to promote an artist has to be trustworthy in the eyes of those to whom the promotion is directed. Ergo, databases have to be trustworthy in the eyes of the public that they are designed to reach.



Fig. 02 - Curators' Network Meeting at Brukenthal Museum, Sibiu, Romania, in 2012.

A database wishing to promote artists therefore requires sufficient prominence to stand out from the mass of communications on the Internet and must have established a reputation for itself among the art community. In order to achieve this goal, databases commonly use one of the following four strategies:

- **Databases take advantage of an already existing pattern of excellence in order to make themselves credible.** These kinds of platforms do not focus so much on promoting others; it is more that they use the prominence of the items that they feature in order to sell something else. Ocula (www.ocula.com), for example, is an international database of artists that functions as a service tool for contemporary art galleries. In the words of its founder, Ocula is “a marketing channel for galleries to be able to reach a much wider audience of people. The idea is to get top galleries from the Asia Pacific region into one space so users can access these galleries in a very transparent and open environment” (artradarjournal.com, 2012). Ocula’s business model and similar initiatives thus only work if the galleries bring excellence to the marriage and the platform delivers a sound communication strategy.

- **Databases target non-professional artists with no gallery representation** who wish to find a tool for the effective self-marketing of their works. Noenga (www.noenga.com) represents this very common type of artist databases that seek to adapt the dynamics of social network sites to contemporary art. In its own words, “At Noenga we envision a new art market model driven by social media technology in which the artist reaches out to the public directly without interference or obstacles of any kind. In the regular gallery/ museum world and art market a select group of curators and the like determines what art is and what it is not. They decide what people may see and buy. This is acceptable [in the case of the] historical

cultural heritage. When it concerns art, however, these curators are self-appointed authorities, limiting the opportunities for many artists. Noenga wants to [do away with] this elite interference and open up the art world. Now the community can choose for itself thanks to new and interactive selection methods” (www.artpromotivate.com 2012). These kinds of database are open to everybody who wishes to participate. Turning down an artist who wishes to belong to the database would actually be contradictory, as the great advantage of platforms such as Noenga is their claim to be independent of any authorities and hierarchies. It is the users who decide what is good and what is not by voting digitally. The great problem with these databases is that the system only works if there is a critical mass of actively participating members. But the larger the database becomes, the more diverse are the styles and qualities of its artist members. And this affects its usability and navigability.

- **Databases are built to inform people about the market value of an artist** by offering paying subscribers exhaustive and detailed auction records about as many artists as possible. Databases such as Artnet (www.artnet.com) and Artprice (www.artprice.com) do not invite or select artists to join them; they just monitor what happens at auctions. The detailed records that Artnet holds about thousands of artists for example, are basically the by-product of the business service that the platform offers. Their clients are collectors, auction houses, gallery owners and museums looking for highly professionalised services that focus on strictly financial results for the evaluation of an artist’s work, calculating insurance values and keeping track of auctions.

- **Databases promote locally restricted communities** in order to document the activities of a regional group of artists and raise awareness about them abroad. All such databases apply some kind of selection criteria in order to determine which artists can actually

enter the database. They all also get their credibility from the fact that they have a privileged view of the local context. At the same time they are faced with the challenge of how to actually present their content to possible users: programmers, curators, cultural managers, critics, journalists, other artists and the general public. Examples of this kind of database are the Madrid-based Archivo de Creadores (www.archivodecreadores.es), the Portuguese Projecto Map (<http://projectomap.net/>) and the Czech Artlist.cz (<http://www.artlist.cz/en/>).

All of the databases presented inevitably have their flaws and their strong points. Commercially sustainable platforms seem to consist of databases such as Ocula or Artnet, but, as their content is not generated through the database itself, they do not build any kind of relationship with the art professionals who are included in them. Databases like Noenga try to build up this relationship, but Noenga is, at the same time, a network of individuals with no further interest in the database itself. Databases such as Archivo de Creadores, Projecto Map and Artlist clearly have their own strong identity, at least due to their having created a selection process that guarantees the formation of a hand-picked group that constitutes the core of the database. But the geographically restricted nature of these websites limits their inherent potential for development.

A beating heart: sustainable networks in a networking society

The Curators' Network (www.curators-network.eu) database is designed to add a new element to the aforementioned class of platforms. The main difference lies in the idea that a database needs to rely on the people that it promotes and that it therefore needs to foster a relationship with its users by building up a 'network of affect'.

In his highly inspirational essay 'Curating with Love, or a Plea for Inflexibility', Dutch sociologist Pascal Gielen (Gielen 2010) states that our network-driven society is based on highly volatile temporary collaborations, which are, in turn, motivated by the constant competition of enterprising individuals. "The more we become a network, the more we also become disconnected from the world. The mobile human loses his embedding in the mental, social context and the ecosystem of the places he calls in on during his life or career, precisely because he never takes or receives quite enough time to become a true inhabitant" (Gielen 2010: 16-17). According to Gielen, this modern (and mental) nomadism leads to networks that lack solidarity and durable relationships, that have a great affinity for following trends and fashions and leave little space for self-reflection or research and development, all of this because the individuals that populate them "constantly have to live from self-promotion within a sphere of attention to stay connected or to further extend their network" (Gielen 2010: 19).

The surprising conclusion that Gielen draws from this devastating analysis of networks is his 'plea for inflexibility'. "It boils down to providing the network, which is increasingly shaped by rational calculating and competing figurations, with a beating heart. (...) And, oh yes, for that we need that worn-out notion: love" (Gielen 2010: 22-23).

It is this point that makes Gielen's essay so interesting. By claiming the irredeemable subjectivity of love as a solution for breaking free from the network structure of competing individuals, he advocates a durable network structure that possibly presupposes exclusion, inflexibility and even intolerance, but at the same time compromise, commitment and identity. A network – one could say – needs to develop an arrangement among its participants in order to gain its



Fig. 03 - Curators' Network at Intermediae, Madrid, Spain, in 2013.



Fig. 04 - Curators' Network at Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna, Austria, in 2013.

own strong public profile and to ensure real collaboration among the professionals who take part in it.

This is particularly true if one also bears in mind that a database with a promotional purpose has a certain similarity with online dating sites. These sites also 'promote' individuals. People take part in these promotional environments in order to achieve a clearly formulated goal, but as this goal is about promoting a relationship that is not just a financial transaction, people want to find out more about their counterparts. They need to trust each other, or at least the intermediary who links them both, before engaging in any form of interaction.

In order to gain trust, people search for more information about the other party. This is what the 'Uncertainty Reduction Theory' of Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975) confirms: people find uncertainty in interpersonal relationships unpleasant and are motivated to reduce this through interpersonal communication. According to the authors, by gaining information about their interlocutors, people are able to predict the other's behaviour and consequent actions, all of which, according to the theory, is crucial for the development of any relationships. It is therefore of utmost importance for a promotional database to create a network of affect through tools of interpersonal communication between the participants, in order to foster the creation of a durable network atmosphere with its own identity that is sustained by personal relations.

Conclusions for the future of the Curators' Network

The mission of the Curators' Network is to enhance the international promotion and interconnection of art professionals who live and

work in environments that can be considered peripheral to the main centres of contemporary art. It seeks to make these professionals visible on an international scale, as well as to transfer local knowledge to an international community and vice versa. The activities of the Curators' Network consist of real-life events and tools for digital promotion that nurture a database with all the participating art professionals. The creator of the Curators' Network is hablarenarte: (Spain). The founding members of the Curators' Network are those organisations that joined hablarenarte: in the first three years of the project from 2010 to 2013, these were Kunsthalle Exnergasse (Austria), the Studio of Young Artists (Hungary), Brukenthal Museum (Romania) and the Foundation for Visual Arts (Poland).

After its first three years of operation, the Curators' Network is now embarking upon a new cycle, which will focus in particular on its online presence. The core idea of the Curators' Network was, and still is, to gather together local knowledge about the art professionals that live and work on the peripheries of the traditional hotspots of contemporary art. Therefore its main goal is also to find ways to attract visitors from other parts of the world who would like to work with the art professionals that are included in its database.

One of the network's first discoveries was that a database alone would not attract such a group of visitors. The database has to be more like a platform that already creates content, rather than just a record of all the art professionals that have participated in any of the network's events. The Curators' Network website therefore needs to transform itself from a merely accumulative database to a provider of content. This can be achieved through online activities that activate the profiles of the members, as well as by creating exclusive material for the website.

A second insight was that it makes sense not to open up the database to everybody who wants to participate. The arguments put forward by the detractors of ‘curated’ databases, who say that this practice is not very democratic (www.artpromotivate.com, 2012), are of course completely right. But we consider that, by opening up a database of contemporary art to everybody, you do a small favour for all concerned. Limiting yourself in size means that you only have the opportunity to cover a niche market: the content is not overwhelming and yet it is of special interest to those in the art world who do not just want to see another work by some big names, but wish to discover new and interesting ways of thinking about art.

But it would be wrong to focus only on external cultural agents who occasionally visit the site and might – or might not – be interested in starting a collaboration with any of the art professionals on the website. The participants in the network themselves have the greatest potential for helping one another. Here again, the analogy with the online dating platform is helpful: dating sites exclusively match participants and do not focus at all on their promotion to the outside world. The third desire is therefore to continue including in the platform not only artists, but all kinds of art professionals, and to let the platform slowly develop into a social network shared by its participants. In this way, all profile holders have the opportunity to share their experiences and knowledge with each other and to enter into collaborative activities. Throughout this year and until 2016, we will develop a series of tools that help people use the local knowledge of their counterparts for their own purposes, while contributing to the whole by offering their local knowledge to the others. This could, for example, involve adapting tools that networking sites such as couchsurfing.com, home-exchange.com or behome.com have already been successfully offering their participants for several years.



Fig. 05 - Curators' Network meeting at ARTplacc Festival, Tihany, Hungary, 2014.

The fourth insight is directly linked to this idea: the Curators' Network has been a success story since its very beginning, especially because all of its online content is created and backed up by real-life activities. The meetings, conferences, residencies and portfolio reviews that we have been organising (always under the guidance of a local host) have helped people forge informal real-life relationships that have been developing in parallel to the online presence of the platform. People have already met in real life, and not only in the digital realm. This direct interaction has helped to create a network atmosphere that would have been impossible to achieve through digital tools alone. Nothing beats real-life interaction for getting to know one's peers and gaining their trust and confidence, which is necessary for starting long-lasting collaborations and creating networks of affect. We therefore attempt not to focus exclusively on digital promotional tools, but always seek to link the database to real-life activities.

Fifthly and finally, we agree with Pascal Gielen that any successful network needs a dedicated team behind it, one that can step outside the competitive logic of self-promotion and insist exclusively on the existence of a network. It must allow its hard work to dissolve into an authorless shared experience, disappearing behind the artists and art professionals that it promotes (Gielen, 2010). Only this procedure can create a community that has an identity strong enough to ensure that it stands out among the great mass of promotional databases on the Internet.

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DIVERGENT HISTORIES AND DIGITAL ARCHIVES OF LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO ART IN THE UNITED STATES – OLD PROBLEMS IN NEW DIGITAL FORMATS

Stefanie Kogler

This essay analyses the online digital archive *Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art*, demonstrating how this networked platform deals with differing histories and relates to conflicts of power, diplomacy and cultural visibility.

Since the beginning of what is referred to as the Digital Revolution in the mid-20th century, computers, software programmes and the Internet have become increasingly significant in creating, capturing and preserving information. These tools have become ever more important for research institutions and museums. In recent years, online digital archives have acquired greater prominence as research resources for scholars and students. The accessibility of online archives provides an opportunity to work with primary documents without the need to always physically enter the archive. An online digital archive therefore has the potential to reach out to its users via the virtual realm. Furthermore, it has the potential to promote research into marginal art histories such as those of Latin American and Latino Art.

In 2002, the International Centre for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), part of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas (MFAH), launched the *Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art Project* (ICAA 2014) (Fig. 01), which I shall refer to as the *Documents Project* for the remainder of this essay. Consisting of ten partner institutions that span all the way across the United States and throughout various countries in Latin America, the project establishes a far-reaching network with dedicated teams in each institution. These teams identified important documents that presented key moments in the history of art from Latin America, as well as Latino Art. The selected documents were scanned using equipment provided by the ICAA. The documents were then saved and made available through the online archive. No documents were removed from their original archives, and the ICAA made it its priority to provide digital access to primary documents (Olea, Kervandjian 2012:30).

Today, this online digital archive consists of over five thousand documents that have so far been digitised and made available on the

Documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art

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A DIGITAL ARCHIVE AND PUBLICATIONS PROJECT AT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

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THE ICAA'S DIGITAL ARCHIVE IS GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY THE BRUCE T. HALLE FAMILY FOUNDATION

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3 December 2013

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3 December 2013

The ICAA Documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art digital archive provides access to primary sources and critical documents tracing the development of twentieth-century art in Latin America and among Latino populations in the United States. Recovered texts provide a much-needed intellectual foundation for the exhibition, collection, and interpretation of art produced along this cultural axis. Countries featured in the first phase of this multiyear project include Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Latino USA. The ICAA Digital Archive reflects the findings of this monumental digitization project and is now available, free of charge, to the research and teaching community as well as to the public at large. The uploading of documents to the archive is an ongoing process. Please visit us often.

Total Documents

Archived to Date

5,540

Shared Document

Collections

131

Fig. 01 - The homepage of the online archive of *Documents of 20th Century Latin American and Latino art*. The International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). Available from: <<http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>>.

Internet. Aside from its far-reaching and intricate logistical effort, I want to focus my attention on the categorisation of Latin American art and Latino Art, and on how this frames the *Documents Project*. In order to understand this framing, I will highlight the different histories of art from Latin America and of Latino Art in the USA. The histories and conditions of both fields differ vastly, yet through their incorporation into museums and institutions in the United States, the notion of a Pan-Latino consciousness, and that of Pan-Americanism, has come to rationalise the overlapping of both fields, particularly since the 1980s. This is based on promoting diplomatic relations between countries in the Americas, a shared cultural heritage between Latin American and Latino communities in the United States, and, above all, ethnicity.

I want to problematise this conception, since people from the twenty different countries in Latin America and the many Latino communities in the USA are bracketed together under one overarching idea of ethnicity. Not all people of a similar heritage permanently identify themselves as Latinos in the United States. Indeed, most would identify with their country of origin, describing themselves, for example as Puerto Rican, Colombian, Peruvian, Argentinean or of other origins, before claiming, if at all, that they pertain to the Latino community¹. Moreover, it is unlikely that people from Brazil regard themselves as Latinos within the broader context of the United States. Notwithstanding this, Brazil is a major contributor to the *Documents Project* and collaborates under the categorisation of Latin American Art.

The term *Latino* is a political tool that, since its coining in the 1960s, has been utilised to argue for the wider representation and inclusion of rapidly growing communities with origins in Latin America, as well as those already living and working in the United States for generations (Calderon 1992: 39). These diverse communities remain

sidelined, and the term has become a means to multiply and highlight their similar concerns for equality and representation. Moreover, Latino Studies as an academic discipline is offered at universities across the country. One partner institution of the *Documents Project* is particularly active in this field, namely the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana (Institute for Latino Studies 2014). This institution has dedicated its research to this field since 1999, and promotes a better understanding of the changing demographics in the United States. The term *Latino* therefore has significant meaning in the context of this country as a legitimate tool for evincing representation.

On the other hand, Latin American art is part of a diplomatic history that began in the late 19th century with the origins of Pan-Americanism. This idea underlined the aim to align the countries to the south of the United States with their neighbour in the north in order to ensure economic domination and prevent international threats to the security of the United States. This also included the consolidation of Latin American Studies at various universities, which contributed to a better understanding of Latin America on the part of the United States. For example, Texas, with its borders with Mexico, was the first State that fomented this field and has encouraged the study of Latin America at the University of Texas at Austin since the late 19th century (Palaima 2009: n.p.). The same university also offers courses in Latino Studies.

The categories, Latin American and Latino, although intertwined and related, comprise different histories. Both are supported and influenced through their study as academic fields, and each term is underlined by approaches and aims that originated in the United States. Therefore the *Documents Project* is an endeavour that is particular to this country.

I will begin with an outline of the *Documents Project* and its classification of documents according to constellations. These do not impose a strict order, but rather suggest a fluid way of cataloguing the digital archive. I will then recount the histories of Latin American and Latino Art in the USA, before discussing the role of the MFAH and its director, Peter Marzio, from 1982 until 2010, in incorporating and grounding Latin American art and Latino Art into this institution. As a result, this paper will provide a broad overview of these histories, the use of categorisations, and the role of the ICAA and the MFAH in the incorporation of marginal art histories into the mainstream through digital archives.

The *Documents Project*

This endeavour is marked by a vast logistical and managerial effort spanning across the Americas. The end result comprises not only the online archive, but also a book series of thirteen volumes that accompanies the repository. The *Documents Project* was conceived and conceptually developed by an Editorial Board composed of twenty researchers, curators and scholars, some of whom are based at each of the ten partner institutions collaborating in the venture². The institutions from where the documents were outsourced include museums, research centres and universities³. The archival material was selected according to editorial categories determined by the Editorial Board, in conjunction with the teams in each partner institution. I will elaborate on this aspect in detail below. Once selected, the documents were scanned and digitally processed by administrative members in each location. The results of thousands of digitised documents were then sent to the ICAA headquarters in Houston, where they continue to be uploaded onto the website.

It follows that the *Documents Project* is a collaborative effort that requires time, effort, and significant volumes of digital data to be managed, stored and uploaded. Despite criticism that highlights the location and sponsorship of this project in the United States rather than in Latin America, it is important to note that the project does not remove documents from their original surroundings to then be re-housed, for example, at the MFAH. Rather, the process of digitising the original files and saving them onto a website builds a virtual bridge between the ICAA and the partner institutions across the United States and in Latin America, where the originals remain. I have argued elsewhere that this forms a *Transnational Networked Archive*, in which, rather than merely making digital archival material accessible, the website and archive form the basis of a network of scholars and institutions that work together in collaboration to re-frame the study of Latin American Art and Latino Art in the United States (Kogler in peer review).

I want to afford the presentation and categorisation of the documents on the website a brief analysis since this determines the framework of the digital archive and the selection criteria for the archival material. The website for the digital archive comprises a search and browse function, which allows users to search for archival material in various ways (Fig.02). These include, for example, Geographic Descriptors, Topic Descriptors, Name Descriptors, authors, titles and editorial categories. This latter subsection consists of thirteen constellations that have been developed by the twenty members of the Editorial Board based across the Americas in collaboration with the teams of all partner institutions. The constellations frame the archive through the following overarching fields:

- Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?
- National Imaginaries/Cosmopolitan Identities

The screenshot displays the website for the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH). The main heading is "Documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art". The site is in English, with a Spanish option available. A navigation bar includes "ABOUT", "THE ARCHIVE", "MY DOCUMENTS", "PUBLICATIONS", and "SPONSORS".

The search interface is divided into two main sections:

- KEYWORD SEARCH:** Features a search bar and a "Search" button. Below it, there are links for "Browse" and "Editorial Categories".
- ADVANCED SEARCH:** Includes a search bar, a "Search" button, and a "Find documents matching:" section with a radio button selected for "Both conditions".

On the right side of the search interface, there are several dropdown menus for filtering results:

- AA RECORD ID.
- Editorial Categories
- Titles
- Authors
- Topic Descriptors
- Name Descriptors
- Geographic Descriptors

At the bottom of the search interface, there is a "FILTERS" section with the instruction: "You must specify at least one Advanced Search condition to use filters." The filters include:

- From: [dropdown]
- To: [dropdown]
- Place of publication: [text input]
- Type: [dropdown]
- Genre: [dropdown]
- Language: [dropdown]
- Editorial Category: [dropdown]

A "Search" button is located at the bottom of the filters section.

On the left side of the page, there is a sidebar with the following sections:

- THE ICAA'S DIGITAL ARCHIVE IS GENEROUSLY UNDERWRITTEN BY THE BRUCE T. HALLE FAMILY FOUNDATION**
- SEARCH**
 - New Search
- BROWSE**
 - Editorial Categories
 - Titles
 - Authors
 - Topic Descriptors
 - Name Descriptors
 - Geographic Descriptors

Fig. 02 - Search and Browse categories. The International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH)

- Recycling and Hybridity in the Art of Latino-America
- Issues of Race, Class, and Gender in the Visual Arts of Latino-America
- Art, Activism and Social Change
- Suprerealism, Magic Realism and the Fantastic
- Globalization and Its Latin American Dis/Contents
- New World Geometric and Constructive Utopias
- Abstracts vs. Figuratives in the Cold War Period
- In Pursuit of Democracy: Graphics and Community-building
- Exile, Displacement, Diaspora
- Conceptualisms and Non-object-based Art
- Mass Media, Technology and Art

While analysing each category in detail is beyond the scope of this essay, I wish to point out that each of them contributes to curating the archive and its contents. The loosely defining constellations allowed each team to adapt them according to the local context, and provided criteria through which to select archival material. The subject areas seek to create fluid fields rather than impose, for example, a strict chronological order. While not strictly intersecting, the categories remain broad enough to allow for the inclusion of varied documents according to the different institutional needs that exist in each country.

This frames a process of selection that determines what not to include, a procedure that determines the acquisition of primary material for any archive. Nevertheless, the selection of digital documents was made by each institution, and was based upon what documents each team deemed most important. Therefore, no overlapping took place in the process of selecting documents between institutions or teams across Latin America and the United States.

Indeed, the first constellation *Resisting Categories: Latin American*

and/or Latino? provides a starting point from which the *Documents Project* explores its wider framing through the accompanying first book from the edition of thirteen. In this first tome with the same title, both terms are explored through a number of documents spanning several hundred years, from the colonisation of the Americas to the present day. The vast array of curated documents dissects the development of these taxonomies and shows how they were established over time.

Although the curated archive and book edition seemingly consider the vastly different histories between Art from Latin America and Latino Art in the USA, both remain conflated within these constellations and under the title of the project – *Documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art*. In order to provide an idea of the impact of this framing, it is imperative to briefly detail the heterogeneous histories that culminated in the amalgamation of both categories, Latin American Art and Latino Art, within the *Documents Project*. In order to do this, I will outline the different histories of both fields in the 20th century.

Divergent Histories

The earliest collection of modern Latin American Art in the USA was that of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. The solo exhibition of Mexican muralist painter Diego Rivera's work in 1931 marked the beginning of a prolonged history of collecting and displaying Latin American Art at this institution. The intentions behind this initiative were outlined by Alfred H. Barr, MoMA's first director:

“Perhaps [I] might not have taken any great interest in South America had it not been for the war, the state of emergency,

the necessity of establishing closer relations with the countries to the south. I think we were very conscious of the political background of our interests, and conscious, too, of the somewhat complicating nature of that political atmosphere” (Barr 1945: 38).

Barr refers to diplomatic strategies that had been developed by the USA since before the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1930s in order to prevent its spilling over to Latin America, which in turn would pose a threat to the USA. After the Second World War, the interest in stopping the spread of communism afforded similar strategies. Again, cultural exchanges were a way to foster stronger relations and promote democracy in the Americas. These were realised through the Pan-American Union in Washington DC, under the curatorship of José Gómez Sicre, a Cuban-born art historian and curator, who led the continued exhibition and collection efforts as the Head of the Visual Art Section. Gómez Sicre believed that Latin American Art was equally as innovative as art produced in the USA and Europe:

“Few are the skeptics who would venture to express doubts today that Latin America possesses – as an obvious reality – a vigorous art of its own [...] it ranks as one of the outstanding cultural manifestations of our hemisphere. I am among those who have believed in its power, its significance, and its viability for twenty or perhaps thirty years” (Gómez-Sicre 1965: n.p.).

While again motivated by diplomatic intentions, Gómez Sicre saw art from Latin America as an innovation that contributed to artistic developments. On the other hand, Barr was predominantly driven by a pioneering spirit to discover and map this field, as well as, political intentions that furthered collaboration throughout the Americas.

The term Latin America, used by Gómez Sicre to great effect, is a

construct describing the geographical and geopolitical area south of the USA, encompassing Central and South America and the Caribbean (Swanson 2003: xii). The term also describes countries in which Spanish, indigenous and Lusophone languages are spoken, and which share a history of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism (Holloway 2008: 2). These broad linguistic, geographical and historical parameters contributed to the field of Latin American Studies, which continues to be taught at universities in the United States and Europe. This was also the result of a shift in the perception of the Americas that focused on the Western Hemisphere as a geographical entity, and which was employed to promote the idea of Pan-Americanism (Spellacy 2006: 44). This approach was promulgated in particular as part of the United States foreign policy, which sought to promote collaboration and secure economic domination over the countries it bordered with and beyond (Spellacy 2006: 44).

The idea of the Western Hemisphere has bound the Americas together as one encompassing landmass, while Pan-Americanism describes the diplomatic and political dimension under which this idea operated. The Pan-American Union was one result of this development and therefore an active propagator of collaboration and exchange in the hemisphere. Furthermore, Latin American Studies was consolidated as an academic discipline at universities, and artistic exchanges were endorsed between cultural institutions in the hemisphere.

Although no direct link can be established between Latin American Studies and the collection and exchange of art from Latin America in the United States during the 20th century, the likelihood of both fields influencing one another on some level is a strong one. The emergence and consolidation of Latin American Studies in universities since the late 19th century, and the active involvement of art museums, such as MoMA, and diplomatic institutions, such as the Pan-American

Union in the early 20th century, point to this link.

Parallel to the activities involving art from Latin America and Latin American Studies, the 1960s was an eventful decade in the United States. The Civil Rights Movement paved the way for underrepresented minorities that demanded rights and greater representation in institutions. Chicanos (US citizens with Mexican ancestry) and Puerto Ricans emerged as communities who together coined the term 'Latino' and appropriated it into their language and identity (Calderon 1992: 39). Other Latino communities joined the movement in order to highlight their experiences as minorities that were "marked by differences of class, gender, sexuality, mestizaje and geocultural location" (Zamudio-Taylor 1996: 317). The differences refer to their status as minorities and their subsequent lack of rights and representation in institutions in the United States. The above quote also suggests the unifying shared experiences of marginalisation that people of Latin American descent witness due to their ethnicity.

Although Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and later Cubans (as well as by now all citizens from Latin America and those of Latin American descent) have formed heterogeneous and diverse communities in the USA, the term 'Latino' is key in forming an overarching term that is supported by a Pan-Latino consciousness, as stated by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto (2012: 790). He claims that the "surge in the Latino population coincided with the rise of a pan-Latino consciousness that evolved in the artistic and cultural production in the United States" (Ybarra-Frausto 2012: 790). This refers to the shared perceptions between all people of Latin American backgrounds that relate directly to their culture, language and history. Therefore, it was through artistic endeavours that the idea of a Pan-Latino consciousness was

grounded within this field and began to support the struggle for recognition. The term further echoes the idea of Pan-Americanism mentioned above. However, it is not rooted in diplomacy and political collaboration between separate countries. Instead, a Pan-Latino consciousness transcends these delineations and is grounded in ethnicity. The term therefore describes a crossing of borders and a mixing of cultures and traditions.

Latino movements in the United States comprised artists, cultural workers, intellectuals and activists who concentrated on recuperating and re-establishing memories connected to their origins throughout Latin America. They also demanded a better education that reflected their histories and cultural backgrounds in relation to the United States. For instance, after the Spanish-American War (1898), Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States. By granting Puerto Rican citizens US passports, and therefore free movement within the United States, a continuous flow of migration and the formation of Puerto Rican communities ensued, which was initially concentrated in the New York area (Calderon 1992: 38).

Conversely, Cuban immigration took place in several waves, beginning with the struggle for independence from Spain before and during the Spanish-American War. Emigration and exile spiked again after the Cuban Revolution (1959) and the introduction of communist policies that forced mainly middle and upper-class Cubans to leave their country and seek new opportunities in the United States (Calderon 1992: 38). Many settled in Florida and today form sizeable and embedded communities there.

Underscored by a seismic shift in borders, the history of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans is quite different and begins with the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), in which Mexico lost half of its territory

to the United States. Mexican landowners who remained in the newly formed states lost many of their rights under new United States laws and were subsequently marginalised (Zamudio-Taylor 1996: 316). Despite this, a palpable Chicano and Mexican presence still remains in these south-western states, including California, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Texas. Nearly all of these states now border on Mexico and comprise significant Chicano and Mexican-American communities that are autochthonous to this region (Calderon 1992: 38).

Nevertheless, the area also faced unprecedented levels of immigration as a result of the persistent violence and economic hardship experienced in Mexico, and other countries in the region, throughout the 20th century, adding yet another dimension to the issue of border delineations, crossings and the marginalisation of immigrants.

The histories, outlined here very briefly, barely begin to highlight the vastly different circumstances of the three communities that have existed in the United States longest. Their histories differ from each other and pose an impossible task for those seeking to combine them under the umbrella term Latino. Moreover, through continuous immigration from all parts of Latin America, many more communities were formed and now exist in the United States. Their histories are yet again different and beyond the scope of this essay⁴. Nevertheless, it was the Chicano and Puerto Rican communities that were instrumental in leading the struggle for the establishment of the term Latino, designed to create an affinity between these many people and their shared experiences in the United States.

For instance, in New York, El Museo del Barrio was founded in 1969 by Puerto Rican artist and educator Rafael Montañez Ortíz (b. 1934). He clearly stated the intentions that lay behind this initiative:

“The cultural disenfranchisement I experience as a Puerto Rican has prompted me to seek a practical alternative to the orthodox museum, which fails to meet my need for an authentic ethnic experience. To afford me and others the opportunity to establish living connections with our own culture, I founded El Museo del Barrio” (El Museo del Barrio 2005).

As a cultural reference point for Puerto Ricans, El Museo del Barrio marked a significant point of departure in the institutional and cultural history, as well as the artistic production, of Puerto Ricans in New York. Through their exhibition programme, which included not only Modern and Contemporary Art from Puerto Rico, but also artefacts of the pre-Columbian Taíno culture, the museum sought to root the history of Puerto Ricans in that of their country of origin, while paying attention to the art produced by its artists in the United States.

El Museo del Barrio expanded its vision and programming during the 1970s to include Latino Art, and eventually Latin American Art (El Museo del Barrio 2005). This forms a significant change in its programming and shows an awareness of, on the one hand, Pan-Americanism and, on the other hand, a Pan-Latino consciousness. This marks a node in the amalgamation of both ideas, one geopolitical and the other ethnic, in one institution. This furthermore highlights the overlapping and not so delineated approach between two seemingly different categories.

In California, Chicano artists and artists’ collectives founded institutions that were much more focused on their ethnicity. As a result, their aims differed from those of El Museo del Barrio, in that their focus remained delineated by the context of the Chicanos living in California. Institutions included the Centro Cultural de la Raza,

in San Diego and La Galería de la Raza, in San Francisco, to name but two. Artists' collectives included East Los Streetscapers in Los Angeles, among many others. These groups and collectives created public wall murals in Chicano communities and neighbourhoods. The murals were influenced by the practices of Mexican Muralism from the 1920s and the work of such artists as Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros (Ybarra-Frausto 1995: 173). Chicano artists used a political and social visual language to create works that were relevant to the aims and urgency of the movement, also known as El Movimiento, fighting for the recognition and representation of Chicanos (Ybarra-Frausto 1995: 173).

While El Museo del Barrio opened its programming to include other communities, in California the focus remained upon the political struggle for the rights of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans. Unlike Latin American Art, which from the outset was incorporated into mainstream institutions, beginning with MoMA, Latino Art worked distinctly outside of this remit. El Museo del Barrio was founded at the initiative of the Puerto Rican community in order to reconnect with, and raise awareness of, their origins, as well as to create an identity. While it was successful in this endeavour, it also incorporated Pan-Americanism and a Pan-Latino consciousness, while, in California, community-based art was purposely placed in public spaces and located distinctly outside of the mainstream cultural institutions, in order to reach people and raise political awareness within the Chicano community. Again, it becomes clear that the framing differed significantly between artistic communities across the country, despite the collaborative efforts to convene a Pan-Latino consciousness under the term Latino.

Moreover, while Latin American Art continued to be a diplomatic tool to improve transnational relations under the heading of Pan-

Americanism, Latino Art, in all its incarnations, increasingly became a political tool, generating public and community representation and identity within the United States. Neither term encompasses the vast differences I have highlighted here; however, they clearly underline their heterogeneity with poignancy.

All of this highlights the complexity through which both histories are conflated within the *Documents Project*, despite their vastly different pasts and backgrounds. As a result, the project risks imposing a limitation for art from Latin America and Latino Art that is dependent upon its insertion within institutions in the United States. This also presents us with a division between art from Latin America and Latino Art in this country that goes beyond a shared Pan-Latino consciousness and smoothes over superficial cracks in the conceptual approach of this project. Nevertheless, as I have shown, both areas share an overlap that is visible only in the United States. This project is therefore transnational, as well as, locally specific.

This brings us to the role of the MFAH and its history in the gradual inclusion of both fields within its programming, which is of further importance here. The following pages outline this history and highlight the national and local impetus that led to the establishment of the ICAA and the initiation of the *Documents Project*.

Mainstreaming Latin American and Latino Art

By the 1980s, a shift had occurred in the terms of inclusion, and with the advent of multiculturalism, Latino and Latin American Art were increasingly exhibited in mainstream institutions. One such example was the MFAH, which, under the leadership of Peter Marzio, worked towards a broader and more inclusive representation of these two

areas of artistic production, despite their heterogeneous nature. Two initiatives at the MFAH were especially poignant in this context.

Firstly, in 1987, the MFAH organised the survey exhibition *Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Artists*. The exhibition showcased Latino artists from across the USA and included art produced by Chicano, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican and Cuban artists, as well as artists from Latin America who live and work in the United States. This was the result of a prolonged research endeavour that saw the curators, John Beardsley and Jane Livingston, travel and research the artistic output of Latino artists throughout the country. The artworks were chosen based on their quality, according to the curators, and the ethnicity of the artists.

In his funding application for *Hispanic Art in the United States*, Marzio underlined the significance of this project, but he was also aware of the potential difficulties and criticisms it would produce:

“Hispanic art will be seen as a profound cultural expression of the Spanish-speaking people of North America, and as an expression of their ‘new world’ experiences. [...] The exhibition could be politically explosive. The Hispanic cultures are diverse and far-flung in North America. To do an exhibition which is fair and fabulous could be impossible” (MFAH Archives 2014: n.p.).

Hispanic Art in the United States indeed met with considerable criticism that claimed, among other things, that the show presented a selective survey of art under the controversial term ‘Hispanic’, rather than ‘Latino’. Furthermore, the curators, Livingston and Beardsley, were non-Latinos and therefore presented a mainstream view of this art, arousing criticism for their lack of knowledge of the experience of Latinos in the United States (Johnson 1987). The exhibition and its controversy highlighted an inherent chasm between

what mainstream institutions deem to be quality art, and the way in which Latinos wish to be represented in museums. It highlighted the reductive nature of the scope under which both fields operate. While Latino Art bases its production on the ethnicity of the artist, mainstream museums interpret this field according to Eurocentric criteria. These do not reflect the intricacies of Latino Art in the United States. Nevertheless, this exhibition, despite its obvious flaws and pertinent criticisms, was a first and significant opener for bringing this field of art to mainstream institutions, and to a wider audience.

Also in 1987, Marzio undertook a month-long research trip to Latin America, visiting key museums in the region⁵. His aims were to “establish an exhibition exchange program between the South American museums and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston” and further extended to gaining a better understanding of “our neighbours to the South” (Marzio, 1987). He repeated the rhetoric from earlier in the century, calling for greater collaboration between a United States institution and those based in Latin America, through a Pan-American exchange. Finally, and showing an awareness of the local context, Marzio sought to reflect the Latin American heritage of the Latino population of Houston more accurately, which at the time amounted to a significant portion of its inhabitants.

The MFAH’s activities extended yet further when, in 2001, it founded the International Centre for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), which actively began the collection and exhibition of key works of art from Latin America⁶. In 2002, work began on the long-term transnational project digitising documents of 20th-century Latin American and Latino Art. This project incorporated technology, the internet as a platform and a vision to root these fields within this institution, and promoted their research and study in the United States and beyond.

Two sponsors of the *Documents Project* particularly stand out in their attempts to support initiatives that highlight Latino and Latin American connections. One of these is the Bruce T. Halle Family Foundation, which, aside from actively collecting and promoting art from Latin America, sponsors the online digital archive (ICAA 2014). Moreover, the Ford Foundation sponsors the arts, art communities and innovation in approaches designed to change US demographics (Ford Foundation 2014). The support and awareness of these key sponsors point to a vested interest in this field in the United States and make this project, and the creation of the ICAA, an endeavour that could only have come into existence in that country.

As I have shown, the histories of Latin American Art and Latino Art in the United States diverge vastly. Nevertheless, they are intertwined through echoing ideas of a Pan-Latino consciousness and Pan-Americanism. While both ideas were separate and unconnected initially, it has become clear that they have become intertwined in some ways. I believe that this situation is only possible in the United States, where the *Documents Project* originated.

The role of this digital project and the incorporation of both fields within it is framed by the construct of Latin America that was consolidated in the United States through Pan-Americanism and Latin American Studies. Moreover, Pan-Latino ethnicity builds a bridge between the many Latino communities in the United States and Latin America. These notions span across the whole of the Western Hemisphere through their conception in the United States. This creates vast categories within which it is important not to confuse, for example, the idea of Latino Art as an all-encompassing term for the art produced by all Latinos in the United States.

Furthermore, the role of Brazil as part of Latin America, although

not as part of the Latino ethnicity in the United States, brings yet another dimension to this issue. Simply basing artistic production upon a sense of the artist's ethnicity reduces it too easily. Nor is it useful to think of the link between Latin American Art and Latino Art as one that does not generate vast differences, and even resistance, for example, on the part of Latin American artists and institutions that do not wish to be associated with Latino artists and institutions in the United States.

I believe this project could only have come into existence in the United States as part of this country's changing demographics, and as a response to the need for museums and institutions to respond to these changes. The *Documents Project* acts as a political tool for gaining representation and visibility for marginal communities and marginal art histories in the United States. Through the curation of the digital archive and its fluid constellation model, the project seeks to bring art from Latin America and Latino Art closer to each other and nearer to an established western narrative. As a result, it is an equally important task to tease out innovative contributions to artistic practices developed independently in these fields. It remains to be seen whether the *Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art Project* will succeed in its ambitious aims.

Notes

¹ A number of important scholarly texts contribute to a grounded understanding of the history and socioeconomic circumstances experienced by Latinos in the United States. For detailed studies, see, for example, Oboler, S., (1995) *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re) Presentation in the United States*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. Arreola, D. D., (2004) *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America*, Austin: University of Texas Press. Forbes, J. D., (1992) The Hispanic Spin: Party Politics and Governmental Manipulation of Ethnic Identity. In: *Latin American Perspectives*. vol. 19, No 4, Autumn, pp. 59-78.

² The members of the Editorial Board are: Beverly Adams, Ph.D. The Diane and Bruce Halle Collection, Scottsdale, Arizona; Gilberto Cardenas, Ph.D. Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana; Karen Cordero, CURARE, Espacio Crítico para las Artes/Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City; Olivier Debroise, Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes, UNAM, Mexico City; Fabiola-López Durán, Ph.D., Rice University, Houston, Texas, Diane Lovejoy, Publications Director, MFAH, Houston, Texas; Natalia Majluf, Ph.D., Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru; Ivo Mesquita, Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, Brazil; Chon Noriega, Ph.D., Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, Los Angeles, California; James Oles, Ph.D., Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts; Marcelo Pacheco, MALBA-Colección Costantini, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Justo Pastor Mellado, Independent Scholar, Santiago, Chile; Ivonne Pini, Editor, Art Nexus, and Universidad Nacional/Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia; Mari Carmen Ramírez, Ph.D., Director, ICAA, MFAH, Houston, Texas; Tahía Rivero, Fundación Mercantil, Caracas, Venezuela; Victor A. Sorell, Independent Scholar, Chicago, Illinois; Edward J. Sullivan, Ph.D., New York University, New York City, Susana Torruella Leval, Independent Scholar, New York City; Zuleiva Vivas, Independent Scholar, Caracas, Venezuela; Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, Independent Scholar, San Antonio, Texas.

³ The partner institutions are: Fundación Espigas, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa de São Paulo (FAPESP), Brazil; Seminario de Investigación de Historia del Arte, Universidad de Playa Ancha, Valparaíso, Chile; Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia; CURARE, Espacio Crítico para las Artes, Mexico City; Museo de Arte de Lima, Peru; Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, Los Angeles, California; Institute for Latino Studies,

University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana; Museo de Bellas Artes Juan Manuel Blanes, Montevideo, Uruguay; Fundación Mercantil, Caracas, Venezuela.

⁴ Throughout the 20th century, various waves of immigration to the United States were the result of direct interventions undertaken by the United States government in Latin American countries, resulting in military dictatorships and persistent government violence in countries such as Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, among others.

⁵ These included the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Museu de Arte Moderna, São Paulo, Brazil; Galeria Nacional de Artes Plásticas, Montevideo, Uruguay; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo and the Museo de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires, Argentina; Museo de Bellas Artes de Caracas, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Caracas, and the Museo de Arte la Rinconada, Caracas, Venezuela, (MFAH Archives, 2014: n.p.).

⁶ As a research institution, the ICAA regularly stages symposia and produces publications that examine various areas in the field of art from Latin America. The Centre has also staged numerous exhibitions of art from Latin America since its inception, most notably *Inverted Utopias-Avant Garde Art in Latin America*, 20 June until 12 September 2004, which comprised over two hundred works of art by artists from Latin America. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication comprising several essays written by notable scholars in this field.

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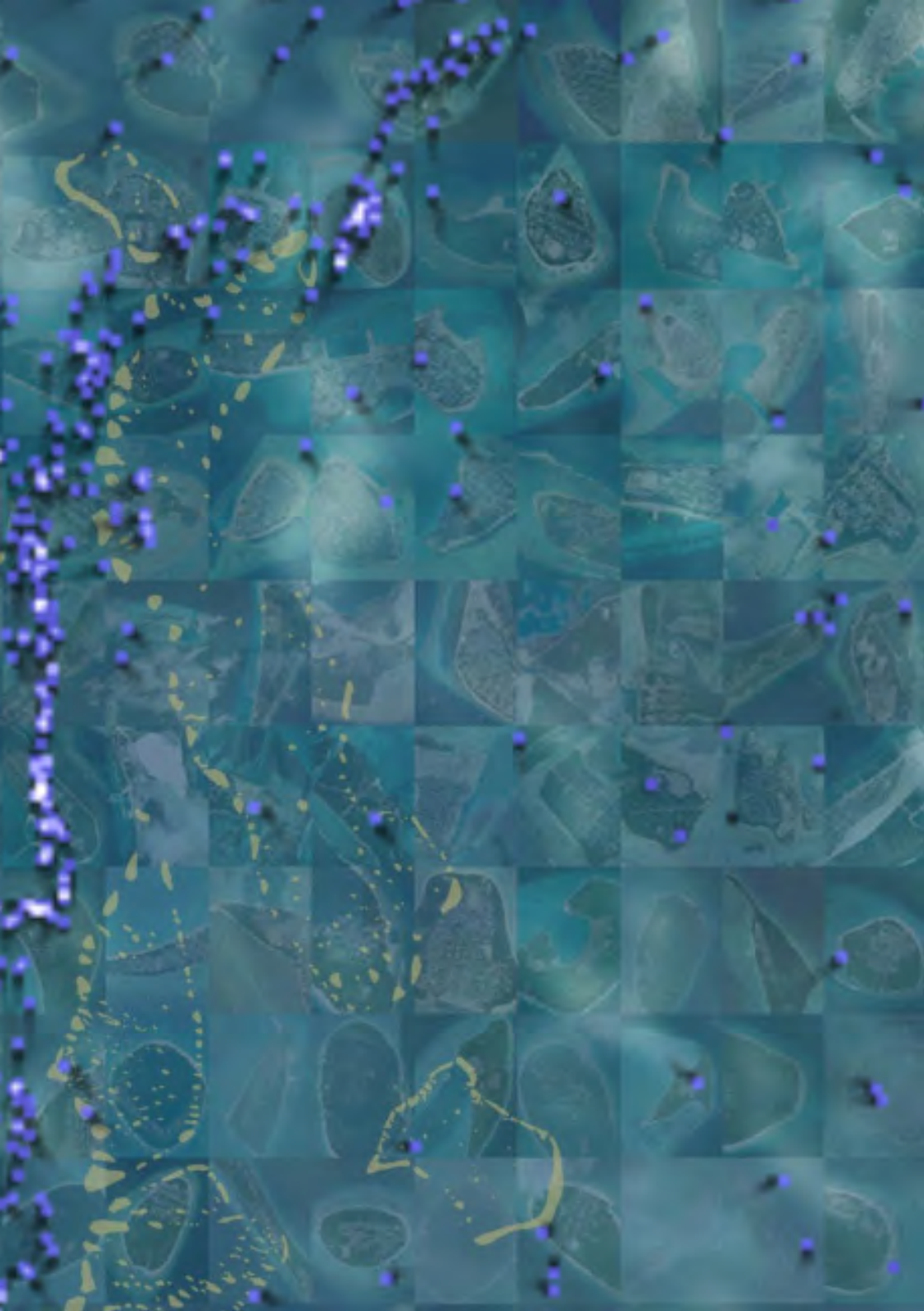
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The background of the image is a grid of approximately 10x10 microscopic images of cells, likely yeast or similar microorganisms, showing various internal structures and shapes. Overlaid on this grid are several network graphs. A prominent one is a vertical chain of purple nodes connected by black lines, extending from the top left towards the bottom. Other smaller, more scattered network structures are visible, including some with yellow nodes and lines. The overall color palette is dominated by teal and blue tones, with the purple and yellow nodes providing contrast.

**NETWORK CULTURES, POLITICS
AND PARTICIPATION**



RIGHT TO THE CITY! RIGHT TO THE MUSEUM!

Luise Reitstätter and Florian Bettel

Drawing on Henri Lefèbvre's *Right to the City* and on subsequent protest and artistic movements grounded in urban participation, this article proposes a correlated *Right to the Museum* by analysing how art practices can foster the active involvement of citizens in their cities and museums.

Introduction

Forty years after Henri Lefèbvre (1968) formulated the *Right to the City*, his slogan has not lost any of its topicality – quite the opposite. Recently, (neo-liberal) city governments all over the world have witnessed the formation of protest groups claiming the right to their city – as people feel deprived of civil, social and political, as well as economic rights (Harvey 2008, 2013; Mayer 2010). These heterogeneous groups demand equal access to, and participation in, legislative and executive processes that have an immediate influence on their urban lives. However, this participatory demand for inclusion does not necessarily mean the same thing in all of the various protest groups' claims. In fact, it was shown that different groups associate different wishes with Lefèbvre's catchy slogan. In New Orleans, for example, tenants of public housing projects wanted to return to their affordable apartments; in Madrid, sex workers and residents protested against expulsion from their neighbourhood; in Hamburg, artists squatted in the last historical buildings in the "Gängeviertel" in order to thwart investors' new building plans (Holm 2013).

Regardless of individual contexts and uses, the *Right to the City* functions as a demand that mobilises citizens with very different political, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in the political debate, who should have the benefits of the city (see various case studies in the reader edited by Holm and Gebhardt 2011). In the course of their struggles, most of the *Right to the City* movements were able to incorporate a set of techniques that empowered the heterogeneous groups of people to plan their actions and interact with a larger audience. Technology facilitated the constitution and maintenance of their activities, and, by occupying public spaces and

marking out territories, they achieved public awareness and media coverage (Bettel 2013). One could even argue, that it is precisely this combination of old school protest activities (such as, for example, occupying public spaces) with the new social media that enabled these movements to successfully perpetuate international public awareness.

One striking similarity was the involvement of artists and artistic activism in these movements. During the protests against the extensive rebuilding of Stuttgart's central station, "Stuttgart 21", for example, Schlossgartenfreiheit, a group of artists, established a temporary building within the protesters' camp and called it *Unser Pavillon* (2011). The artwork created there became a landmark for the campaign, provided a home for discussion and debate, and served as a haven during police action. In 2013 the violent eviction of a protest camp sparked outrage in Istanbul. The protesters contested the urban development plan for the Gezi Park, one of the few remaining green areas in the city centre. The performer Erdem Gündüz gave the campaign a very powerful visual representation by simply standing in Taksim Square for hours, staring at the Atatürk Cultural Centre. *The Standing Man* [Duran Adam] (2013) (Fig. 01) went viral on Social Media and reinforced media coverage of the events. There are more examples of artistic interventions attempting to occupy space in the media and the new technologies and, most of all, seeking attention to convey the concerns of the *Right to the City* campaign (e.g. Zefrey Throwell's *Ocularpation* (2011), the Centre for Artistic Activism/Yes Lab's online platform for artistic activism *Actipedia* (2014), and the group exhibition *I Am a Drop in the Ocean* (2014) in Künstlerhaus Wien).

In this paper, we will conceptualise the *Right to the Museum*¹ based on three assumptions: 1. The *Right to the Museum* refers to Lefèbvre's



Fig. 01 - Erdem Gündüz, *Standing Man* (2013), performance, Istanbul. Screenshot, Google Image search. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

demand for urban participation. Therefore, it mainly targets those museums that negotiate the notion of the city and those museums that directly seek to link themselves to their specific site and the surrounding communities. 2. Art, such as, for example, Urban Performance (Schütz 2013), often questions the 'city' as a reference point for a heterogeneous urban population with different needs and expectations. Urban art forms are especially powerful in making political, social, cultural, and economic issues sensually perceivable. These art forms therefore propel the *Right to the Museum*. 3. The *Right to the Museum*, as we see it, is part of the museum's everyday practice of cooperating with its (new) communities, and not – as we controversially wish to describe our thesis – mere theory.

In the first section, we will answer the question why the *Right to the Museum* has not yet been proclaimed. We will do so by focusing on the central demands that *Right to the City* movements have been making, such as, for example, participation, empowerment, and diversity that also refer to the changing cultural, social and political challenges that museums are confronted with. Despite their great efforts, museums in general may well have failed to implement strategies for the involvement of heterogeneous groups of people, and consequently to become an open space not only for the elite.² Subsequently, we will discuss selected artistic/curatorial works – many of which have been commissioned by cultural institutions or produced within an activist context – that have dealt successfully with issues of social inclusion and change. On the basis of these selected projects, we will exemplify which artistic practices possibly lead to a *Right to the Museum*, whose main features we will outline in the concluding section.

No Right to the Museum yet

Occupying urban public spaces is a common feature of the different *Right to the City* movements: Tahrir Square, Gezi Park, Maidan Square, Wall Street, etc. However, occupying buildings that are of significance for politics, science, the media or general discussion and debate has not been an integral part of the strategy. Institutions such as universities, parliaments, broadcasting stations or (city) museums have not evolved into important signifiers for the *Right to the City* movements. At the same time, the desire to change urban living conditions, which informs the thinking of these grassroots and bottom-up projects, has not been restricted to a sub-cultural, alternative movement; the *Right to the City* concept is being explored at an institutional level too. *The World Charter for the Right to the City (International Alliance of Inhabitants 2005)*, which was first developed by a set of international, national, and local civil society organisations at the World Social Forum in 2004, demands the internationally recognised human rights to food and water, housing, social security, work, an adequate standard of living, health, etc. for all inhabitants. Furthermore, the charter's demands also include leisure, information, organisation, and free association, participation and self-expression, education, and culture – issues that museums deal with directly. But, also at this institutional level, the *Right to the Museum* has not yet been explicitly formulated.

Shortly after Lefèbvre's slogan was coined in the 1960s, Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel conducted their seminal study *The love of art* (1991) [*L'Amour de L'Art* (1969)] in museums all over Europe. During their research, it became evident that the *Right to the Museum* is not something that the institution embodies *per se*. On the contrary, Bourdieu and Darbel were able to show that the museum

operates according to a subtle distinction, serving those who already have 'competent' tastes and making others feel insecure or simply out of place. Particularly strong efforts to change this questionable situation and to open the museum to a broader public were made in the 1970s, when the *zeitgeist* was preaching a "culture for all". In the 1980s, the New Museology followed by broadening the museum's range of topics with influences of feminism, cultural studies, political sciences, etc., distancing itself from the old museology, which, to quote Peter Vergo, was "too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums" (Vergo 1989: 3). The American museum scholar Stephen E. Weill (2002) even postulated that the value of museums could only be measured in terms of the relevance that they have for their users, who consist of people from different socio-cultural communities. This led to a further development of the New Museology and resulted in the so-called critical museum studies, which have amplified political topics and empirical methodologies by turning to disciplines such as sociology and anthropology (Macdonald 2011).

Nevertheless, as Volker Kirchberg argues (2010: 254), these new standards have never been fully incorporated into museum practice. The orientation of museums towards a well-educated middle/upper-class core audience and their focus on object-oriented scientific practices frustrate their intentions to become more relevant to different communities. Not even the more leisure-oriented, instead of education-oriented, approach that museums have adopted in recent years has been able to prevent people from feeling the need to act as 'good' visitors by approaching works of art with formal expertise instead of relying on their own subjective knowledge and specific backgrounds (Reitstätter 2015: 149). Consequently, the multiple-voice museum with its conscious focus on inequalities of ethnicity,

gender, sexuality and class has, in fact, been the subject of intense discussion for quite some time, but it is still far from becoming part of everyday museum practice (Karp/Lavine 1991; Mörsch 2014). Hence, there is an evident need to change perspectives inside the museum in order to break away from the hegemonic forms of presentation, as well as to empower people to use museums in their own way.

Artistic practice (potentially) leading to a *Right to the Museum*

There are several artistic practices that might (potentially) change this traditional museal situation. Especially the “social turn” in art (Bishop 2006) seeks to extend site-specific and conceptual strategies with the artistic interest to enhance collaboration and collectivity. Furthermore the growing number of biennials and new models for commissioning artworks in the public field also served to make experimental engaged art a highly current phenomenon. Contrary to the mechanisms of capitalism, in these projects the creative process often counts for more than the end product due to “a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas” (*ibid.*: 170). This can also be seen in the case of the artworks and the initiatives presented below which offer inspiration for conceptualising a *Right to the Museum* by providing new ways of dealing with art objects, relevant social issues and forms of communication. The six different site-specific and community-driven artworks consequently serve as case-studies to introduce three important criteria for a *Right to the Museum*. While the first category, “establishing relationships”, intensifies the dialogue between the art world and the everyday life (for example, by placing artworks in people’s homes), “empowering people”, the second category, addresses specific communities and their needs with a participatory artistic approach and open outcomes.

In comparison, the third category, “speaking out”, results in a more impulsive experience as artists try to overcome traditional roles and settings while leaving behind the comfort zone of active producers and passively enjoying spectators.

a) Establishing relationships

When it comes to re-thinking the art institution and its relationship with its audience, it is essential to reflect on the context in which artistic encounters usually take place. This is the museum space, traditionally a ‘white cube’ model, which is not neutral at all, as the art critic and artist Brian O’Doherty (1996) pointed out by deconstructing its ideology and showing its importance for the modern art system. As the predominant mode for the presentation of art in the 20th century, the ‘white cube’ continues to be very popular today. It still influences the meaning of art merely through its spatial setting with white walls, no windows and preferably light from above – referring to a sacred atmosphere that is disconnected from the outside everyday world. Whatever object is exhibited there will most likely be recognised as a piece of art. Additionally, the display setting of the ‘white cube’ raises the capitalistic valorisation of the artwork and potentially degrades it to the status of a transportable good and an apolitical object.

Consequently Jan Hoet’s so-called ‘simple idea’ (1986: 340) of showing art in private spaces owned by Ghent landlords must be seen as a pioneering initiative. The curator placed the tenants of about fifty flats in contact with a similar number of artists, among whom were Carla Accardi, Daniel Buren, Sol LeWitt, Bruce Nauman, Oswald Oberhuber, and Martin Walde. The concept of *Friends’ Rooms* [chambres d’amis] (1986) envisaged that the tenants and the artists would then work together on transforming the flat’s private sphere into an artistic space that would be made accessible to the public

during the summer of 1986. For this concept to work, it was crucial for both sides that Jan Hoet, as the director of the local host museum, did no more than provide the framework for the cooperation that would take place between the tenants and the artists. There were no expectations regarding either the results of this initiative or the reinterpretation of what a museum might feel like by relocating its exhibition space. The art works, the interventions and the newly created spaces all combined to shape the experience that the visitors and the participants had when entering the different venues scattered all around the town. So, as Jan Hoet put it, the concept's "simple naivety" (Hoet 1986: 331) was bound to have a subversive effect on the museum's inner logic, since it deliberately relinquished some of its authority to people outside its sphere. More freedom implied greater insecurity as the artists could not work under the 'safe' conditions that they normally find within a white cube. Furthermore, the visitors were required to see the exhibition with a new and open gaze, as they did not know exactly where to find the art or how to look at it properly.

Whereas Jan Hoet's *Friends' Rooms* led to various site-specific installations in a domestic, instead of a museum, context, Ricardo Basbaum's *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* [Você gostaria de participar de uma experienciência artística?] (since 1994) challenged viewing habits through the object that was placed at the core of the project: a rectangular steel bowl with a hole in the middle, painted entirely white except for its navy blue rims (Fig. 02). With its quite massive dimensions of 125 x 80 x 18 cm, the object may be touched, contrary to one of the museum's most prominent rules: not to touch the artworks. It is, in fact, almost impossible not to react physically to the object, which presents "a curious antidote to the professed dematerialization of art (and of life in general) in the



Fig. 02 - Ricardo Basbaum, *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* (1994 -), children and youth network, Kassel 2007. Available from: <http://www.nbp.pro.br/pop.php?imagem=/experiencias/img/hi/2_1177101281_kunst_und_nun.jpg>. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

digital age”³. After being invited to take home with them one of the several objects circulating worldwide and to spend a certain amount of time with it, participants are then free to decide what to do with the object, where to take it, and how to document their actions on the corresponding website. As a seemingly ‘useless’ object, it points precisely to multiple uses – having already served, for example, as part of a dance performance, a stage on which to present animal figures, a dish to be filled with freshly cooked food, the body of a children’s car, or often as a window for looking more closely at one’s personal surroundings.⁴

The twenty-year history of the project has proved that the object may look simple, but that it is capable of setting up different social situations. Or, as Pablo Lafuente theoretically explains it: “The work of art, this time, sees its visual character decreased, but only in order to give occasion to an experience that makes whoever enters into contact with it enter a new sensorial space and a reconfigured social space, in which new processes of subjectivation may occur” (Lafuente 2011: 85). *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* gives people the opportunity to establish an object-viewer relationship, with results being radically open and totally opposed to the museum setting, where the aesthetic experience is mainly restricted to looking at an object from a safe distance. With each person making their own decisions about how to participate and interact with the object, it becomes possible to develop a relationship with a work of art, and even to contribute to it in the context of everyday life, based on individual propositions and interests.

b) Empowering people

What might be seen as a banal interaction with an object at home refers to a much more significant change in the role of the art

audience today. Whereas artists do not limit themselves to showing art in a preconfigured museum setting, but instead use it to establish social situations, visitors themselves are able to (re)act beyond their role as silent recipients. With *Superchannel* (1999–2005), the Danish art collective Superflex, in collaboration with Sean Treadway, even took this approach further, by not producing any content of its own, but offering the audience the chance to become creators themselves.

Superchannel worked as a tool that enabled people to gather together and produce Internet TV via the installation of a physical TV studio. It started in 1999 with an invitation by Artspace 1% in Copenhagen to hold an exhibition that Superflex ‘misused’ to install an open internet TV studio, where people could sign up for broadcasting – at a time when live streaming was far from commonplace, and more than five years before YouTube opened its platform. While Superflex’s offer was mainly used by the ‘creative class’ (artists, DJs and anthropologists, among others), subsequent studio set-ups often dedicated themselves to a specific kind of local group. One of the most successful examples was *Tenantspin Channel*, a collaboration between the Liverpool Housing Action Trust (set up to create sustainable communities through the demolition of 67 tower blocks), the High-Rise Tenants Group (a group of residents), Superflex and FACT (the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) (Fig. 03). Beginning life as a pilot series of online broadcasts in 1999, the project continued until 2012.⁵

The digital archive contains about a thousand hours of broadcast content, ranging from serious topics such as rent increases to more light-hearted subjects such as food recipes or music – all developed and produced by groups of social housing residents (mainly over the age of 65). *Tenantspin* served as a tool for sharing experiences, for establishing a constructive dialogue, and – most importantly – for developing skills and creative practices with the goal of producing



Fig. 03 - Cathy and Olga from *Tenantspin Channel* (1999-2012), Internet broadcast at the Superflex studio, Copenhagen. Photo: Superflex. Courtesy of the artists.

online content. “Older people,” writes Laura Yates, the community programmer at FACT involved in the project, “are web-streaming pioneers, digital story-tellers and filmmakers; spoon-players, VJs and social campaigners”. These are professions that are not usually attributed to older people and they opened up new spaces for actions that proved to be “health-promoting and life-affirming” (Yates 2013).

Empowering people was also one of the main motivations that led artist and theorist Stefanie Wuschitz to found the hackerspace *Mz Baltazar’s Laboratory* (since 2009), together with fellow artists, hackers and theoreticians in Vienna⁶. *Mz Baltazar’s Laboratory* is organised by women and trans people, thus targeting two main areas of empowerment: technology and gender. It is based on the general awareness of “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) as a powerful tool in art, design and education. Serving as a complement to the immense amount of information available on the Internet about “doing things yourself”, hackerspaces provide opportunities for sharing know-how, tools and ideas to reinterpret technological artefacts. Dismantling, programming and assembling technology empowers participants to become active users and to understand the technological principles through which their day-to-day tools work. By reflecting on technology in a hands-on experience, certain cultural aspects become apparent. “In the hackerspaces I was researching, only one half to five percent of all members were females” (Wuschitz 2013). Despite the fact, that Stefanie Wuschitz is a trained hacker and has profound skills in programming and hardware-related manipulations (e.g. soldering), she experienced mechanisms of exclusion in these male-dominated hackerspaces; mechanisms that can surface in the form of very subtle expressions or blunt examples of sexual harassment. Even though she did not intend to found a women and trans only hackerspace, Stefanie Wuschitz identified the need for a

space where “participants can explore new concepts and techniques” and are not “intimidated by gender scripts” (*ibid.*). This venture is still ongoing, with activities that include workshops in Taiwan, Indonesia and Syria, as well as exhibitions, city walks and panel discussions, etc. These activities testify to the importance of empowering people to adopt the technological knowledge and skills needed to deal with a ubiquitous culture and gender-biased technology.

Projects like these thus work perfectly as a tool (to use Superflex’s concept), as they serve as “a model or proposal that can actively be used and further utilized and modified by the user”⁷. In general, artistic practices have proven valuable in empowering participants during the course of an action to work collaboratively on specific issues, and to find aesthetics that have already been prepared for their purposes. Instead of limiting aesthetic experiences to well-accepted behaviours and gender scripts, people can work with the impetuses offered by the artists and take them further – not being hidebound by rules of aesthetics and/or interpretation. Expressing one’s *Right to the Museum* is thus based on citizens who have access to a specific set of techniques and are empowered to analyse, discuss, communicate and synthesise information and technology.

c) Speaking out

Jan Hoet (1986: 332) was very clear when he stated that the artist is undoubtedly a great disturber, and, while a work of art placed within a museum is subject to a distant examination, exhibition formats that penetrate into the reality of everyday life provide a more confrontational way of seeing them. With his series *Instructions on How to Be Politically Incorrect* (2002–2003), the Austrian artist Erwin Wurm invades the public and media space. What his photographs depict are everyday, mostly urban, scenes disturbed by small details,

which are then amplified by the respective title of the work. *Two Ways of Carrying a Bomb* (2003) or *Spit in Someone's Soup* (2003) are intriguing: they make people laugh, but by being politically incorrect they also confront their worldviews. In *Two Ways of Carrying a Bomb*, Wurm depicts a man standing on a pavement somewhere in an urban setting, facing himself across the kerb. Despite the obvious manipulation, the photograph appears to be a snapshot, capturing a rain-soaked street, parked cars and traffic signs, from a non-specific perspective. The most prominent feature of the picture is the deformation of the man's body, showing his generally ill-fitting clothing. The man depicted on the left of the photograph appears to have an unnatural outgrowth close to his genitals, whereas the man facing him has a deformation of the same shape and size in his buttocks. The title of the work, *Two Ways of Carrying a Bomb*, then shifts the connotation from the anatomical features to a political context. Erwin Wurm started with this series of photographs in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in 2001 looking for a way to confront the ubiquitous thread of obliteration to be found in the narrative of politics and the media at that time, as well as the widely accepted violation of citizens' privacy. The artist claimed his position in this debate by pushing the limits of what might be considered humorous, of good taste, or politically correct.

Similarly, the Austrian experimental theatre group God's Entertainment does not limit itself to the sphere of politeness. In their work *Offending the passers-by* [Passantenbeschimpfung] (2008),⁸ they took Peter Handke and his famous *Offending the audience* [Publikumsbeschimpfung] (1966) as a starting point for questioning the relationship between the institution of the 'theatre' and its audience, which is normally regulated through dedicated spaces (stage and auditorium) and roles (speakers and listeners).

While Handke referred to the status of the audience becoming irrelevant as a passive opponent in the theatre space, *Offending the passers-by* transfers the action to lively transit zones in the public space, making no distinction at all between the audience and the performers. Employing labour market mechanisms, the performance script works with a “fast introduction, fast art and fast payment” (God’s Entertainment 2008), asking passers-by to tell the audience with a megaphone in their hands and, in the words of Peter Handke, where to get off (Fig. 04). With its actions taking place in the public space, God’s Entertainment does not only question the traditional modes of theatrical interaction. The group even uses the rawness of the site and its destructive potential to activate the passive audience, so that they become a real part of the show. Thus Wurm and God’s Entertainment show that being politically incorrect or impolite might help people to speak up and rebel against the limited scopes for action in art as well as in everyday life.

Time for a *Right to the Museum*

Being rude, being impolite, being creative, being active, being imaginative and being curious are consequently not only attributes that are possibly of use in an urban protest movement. In our view, these also drive the demand to a *Right to the Museum* that might be realised with artistic/curatorial strategies. Following the implications of the art projects presented above, the *Right to the Museum* means neither a mere expansion of target groups and a rise in visitor numbers (in order to appease public and private sponsors), nor a one-way-knowledge transfer (in order to disseminate canonical or hegemonic views), nor a theoretical perspective on audience needs (not having actually asked people themselves). Instead, the *Right to*



Fig. 04 - God's Entertainment, *Offending the passersby* (2008), performance, Vienna.
Photo: Peter Mayr. Courtesy of the artists.

the Museum positions itself in an insecure area, where people with different kinds of knowledge and different backgrounds interact in an artistic/curatorial/museum-based practice and negotiate their roles, their possible contributions and the collective goal.

Far from being romantic or idealistic, this shift involves some critical issues concerning questions of participation, hierarchies in collaboration, ways of communication, presentation modes and the evaluation of the project: Who is willing to take part in these processes? How can it be ensure that it is not just preaching to the converted? What about the payment of the participants? How to tackle different kinds of knowledge and speech barriers? Who is satisfied with the outcomes? These are just some of the questions that *Right to the Museum* projects need to reflect upon. Learning from new urban protest movements about the nature of their spirit and their structures might help us to engage with these aspects productively. Ongoing *Right to the City* movements impressively demonstrate the current relevance of participatory schemes in urban areas. Then often succeed in including highly heterogeneous groups of people, are developed at the grassroots level and implement sophisticated democratic processes.

At the same time, contemporary artistic developments show that a third wave of institutional critique is not only being formulated by artists, but also positions itself on the edges of an increasingly frazzled art field with “transversal practices that cannot be classified as purely or exclusively ‘artistic’” (Raunig and Ray 2009: xiv). Very often this form of critique leaves the museum space behind and also turns to the public space, simply because of its more general social and political concerns. It often even coincides with urban protest movements. In this case, the *Right to the Museum* joins the *Right to the City* by claiming possible sub-rights, such as the right to be visible,

the right to speak out, the right to urbanise, the right to write history and the right to form a vision for society. If the museum institution wishes to become a place where these concerns can be negotiated, in our view there are two aspects that need to be given serious consideration. The first of these aspects is connected to an intrinsic motivation to engage locally and to change given situations that must arise for all parties. The second aspect, which is clearly linked to the first one, is the relationship that the institution enjoys with its audiences. Only if there is a real interest and a real mutual appreciation, linked to a genuine offer to participate in processes both inside and outside the institution, the *Right to the Museum* inspired by the *Right to the City* can be put into action as a promising practice.

Notes

¹ The demand derives from a joint initiative of the authors, developed in conjunction with the artist, theoretician and curator Günther Friesinger.

² Changes in educational policies, as well as the establishment of educational programmes, have not led to any great changes within museum institutions, where the audience profile still largely consists of the well-educated upper class, a situation that is becoming even more elitist in art institutions (Black 2005: 18 ff.). A survey of Austrian state museums showed that at the KHM – Kunsthistorisches Museum, 57% of visitors are either studying or already have a university degree, while, at the Vienna Technical Museum, the figure is just 31%. Furthermore, people who have completed only compulsory schooling amount to 18% of the audience at the Vienna Technical Museum and just 3% at the KHM (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur 2004).

³ See arts.uchicago.edu/article/logan-center-exhibitions-ricardo-basbaum-oct-9-nov-25. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

⁴ For a full list of the different experiences ordered by date, the names of participants or the city, see www.nbp.pro.br/experiencia_data.php. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

⁵ *Tenantspin* was officially recognised as one of the groundbreaking collaborative art projects with an exhibition at FACT in 2013, see: <www.fact.co.uk/projects/tenantspin-the-incomplete-archive/>. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

⁶ See <www.mzbaltazarslaboratory.org>. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

⁷ See <www.superflex.net/information/>. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

⁸ See <www.gods-entertainment.org/index.php/archiv/archiv-2008/passantenbeschimpfung>. [Accessed 4 March 2015].

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ON GEO-POETIC SYSTEMS: VIRTUAL INTERVENTIONS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM SPACE

Roberto Terracciano

This essay investigates how artistic notions of nomadism, mobility and troubling spatialities challenge the neutrality of technology, questioning also the implications of geographical knowledge on the virtual architectures of the borderland and of the museum space.

CONNECTION (Hacking Borders/Border Hacking)

Hacking and *framing* are two features of Nature and Arts. Nature produces without a cause, for the sake of it. In deep waters as in thin air, in arid deserts and on fertile grounds, it mixes itself, it hacks its own products, for its own pleasure. Nature is indeed a perverse hacker who does and undoes for the pleasure of delivering new codings and new doings (Wark 2004: 4). Art participates in hacking the Earth from the perspective of its living beings. Human arts begin with a groove in the ground, setting the inside and the outside apart: agriculture creates an intensive production of goods from the amorphous proliferation of the Earth, while Architecture's fundamental elements – the wall and the window, the boundary and the access that constitute its framings – extract landscape from the Land, establishing a world outside as well as a world inside the bounded space taming the forces of the virtual¹ (Grosz 2008: 12).

As human artefacts (both digital and material), borders hack the discontinuity of the land, creating the allegedly homogeneous regions of the nation states. But nations, as Homi Bhabha argues, are but narrations: "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye... The nation's 'coming into being' as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social life rather than the discipline of social polity, emphasizes [the] instability of knowledge" (Bhabha 2000: 1). Like language and knowledge, the making of the world is a Janus-faced process: on the one hand, it frames new spaces, on the other hand, it closes them down in order to extract value.

In this paper, I deal with GPS technology, cutting and hacking the globe according to the striations set by the operations of framing and re-framing. The Geo-Poetic Systems of the title of this paper

hint both at the Global Positioning System and at Geo-Poiesis, the ability of mobile technologies to produce space, to make worlds. The projects I am going to introduce are examples of arts using the GPS grid, forcing and bending it to alternative cartographies that question the consistency of both the territory of modern nation states and that of the museum space. The makers of these interventions are artistic collectives and critical media practitioners, who emerged in the 1990s from the prolific ground of Net-Art and engaged mailing lists and groups such as *Rhizomes*, *Net-Time*, *The Thing* and *Critical Art Ensemble*. While the project I introduce in this paper use Augmented Reality, their approaches to this technology are substantially different.

John Craig Freeman and Mark Skwarek's collaboration started in the collective ManifestAR (where AR stands for Augmented Reality), in a project called *ProtestAR* (2011) where the media-artists took issue with the clearing of Zuccotti Park, during the *Occupy Wall Street* movement. Skwarek and Freeman invited the electronic protesters to send the ProtestAR site animated GIF files tagged with Zuccotti Park coordinates, which were later visualised on the augmented reality layer of *ProtestAR*, on smartphone screens.

ManifestAR's *Border Memorial: La Frontera de Los Muertos* is an augmented reality layer running on the LayAR application, showing *calaveras*² on a mobile screen at the exact coordinates where human remains were found in the South Western Borderland (Fig. 01). In Skwarek's and Freeman's memorial, *calaveras* actualise the memory of the migrants whose path had been interrupted by the dangerous conditions of the desert and by the surveillance assemblage of the border, which somehow forced them to move to unsafe places. A virtual section of the electronic reproduction of the borderland has been cut and moved to the yard of the MoMA in New York (October

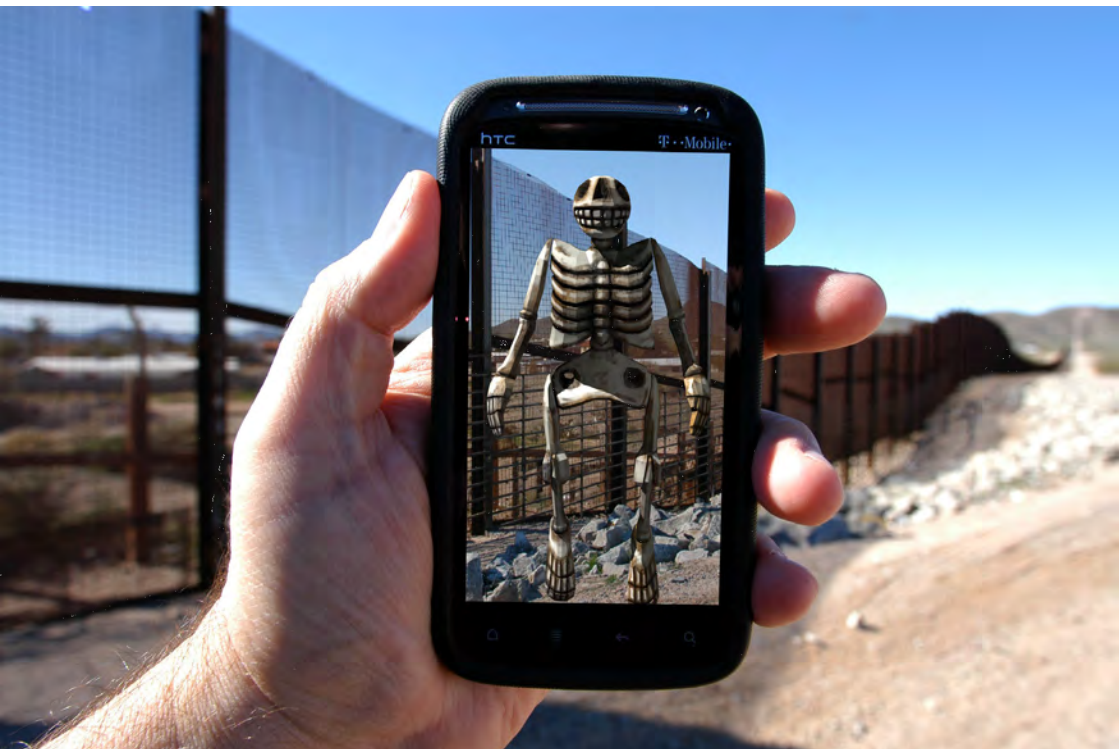


Fig. 01 - John Craig Freeman & Mark Skwarek, *Border Memorial: Frontera de los Muertos* - Border fence near the Lukeville crossing in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona, USA / Sonora, Mexico. Available from: <<https://bordermemorial.wordpress.com>>.

2010) , where visitors can enter the uncanny memorial by tuning into the *La Frontera de los Muertos* layer in the Augmented Reality browser. While criticising the alleged neutral role of the Museum as immune from the logics and the logistics of the market, ManifestAR questions the borders by overlaying other stories on the walls of the museum and at the border of the nation state.

Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 is a diverse collective of artists, makers, tactical media practitioners, writers and theorists born in 2008 around Ricardo Dominguez. In its 1.0 version, EDT was a tactical media collective that gathered together to grant electronic support to the Zapatista protests by creating electronic disturbance softwares. *FloodNet* (1998) was an example of tactical net.art consisting of an applet that aimed at performing virtual strikes by sending Distributed Denial of Service attacks (DDoS) to US and Mexican governmental websites, a practice still used today by Anonymous. Their project, *Transborder Immigrant Tool*, is a gesture of border disturbance, a complex assemblage of hacktivism, video-art, poetry and mobile technologies, helping migrants to orient themselves in the desert of the Borderland with cheap and hacked telephones, using the GPS grid to map safe passages across the border. Tips to survive the desert are delivered in the form of poetry about the flora and the fauna of the US/Mexican Desert. Here, the Global Positioning System is turned into a Geo-Poetic System.

In the next section, I will go deeper into the GPS post-human technology by looking at the first lines that drew its geography. The third section will then consider Augmented Reality not only as a tool, but also as the expression of the modular composition of contemporary capitalism. In the fourth and fifth parts, I will take a closer look at the virtual memorial and at the electronic performance, underlining their specificities. By way of conclusion, I will establish the

connection holding together the configuration of the homogeneous nation state and the museum as its cultural dimension.

WRITING Lines (Against Humanism)

The global modernity of those places has deep roots in the 'great narration' of humanism and colonialism, framed by sheer boundaries in the orthogonal aesthetics of meridians and parallels.

In his classic book, *The Nomos of the Earth* (1950), controversial political theorist Carl Schmitt drew the first lines for a cartography of modern western culture. While his book explores the coming into being of the *European public law* since the Roman Empire, I think it is worthwhile dwelling on the so-called discovery of the Americas in 1492 that gave rise to different treaties setting the New and the Old Worlds apart. The treaties of *Tordesillas* (1494) and *Zaragoza* (1529) established a global *respublica christiana* divided into two by the Portuguese and the Spanish Crowns under the aegis of Pope Alexander VI. *Las rayas* were replaced by the *lines of amity* orally agreed upon during the signing of the Peace of Cateau Cambrésis (1559), in an attempt made by England, France and Holland to question the division of the World set by the Spaniards and the Portuguese (Miéville 2005:179). The amity lines were drawn only a few score miles from the Azores; not only did they divide the Newfoundlands between the French and the English, but also established the boundaries limiting the *European Human Space* from the chaotic space of nature. According to Schmitt, up until that date, piracy was not even considered a crime, as it took place at sea, a *res communes omnium* (a free common space), a place where the grooves and the striations of agriculture and geopolitics couldn't be drawn. But the cartographic technology allowed for

the division of the globe into slices and cloves, with mathematical certainty. Schmitt explains Hobbes's motto, *man is man's wolf*, by pointing out that, precisely beyond those lines drawn by the rising Liberism (no matter what race was involved), the place was a free space where the rule of the strongest prevailed, a free space for European conquest and domestication (Schmitt 2006). Renaissance in the arts and in techniques is deeply rooted in the History of global modernities, and so it is the Industrial Revolution and the Digital Revolution. Thus technology is first a '*logos* about technology', a reflection on technology itself (Latour 2013, 238) as Iain Chambers puts it, the technology is humanism: "contrary to popular perception and superficial sentiment, technology and humanism coincide to become equivalent terms [...] Occidental metaphysics and technology co-exist in a common will to world the world in a subjective and subjugated image" (Chambers 2001: 56).

While Schmitt was writing from the vantage point of industrialisation, attention has recently focused on the topological deformations of bordering policies in the digital global era. According to Aiwha Ong, the quality of global capitalism is *latitudinal*. That is, it frames – at different latitudes – systems of governmentality and incarceration regimes, fostering democratic processes, on the one hand, and creating zones where the normal course of the law is interrupted, on the other hand (Ong 2006). The last decade of the past century witnessed a season of enthusiasm in the western world regarding the erasure of borders, a season inaugurated by the much televised images of the pulling down of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, but it probably ended with the viral videos of airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers in New York, in 2001. In this decade, international treaties were signed in North America (North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994) and in Europe (Treaty of Maastricht in 1992) that erased some

borders inside their economic areas and reinforced the borders of those enlarged communities on their outside. Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) link this trend to the multiplication of labour conditions, which became heterogeneous and weakened the contractual power of workers. In this scenario, borders became legal *dispositifs* of differential inclusion, set at different scales in the topological plane of an ever deforming globe (Mezzadra and Neilson 2012: 71). Borders are removed and rebuilt at different levels, creating conditions of dis-homogeneity inside one region of the space, the nation state. According to Mezzadra and Neilson, borders are to be considered as a “bundle of social relations that involve the active subjectivity of border crossers as much as the interdictory efforts of border police and other control agencies” (2013: 267). This is the reason why, rather than simply protesting against the border, border artists take the agency of the border crossers into account and give up the fixation and the spectacularisation of the borderland’s architecture of power that de-potentiates border crossing politics.

The subject of Modern History, the human wearing the ‘White Heterosexual Man’s skin’ is thus confronted with the heterogeneous multitudes of queer subjectivities performing the border, by living it and by crossing it (Biemann 1999). Gloria Anzaldúa describes the boundary as a *herida abierta*, an open wound that never congeals, where the “first and the third world grates”, where the space between classes, genders and races “shrink[s] with intimacy” (Anzaldúa 1987). The ‘forked tongue’ of the Chicana writer utters a mongrel and blasphemous poetry, making love with prose and theory. In her queer spell, which mixes the conquerors’ languages with the ancient ones, Spanglish and Aztec words alternate, but do not melt together. Borderlands and, in particular, the steep line that runs between the US and Mexico, are the places for the production of modernity: in

fact, *maquiladoras* are factories used for the material production of hardware for digital worlds, where thousands of women work with little protection, or no protection at all. Borders, in the digital age, just like colonialism at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, produce cyborg-subjects used by humanist technologies (or by humanism-as-technology) as steam engines or calculating machines before trains and computers were invented. As the feminist philosopher Beatriz Preciado writes, “Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution rest on the reduction of slaves and women to the same status as the animal, and on the reduction of the three (slaves, women and animals) to that of (re)productive machines” (Preciado 2014)³.

Contrary to Humanism, post-human theories (Braidotti 2013; Hayles 2008; Haraway 1991) seek to reveal the traits of active subjectivities in the positively charged cyborg bodies, reversing the direction of power, as in reverse-engineering processes. From this standpoint, the code is the place of negotiation for power and politics. Code is the post-human language *par excellence*. It is also the only executable language (Galloway 2004: 165), operating by means of speech acts through *flickering signification*. Katherine Hayles contrasts the flickering signifiers of the code with Lacanian floating signifiers, whose relation with the signified is based upon an absence, and hence amounts to a castration (Hayles 2008: 30). While cyclically updating the words I type on my computer with a frequency of 2.5 GHz, the onscreen flickering signifiers do not castrate me inasmuch as they interrupt my mastery of the symbolic, but because the machine-interfacing transits me “from [being] human to something radically different than human” (Hayles 2008: 33). The pervasive connection to the machine queers my body as I infect the machine with humanity: cyborgs blur the boundary between the human and the animal, between the organism and the machine, and then between the

physical and the non-physical (the actual and the virtual) (Haraway 1991). Not only is code a performative language, but it is the very 'stuff' that everyday life is made of. Code is pervasive inasmuch as it helps in drawing and managing the spaces of contemporaneity that are serialised and fully coded, but not like Marc Augé's *non-places*. Mobile technologies augment the space: the code/space they produce is completely permeated and signified by code (Kitchin and Dodge 2011: 66). Let us think of the movements of our bodies inside an airport, how they are triggered by electronic information (timetables, gates, transfer directions) and let us think of the routes followed by the so-called illegal immigrants and how they are infected with natural dangers (the sea, the desert) and surveillance apparatuses. Mobile technologies send us back to the map of the Schmittian globe and to the webs of the Global Positioning System. ManifestAR's virtual memorial and Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0's hacktivist performance question this technology and transduce the space of the national territory, as well as that of the museum, by touching their electronic geographies. In the next sections, I will try to show how the fixed positionality of a subjectivity always already inscribed into a pre-coded space is forced and broken open to the process of geo-hacking and world making.

AUGMENTED Reality as Method (The map is ~~not~~ the territory)

The helmet-and-gloves virtual reality is a dream without exit, a domain of pure representation with rules of its own, a map without a territory. Augmented reality instead is an invisible map of data that covers the entire surface of the globe in a 1:1 relation with the territory it represents. The Korzybski paradox of the 1:1 map is cited and commented on by various authors. Jean Baudrillard, quoting Luis

Borges on this issue, writes that maps are not the territory because they are layers in the *process of simulacra*. Through this process, the map ceases to be the reflection of a profound reality, denatures it, masks its absence, it is freed from the relation with the territory; finally, the map becomes its own simulacrum (Baudrillard 1994). But, before Baudrillard, cybernetician Gregory Bateson, argued that the cognition of the territory through the map is already mediated by other media, the cartographer's hand and the viewer's inverted retinal image, for example. According to Bateson, there was no such thing as the "real thing", or at least it was not that interesting (Bateson 1987: 455). The problem with maps is their representational quality. But, as I showed in the previous section, this is something that maps share with language. And even an executable language like code flickers in signification for the human and the machine. Maps, just like codes, are problematic because they are both representational *and* performative: how can we tell that the map is not the territory when we see ourselves mapped out in the diagram of orthogonalised transit-maps and in the cognitive representations of complex infographics? Information is ubiquitous, and yet it is not everywhere: it is materially stored in specific servers located in the coldest areas of the planet so as to cool off the heat of calculation. Therefore, I would rather say that the map is all over the territory and it performs the site-specific information like a differential tension that runs between the north pole of the server and the south pole of client devices.

The stacking of information in one place replicates the modes of production of digital (audiovisual) arts and computing in general, the so-called *non-destructive editing*. This process occurs for example in *Adobe Photoshop* layers or in *Ableton Live* tracks, not to mention the *Apple Time Machine* that saves structural information about modified information on a disk. Augmented Reality works

according to the same principles: when the client device connects to a server via the Augmented Reality Browser, information and three-dimensional objects are visualised on site, on the smartphone screen, superimposed on the actual field of view, revealing the dense infospace we already live in (PJ Rey 2011).

While Augmented Reality is often associated with screen surfaces, augmented spaces offer the opportunity to rethink the space and its related practices as they go far beyond the intertwining of cinema and architecture in the form of Robert Venturi's "information surface": augmented arts step outside the screens of the black box and outside the white cube architectures affording architects and curators the opportunity "to treat space as layers of data" (Manovich 2006: 236). Using Augmented Reality as a method allows to deal with this technology by expressing the continuous production of data into the augmented space. Not only does Augmented Reality make the density of site-specific information located on the GPS grid visible, but it also conveys the way our bodies move to the pace and the rhythms of algorithms. The layering of information designs new geographies that do not represent the Schmittian horizontal *nomos* of the Earth; they rather perform the vertical *nomos* of the Clouds (Bratton 2014). Borders are already disconnected from the continuous space of the national territory and are reconnected to the discontinuous spaces of the capital. According to this configuration, borders are all over the place: they are the crystallisation of cultural, political and economic trends.

Augmented Reality individuates the layered perception of reality as a metastable process of space formation. According to French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, metastability is characteristic of every process of form-taking (*prise de forme*): it is the condition of false equilibrium of software codings when a minimal change succeeds in

transducing one domain into another (Simondon 1989). ManifestAR explores the uncanny territory of digital information in the nation state and in the museum, while Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 distorts the very space defined by borders through Geohacking and Locative Art. These terms first appeared in William Gibson's novel *Spook Country* (2007), describing how artists use the GPS latitudes and longitudes to turn cyberspace inside out. Gibson introduces geohacking as a misreading of the word cyberspace "see-bare-escape", as the French speaking protagonist reads it (Gibson 2007: 20), like a void space to look through, a blank page to write on, an uncertain place that goes through deformations, misspellings and blasphemies. Transduction of the Earth is the aim of Geohacking and Locative Art: they do not question the existence of borders *tout court* as illegal or unethical, they rather exploit the interstices generated by discontinuities, in order to disturb border architectures.

STILL, It moves (Uncanny Necrocartographies)

ManifestAR's necrocartography is a process of reverse engineering for contemporary geopolitics. Reverse engineering extracts information about the process of designing human artefacts, by breaking them open and by studying their mechanisms. Geopolitics is the technology that ManifestAR tries to disassemble and re-assemble through augmentation. The acupuncture architecture of *calaveras* is a composite blurred photograph of the virtual bodies of the migrants who lost their lives in the act of crossing the border (Fig. 02). There, in the middle of the desert, their bodies exhausted their movement, accumulating all their past into the surface of the present. In order to take a closer look at ManifestAR's intervention, I will briefly sketch three main themes underlying *La frontera de los*

muertos: the duration of the memorial, the movement it triggers and its relationship with the museum space.

By 'duration', I mean the philosophical conception of 'time' that dates back to Henri Bergson and continues with Gilles Deleuze in the 1990s and with Brian Massumi in the first years of this century. 'Duration' discards the conception of time as either cyclical or linear: these are two-dimensional representations that do not take the multiplicity of virtuality into account (Deleuze 1991: 113). The virtuality of memory is an out-of-focus tracking of the present, which is different in kind and does not act on the present directly, except as a memory-image that takes form in the present. As in Eisenman's *Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe* in Berlin (2005), in *Border Memorial*, the perceptive differential between the surface of the physical architecture of the museum (the actual) and the depth of the virtual memorial guarantees no comprehension, no connection between the individual experience of the memorial and the timing, the duration, of the memorial itself (Eisenman, Galiano and Keys 2003: 314). There is neither nostalgia nor memory of the past, but only an engineered perception that helps the body travel both in time and space. Virtuality – as opposed to actuality, rather than to reality – is itself real and immanent to matter. If actualisation expresses the quality of the ever-changing present, virtuality insists both in the past and in the present. Duration points to the coexistence of past and present accumulating in the electronic event of the memorial. It does not encompass finite moments in the flux of time; it rather frames its becoming like pictures framing the 'instantaneous velocity' of the light on a film, a problem mathematically solvable with the calculation of the limit of a function. As Massumi argues, "Zeno's philosophical arrow" never gets lost in the stillness of an infinite moment (Massumi 2002: 6), but it trembles and flickers on the video at the moment of its passage, when the computer crashes.

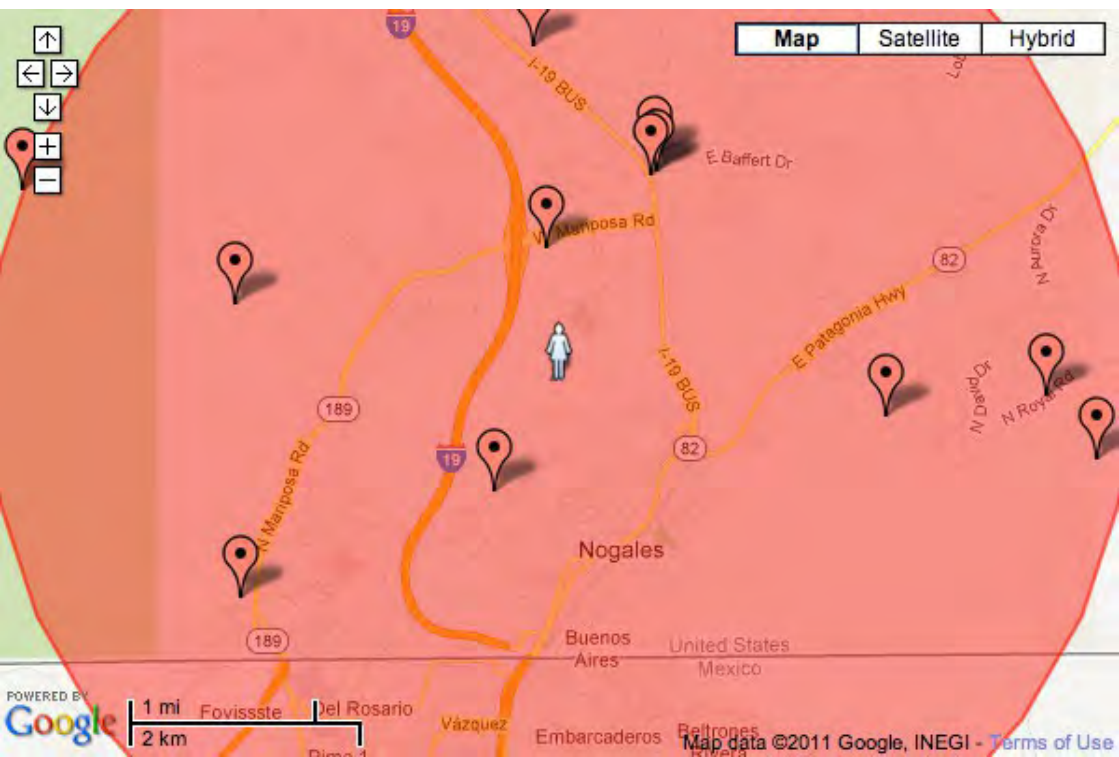


Fig. 02 - John Craig Freeman & Mark Skwarek, *Border Memorial: Frontera de los Muertos* - LayAR test showing a dozen POIs near Nogales, Arizona, USA, 2 January 2012. Available from: <<https://bordermemorial.wordpress.com>>.

Although 'calaveras' are uncannily still, the geography they draw is the afterlife of their movement, it is the past that is stacked on the surface of the present, an archive of singular events falling onto the plane of the digital layer like asteroids crashing on the moon. If, as Massumi argues, stillness is impossible, identity (identity-in-time) is impossible as well. This leads to the reprogramming of identity policies as nomadic politics: movement questions not only 'identity' but also the affordances of the museum space as well. *Border Memorial* draws a necrocartographic map of the borderland, infecting the cyborg-visitors with fear or curiosity, urging their bodies to movement and contemplation. When spread to the latitudes of the yard of the MoMA, the virtual memorial disturbs the normal flow of visitors moving inside the physical space of the museum according to the paths determined by the alternative codings of the digital objects. Movement sets the agenda for subjectivities caught on the electronic grid of geo-localisation systems.

TRANSITIVITIES and contagion (Breaking the grid open)

While, in *Border Memorial*, visitors are called upon to follow the movements of the migrants, Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0 (EDT2.0) exposes the bare materiality of hacked handsets in the white box of the gallery (Fig. 03). Those devices were used by migrants to open safe passages into the physical ground and onto the electronic grid. *Transborder Immigrant Tool* (TBT) does not adopt stealth tactics, but it claims the visibility on the grid for the subjectivities of migrants, on whose bodies the electronic assemblage of the border is performed and inscribed. EDT 2.0 responds to the assemblage made of drones, helicopters, TV screens and police patrols with video poetry that infects

the cells of mobile communication and provides them with clandestine information augmenting the experience of migration.

EDT2.0's work is inspired by Richard Long's walking sculptures and by Heath Bunting's *xborder art* (2001 - 2011). Long's land art is a human framing that arranges nature's production according to macro-patterning generated by human logic and aesthetics, while Bunting's performance documents the ruins of Europe's internal borders with situationist mappings (Fig. 04). *TBT* uses the *Virtual Hiker Algorithm*, designed by Brett Stalbaum, in order to reproduce Long's and Bunting's practices on the unwired networks of the GPS. In *Sustenance*, a play connected to *TBT*, the chorus reads:

"Today's borders and circuits speak at 'lower frequencies,' are 'shot through with chips of Messianic time.' Might (O chondria!): imagine the chips' transliteration and you have 'arrived' at the engines of a global positioning system—the transitivity of the Transborder Immigrant Tool. Too: when you outgrow that definition, look for the 'trans' of transcendentalisms, imperfect as overwound pocketwatches, 'off'-beat as subliminalities (alternate forms of energy which exceed Reason's predetermined star maps)" (Electronic Disturbance Theater and b.a.n.g.lab 2010).

The movement on the electronic map is a political tactic in the making of *TBT*. The *trans* in transborder 'captures' the transitivity of the migrant, the experience of being crossed without moving. It might be useful to recall, at this point, that the American South West was once Mexican. Only after the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo did California, Arizona, Utah, Nevada and parts of Colorado and Wyoming become part of the USA, as did the people dwelling in those territories (Fig. 05). Migrant subjectivities are always in transition on

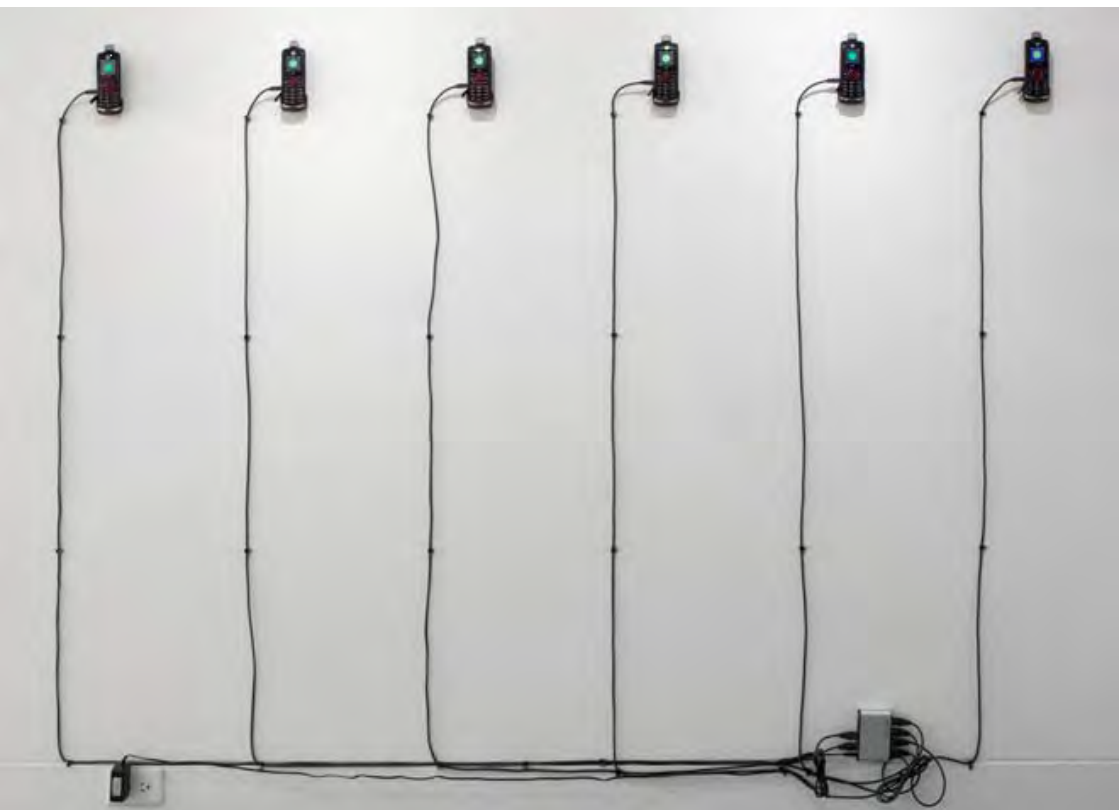
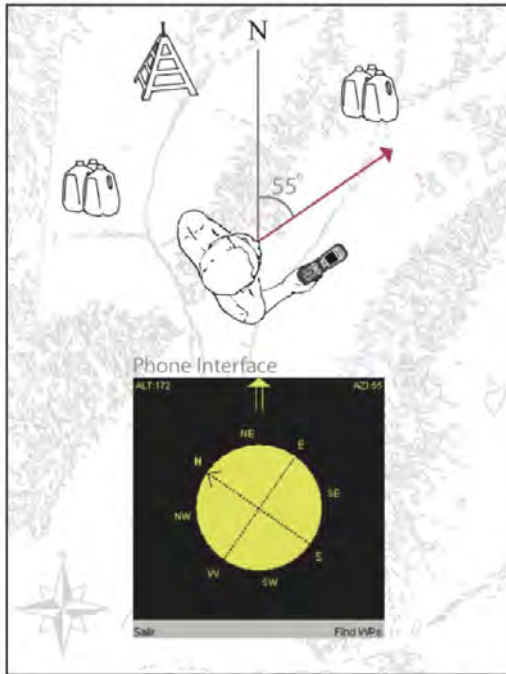


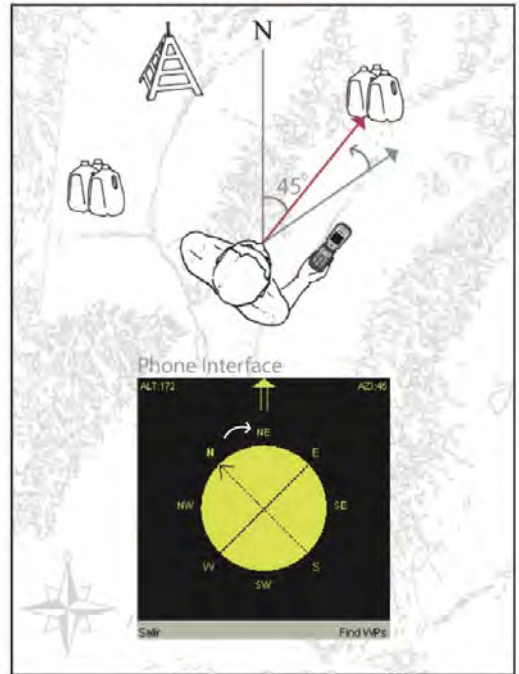
Fig. 03 - Electronic Disturbance Theater/b.a.n.g. lab, *Transborder Immigrant Tool* / *Motorola i455 hacked as TBT*, California Biennial of 2010 in Orange County Museum, California, USA.

1. Normal Navigation



While walking with the device in hand, the mobile interface represents a traditional compass interface

2. Course Alteration



If the user changes his or her direction of travel, the compass face will adjust to represent the user's new course.

Fig. 04 - TBT - Transborder Immigrant Tool Project Description explanation from Tactical Media Files. Available from: <http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/picture.jsp?objectnumber=52379>.

the grid. Their passage precedes the grid; the grid just happens to emerge through legal praxis and codings (Massumi 2002: 5). Praxis precedes codings, flows precede maps, and maps precede territories. When the body is caught in the architecture designed by algorithms based upon 19th-century Lombrosian theories (Kember 2013), the body responds in two ways: either hiding itself or claiming a room of its own on the electronic grid, that is, claiming its own electronic narration. Massumi suggests that movement is always to be preferred to the politics of positioning and grid-locking: a fixed position on the grid provides subjectivities with an oppositional framework of constructed significations, but it plays in futureless architectures. Similarly, stealth tactics demand the search for alternatives to present configurations of cybernetic geopolitics, while claiming visibility is a quest for the transduction of electronic networks that starts *within* those networks.

While transduction is a physical process involving the conversion and delocalisation of an energy flow within a system, according to Simondon's traditional definition, it is:

“a physical, biological, mental, or social operation by means of which an activity propagates itself from one location to another within a given domain, basing this propagation on a structuring of the domain operating from one place to another: each region of the constituted structure serves the following region as a principle and model, as a beginning of its constitution, so that a modification extends itself progressively at the same time as this structuring operation” (Simondon quoted in Combes 2012: 6).

Transductive processes are contagious and work like patterns that are conditioned by one single element of 'disturbance': a grain of sand in the oyster becomes a pearl; slightly different weather conditions grow

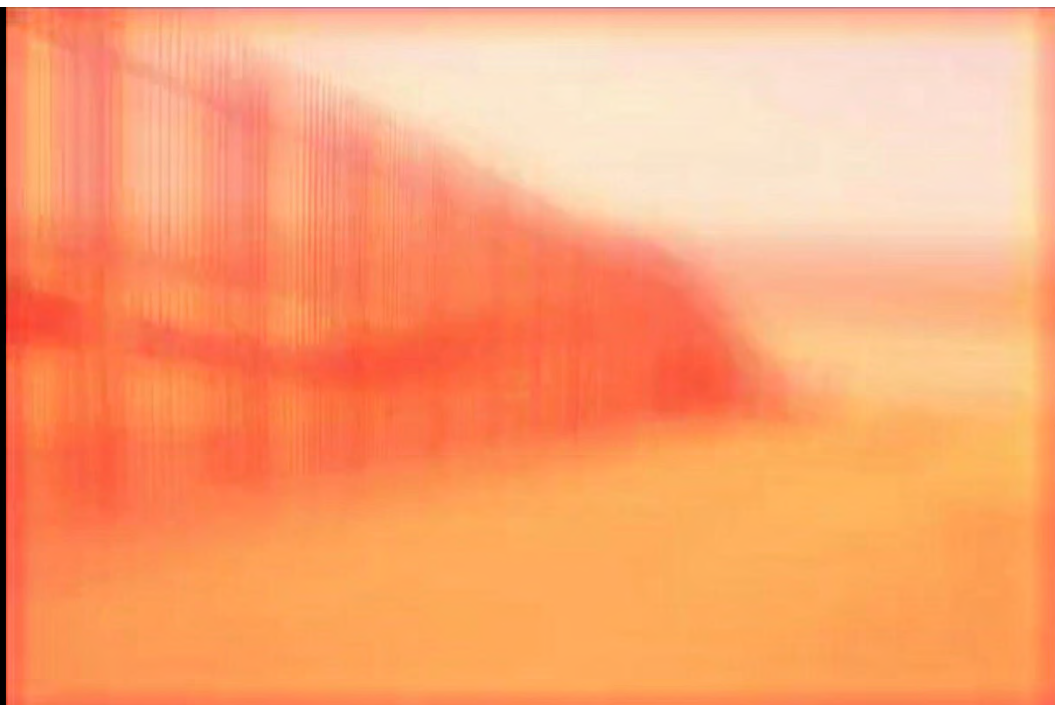


Fig. 05 - Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0., *Transition*, 2009. Still from the video.
Available from: <<http://vimeo.com/6109723>>.

different ice-crystals. Coding is immanent to these processes, and that is why networks should be experienced not as link-node structures, but rather as a space as patchy as cellular networks (Munster 2013). The nomadism of *TBT* emerges in antenna-architectures that have deep roots in the ground where they are built and yet they interact with the global space/time of radio waves and digital production.

DISCONNECTION (A museum for cyborg subjectivities)

In this paper, I have tried to map the deep implications of geographical knowledge and humanist expertise emerging into the complex cybernetic architectures of the border; I have also attempted to show how hacktivist and art-ivist practices respond with aesthetics and codings that are alternatives to border architectures. Most importantly, I have tried to underline that neutral policies for arts and technology, modern or contemporary, cannot exist. However, the total rejection of museum spaces and technological assemblages is of course not an option. Escaping from them is as useless as disengaging. In fact, the art-working of the cyborgs is immanent to the transformation of the world and claims the visibility of its in(ter)ventions. The two projects, that I have introduced, show that the arts invent in the etymological sense of the words 'invention' and 'intervention': they *come from* the fold of reality in a plane of immanency, allowing for "*newness entering the world*" (Bhabha 1994). Arts and technologies arrange matter differently, running on a *continuum of repair*, to paraphrase the artist Kader Attia. The power assemblages that brought us the technologies of cheap mobile communication can be used to draw new geographies, to gather new communities, to imagine new museums. This is the futurity of blasphemous arts hacking the world as given (the world as a *datum*, the world as *data*): blasphemy is a

tactic that stays inside reality, saying something different – and saying it differently.

Haraway's cyborg (1991: 151) is blasphemous inasmuch as she is the illegitimate offspring of militarism, capitalism and the social state and disowns the disciplines assigned by the three. According to cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha, instead,

“Blasphemy is not a misrepresentation of the sacred by the secular; it is a moment when the subject-matter or the content of a cultural tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated, in the act of translation. Into the asserted authenticity or continuity of tradition, ‘secular’ blasphemy releases a temporality that reveals the contingencies, even the incommensurabilities, involved in the process of social transformation” (Bhabha 1994: 225).

In this temporal rearrangement, the ‘post’ in post-colonial, post-modern and post-digital has little to do with what remains on the other side of the hyphen: it does not concern solely the European subject after those narrations, and nor does it speak *about* the European Other either, as an exotic subject to be exhibited in the white cube. It is rather an accumulation, a complication of that part of the story, the afterglow occurring when that story has ceased to be an ‘adventurous’ novelty and has started to silently structure everyday life, becoming invisible and, at the same time, claiming its neutrality. The spaces and the disciplines of modernity are imbued with colonialism (Said 1995), with the nation state and the museum being two articulations of the colonial cultural dimension. The cultural project of the nation state is to create a homogeneous cultural space within a bounded territory that “works by policing its borders, producing its people (Balibar 1991), constructing its citizens, defining its capitals, monuments, cities, waters, and soils, and by constructing

its locales of memory and commemoration, such as graveyards and cenotaphs, mausoleums and museums” (Appadurai 1996: 198).

This statement is in accordance with Foucault’s definition of heterotopia, a place that one is forced into through a system of openings, closings and arrangements that have the dual function of proving all spaces illusory and yet creating another space (a space for the others) of a taxonomic order in a well-arranged fashion. Museums, in Foucault’s view, are heterotopias of time, heterochronies, where all different things are enclosed in one space out of time, subtracting art works from the passing of time itself, protecting them from their natural attitude of becoming ruin (Foucault 1985: 47). This enclosure perpetuates and reproduces the 19th-century model of knowledge where Zeno’s arrow is framed in the infinite moment of its shooting. On this track, Iain Chambers tries to envisage the museum still to be created. This museum is not a space where Otherness is simply included, re-ordered, exhibited and archived according to Western logics. On the contrary, the archive of the post-colonial museum should re-invent the archive itself, questioning it from the next future, troubling western notions of authorship, ownership and trustworthiness (Chambers 2012: 24).

It should be clear now how *Border Memorial* and *TBT* dislocate, in two different ways, the architectures inside and outside the museum space, shaking western oculo-centrism by overlaying uncanny visions or by guiding the migrants’ movement in a visionless space of pure electronic data. They look with exophoric eyes to the past through memory, and to the future through movement. In the uncertain localities of the GPS network, they build a space of continuous individuation for cyborg subjectivities, an archive of data resulting from the performance of the migrants’ movements. It is worth noting that nomadism and mobility are two attributes of movement that

are often confused. While mobility allows pre-coded movement via invisible and intimate media and through immaterial and diffuse bordering policies, the nomadic aesthetics of cyborg art calls for the visibility of what is hidden under the surface of screens and under the closed architectures of proprietary softwares: entangled bodies, wires, cables, computers and machines, where information and electronic impulses are switched, commuted and transduced.

The *cyborg* nicely captures the dynamics and the positionality of the subjectivities enmeshed in the topological spaces of contemporary capitalism. Here, the links and the nodes of the network undergo a process of transduction and transformation in the act of movement produced through border-crossing. *Border Memorial* is blasphemous inasmuch as it infects the space of the museum with the spatiality and the temporality of the borderland's peripheral geographies. *TBT* opens a safe place into the secured grids of control. The irony of the nomadic cyborg, equipped with hacked cellphones, corrodes and consumes the grid, turning it into something else. Cyborgs are committed to the practices of deterritorialisation that make both the continuity of the nation and that of the museum unstable. At the same time, they stretch the border, remove it, and make the political stakes that led to its emergence visible. If contemporary capitalism operates with borders and zonings, with disconnections, with latitudes and scales fostering material and creative production, on the one side, and securing consumption, on the other side, new practices exploiting the present configuration must be contemplated, and new logistics impeding any sort of crystallisation of art-processing into objects of consumption must be encouraged by rethinking the museum space, by diffusing curatorial practices. Then disturbance becomes tactics and movement becomes creation.

Notes

¹ I follow Grosz's Deleuzian use of the word "virtual" intended as lines of differentiation. Virtuality is not a synonym for digital and it is not opposed to reality, as it is already real in as much as it is pure potentiality. It is rather opposed to possibility that expresses a reduced and limited range of realities.

² *Calaveras* are Aztec traditional effigies, an example of religious syncretism in the shape of joyful skeletons.

³ My translation, from the original text in French: *La Renaissance, les Lumières, le miracle de la révolution industrielle reposent donc sur la réduction des esclaves et des femmes au statut d'animal et sur la réduction des trois (esclaves, femmes et animaux) à celui de machine (re)productrice.*

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ART PRACTICE IN COLLABORATIVE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

Catarina Carneiro de Sousa and Luís Eustáquio

This article addresses and characterises creative art processes in Collaborative Virtual Environments (CVEs), examining how most art works in CVEs escape and resist taxonomic classification given their unstable and fluid nature, which is often open and participatory.

Introduction

Collaborative Virtual Environments (CVEs) are digital, distributed virtual spaces that support collaborative activities (Churchill, Snowden and Munro 2001: 4). In this article, we will focus on the Second Life (SL) platform, as well as on others that use the same data communication protocol, based on OpenSimulator (OS), since their visual and procedural aspects are very similar. We chose to examine these platforms in particular because they allow any number of users to collaborate in the creation of very diverse artefacts, and because, at the time of writing, both SL and OS house an abundantly productive artistic community. We speak of collaboration and creation, and it is important to stress the creative affordances of the virtual environments under discussion, in addition to the collaborative ones. As we shall demonstrate, those affordances set them apart from other popular virtual environments. For, if many virtual environments, such as multiplayer games, allow for some forms of collaboration, users there are largely limited to performative activities within pre-established contexts, narratives and settings. SL and OS, on the other hand, are open worlds where users can build everything from the ground up (quite literally, as the landscape itself is reducible to a void), create their own narratives and redefine their virtual self.

CVEs are often referred to as virtual worlds or the metaverse. The term 'metaverse' was coined in 1992 by the writer Neal Stephenson in his novel *Snow Crash* (1992). There, the metaverse was a fully immersive three-dimensional space where people interacted through avatars. Today, the term is used to refer to the collective online space as a whole, particularly with regard to virtual worlds. We speak of metaverse, virtual worlds or synthetic worlds when we

refer to a “computer-generated physical space, represented graphically in three dimensions, that can be experienced by many people at once” (Castranova 2005: 22). Boellstorff suggests three fundamental elements in “virtual worlds: they are (1) places, (2) inhabited by persons, (3) and enabled by online technologies” (Boellestorff 2010: 17).

SL and OS residents interact with the virtual world, and each other, via an avatar. They are able to build new 3D digital objects, as well as upload their own contents, designed outside the platform, such as image files, 3D models, sounds, animations and other scripts. These worlds are therefore created mostly by their residents, thus becoming a privileged environment for the birth of the most diverse art forms. However, artworks in CVEs resist being categorised in taxonomies, because they are unstable and fluid, frequently open and participatory in nature. Although present in numerous art forms, the playfulness of the creative act is a prevalent feature of art practice in CVEs (Ayiter 2012: 170). This playful dimension extends to the fruition of these projects, contributing to the transformation of the aesthetic experience into a creative one, while also adding to its elusiveness in terms of categorisation.

This is why a strict categorisation of such practices can be seen as a fruitless toil. But simple as it may be, such a framework may assist us in gaining further insight into the scope and breadth of current and future art works in CVEs. For this reason, we provide a simple and brief description of the various art forms found in the SL and OS CVEs, so that those not familiar with these environments can better understand both the creative potential and the cultural significance of CVEs. In order to characterise and illustrate such art forms, we shall briefly present and discuss a few selected works from the aforementioned CVEs. It should be noted that the following projects encompass more than one of the proposed categories. This will become evident as we

describe how they frequently develop asynchronously, changing both their processes and their manifestations.

Art typologies in CVEs

We begin with two main groups: one for works developed in the metaverse, which will be referred to as 'metaverse-based'; and one for works derived therefrom, which will be referred to as 'metaverse-derived'. Within the former, we can identify environments and objects, avatars and performance. In the latter group, derived works include virtual photography and machinima.

- Metaverse-based

We begin with Environments and Objects, which range from entire art-habitats (Ayiter and Ugajin 2015) to stand-alone objects. These include landscape terraforming and building, architecture, installations and dioramas, digital sculptures, object and equipment design, external mesh modelling and sound. Environments and objects can be further developed through scripting, thus enabling dynamic properties and interactive behaviours.

An excellent example of this kind of art practice is the work by the artist Cherry Manga. Her work *Insanity*, a 2014 environment at MetaLES SIM, in SL, is a surreal landscape where giant and disfigured bodies sprout from desolate dunes (Fig. 01). We can find several techniques in this work: the windlight design; the modelling of objects in mesh, conceived externally and then uploaded to SL as digital sculptures; the use of scripts to animate objects; and soundscaping, using sounds attached to objects across the space.



Fig. 01 - Cherry Manga, *Insanity*, 2014. Screenshot by CapCat Ragu.

The Inevitability of Fate was a 2012 installation by Saskia Boddeke, known in SL as Rose Borchovski¹, at the SL Two Fish SIM. A narrative unfolded along a path on the landscape, enveloping residents in the history of Angry Beth and Lot, a mother and her son at the outbreak of a war that would separate them. In the virtual environment, one could witness Lot's birthday and see his childhood toys. Further ahead, a yellow ribbon pinned on their bodies symbolised their new condition. After the war, Beth came back, but the child was gone. That was how Beth became Angry Beth. In this work, Boddeke uses space as a structural element to organise the narrative through time, using objects as evocative landmarks, and visitors need to travel through the installation in order to 'read' a story that is told to them through all the aspects of a constructed environment.

In the category of avatars, we can consider all manifestations that relate to their design: skin and clothing texture design, body shape design, the design of all kinds of objects that can be associated with avatars — hair, clothing, accessories of many different types and animations, which can slightly modify, or completely take control of, an avatar's behaviour. Interesting examples can be found in the avatars and accessories designed by I. Struebel, known in SL as Cutea Benelli, for the *Grim Bros.* brand. One of her creations, *Broken Bot Buddy*, exemplifies how the creation of avatars can be an art practice (Fig. 02). On a social network, the artist reflects upon her creative process:

“What would happen, I thought, if you created a compassionate robot with the sole purpose of taking care of others – and then, like all the other technology we use, you left it to rot in the cellar, with nobody to care about – and to care for? From this basic notion of a neglected care robot, the look of ‘compassion program’ became clear in my mind: friendly, female, almost



Fig. 02 - Cutea Benelli, *Broken Bot Buddy*, 2014. © Cutea Benelli 2014.

motherly, vaguely nurse-ish, with a touch of sadness and forgotten-ness. Rusty, of course, not shiny” (Benelli 2014).

Alpha.tribe avatars are also an interesting reference. Designed by Elif Ayiter, divided into a tribe of alts², they escape mainstream stereotypes and challenge residents with a different take on embodiment – these avatar creations seem to highlight the way in which standard avatars are representations of an idealised, sexist body. *Alpha.tribe* avatars deviate from human representation, although without totally abandoning the human metaphor. This type of work would only be possible in a creative collaborative virtual environment, where one is free from pre-established constraints in gender representation, present in most popular multiplayer role-playing or action games – in which the players are often unable to even choose their own gender.

In CVEs, artistic activities carried out by avatars fall into the performance subgroup. While this includes simulations of conventional art forms such as theatre, opera, dance, circus and musical performance, CVEs provide the grounds and tools for new types of enactments, tailored to explore the medium’s specificity.

The duo of Portuguese artists Kikas Babenco and Marmaduke Arado takes advantage of the ability to attach artefacts to avatars, in order to display full installations in the world, which in reality are not part of the environment, but are ‘worn’ by their avatars. Kikas and Marmaduke use this strategy in their performances to create a strong visual impact, usually with satirical intent towards the world of art and the social codes of the metaverse. These events are usually improvised and participatory, as the artists often offer their artefacts to the public and invite them to join in the performance (Fig. 03).

The approach used by the artist SaveMe Oh, while similar in strategy, is more heavily focused on her artistic persona – whose avatar, more

than an author, embodies the work itself. SaveMe referred to herself (an avatar) as an artwork and not as an author, in the talk promoted by Transdisciplinares Artes Lisboa (2014), in the activities related to the event and exhibition entitled *Virtual Interactive Participatory Arts*. SaveMe presents herself as an agent provocateur in the art world, often invading artistic events with her performances, which can cover a whole SIM.

It should be noted that, while it can be argued that this somewhat ironical questioning of authorship and identity may have roots in previous 'real world' works, the spatial, environmental and behavioural properties of Babenco, Arado and Oh's performances are unique to the affordances of a CVE and could hardly take place in our world.

- Metaverse-derived

The second group, metaverse-derived works, consists of art practices that draw upon the metaverse, but are not necessarily constructions of that world. One popular example is the first subgroup, virtual photography.

CVEs enable us to capture still images of virtual worlds. Usually the icon that signals this functionality depicts a still camera. It is common practice among metaverse residents to refer to these images as photographs. Image capture in the metaverse can serve the exact same purpose as in the physical world – memories of time spent with others, news reporting, fashion, advertising and, of course, artistic purposes. A prime example of the latter is the work by the photographer Nur_Moo, Commissioner of the legendary SIM Poetik_Velvets, whose career in the metaverse dates back to 2007.

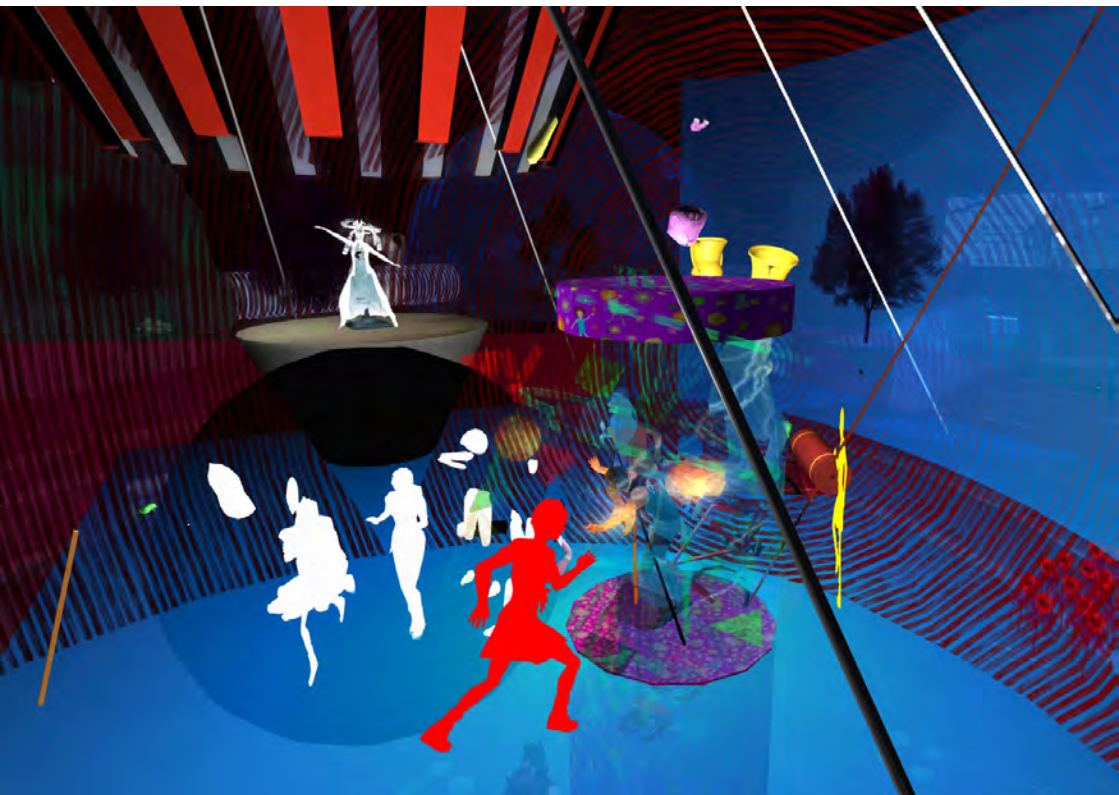


Fig. 03 - Kikas Babenco & Marmaduke Arado, performance at Slactions, 2013.
Screenshot by CapCat Ragu.

Moo is also a photographer in physical reality. She uses the specific possibilities of light and colour in SL, either through manipulation of windlight or the use of light sources associated with prims. The artist plays with the installation of objects as a setting, and with the possibilities of layered editing in Raster Graphic Editors (Fig. 04).

Deborah Lombardo, known in the metaverse as Harbor Galaxy, has a more painterly approach. She uses Raster Graphic Editors to enhance colour saturation and play with contour and texture. Her approach to female body representation defies standards and stereotypes in depicting age, nudity and intimacy.

However, not all virtual photography is edited outside the platform. Ziki Questi is an SL blogger, and in *Ziki Questi's Blog*³ she reviews arts and destinations in the metaverse. Her posts are profusely illustrated with her own virtual photographs of the places she visits. Most of her work depends solely on light, angle, depth of field and framing – photography's basic principles. Although her approach is mostly documental in nature, the resulting images become art works in their own right, not only because of Ziki's technical mastery, but more particularly because of her ability in capturing the *pathos* of each place.

Machinima can be defined as the capture of moving images in real time using 3D rendering engines in digital environments (Zagalo 2012: 2). This is a form of expression generally associated with video gaming culture, since a large part of the machinima being produced uses computer game engines (Picard 2006) and real-time gameplay. Although this is their origin, their growth and development go beyond the cultural universe of games, a phenomenon favoured by the greater technical quality and increasing affordability of multiple online platforms for its creation and dissemination (Lowood and Nitsche 2011: viii), such as SL and OS. The machinima conceived



Fig. 04 - Nur_Moo, *Under an OcTree **, 2013. © Nur_Moo 2013.

in these platforms, unlike the video game derivatives, do not rely on stringent aesthetic or themed environments, as in EverQuest or World of Warcraft (Pinchbeck and Gras 2011: 143). Thus, like virtual photography, they become the ideal environment for artistic development and art documentation.

One of the most interesting artists using machinima as a medium is Ole Etzel, the author of the series of machinima that tell the stories of Mr and Mrs Bones, who moved away from each other when Mr Bones decided to sail out to sea. Ole Etzel not only shoots and edits his machinimas, he also performs the voices and songs.

A case where documentation becomes another art work is Iono Allen's machinima *The Inevitability of Fate* (2012) documenting the homonymous work by Rose Borchovski, mentioned before (Figs. 05-08). The film holds true to Borchovski's narrative, making it emerge from the environment path, all the way from Lot's birthday to his plunge into the void. Virtual photography and machinima often connect CVEs with the rest of the World Wide Web, for, although they can be displayed in virtual worlds, they are often shared on social networks, blogs and other web locations.

Due to the structural nature of most CVEs, in that they operate in privately-owned remote servers, the vast majority of works made in the metaverse have no possibility of archival storage or preservation, except when held in OS and stored in the artist's own computer. In SL, however, once dismantled, the work can only be stored in the resident's inventory, piece by piece like parts in a warehouse, and this inventory can only be accessed through the SL platform. The possibility of revisiting such works is often limited to alternative forms of registration, such as virtual photography and machinima. Exhibitions in physical reality also often resort to these as a way of

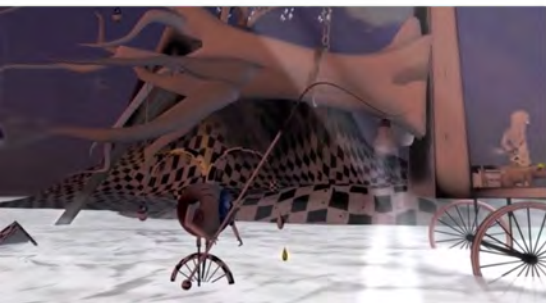


Fig. 05/08 - Iono Allen, *The Inevitability of Fate*, 2012. Machinima of the virtual environment of the same name by Rose Borchovski. Machinima screenshots by CapCat Ragu.

showing CVE art works, because they are easier to display in prints, in projections or on screens. However, these records are not substitutes or replacements of the original art work, nor do they reproduce one's aesthetic experience in the virtual world. Virtual photography and machinima based on previous art works actually occupy two ambivalent places in our aesthetic experience: on the one hand, they trigger new aesthetic experiences; and, on the other hand, they are the result of an aesthetic experience that has a creative dimension. They are the result of lines of flight between art works, digital platforms and, in some cases, instances of the real (the virtual and the tangible). Although they present themselves in a specific medium, they are already hybrid in their creative process.

Hybridisation

This demonstrates our initial proposition that most projects in CVEs fit into more than one of these subgroups and art forms, as they present hybrid features and permeate several categories and instances of reality. This is the case with Alpha Auer's (Elif Ayiter's main avatar) *Asemia*, which involves avatars, environment and object design, as well as soundscaping, all in a single project. This project explores writing stripped of its semantic content. It was part of the collaborative installation *Further Along the Path*, commissioned in 2012 by Bryn Oh, in SL, and sponsored by the Linden Endowment for the Arts (LEA) (Ayiter 2013). This installation was designed by various artists, drawing upon the surrealist concept of *cadavre exquis*, i.e. each installation merges into the one by the following artist (Oh 2012). *Asemia* was an enormous sphere with a textual and textural landscape featuring its own inhabitants – the avatars that were part of this project. The author states that her roots in graphic design

guided her to an aesthetic approach to typographic forms and textual texture (Ayiter 2013). In addition to the asemic text, Alpha Auer also created a soundscape of vocalisations that made no apparent sense, but whose sound could evoke a foreign language. The whole design revolved around a semantically null verballity.

Another instance of this kind of hybridisation is the *LPDT2/3* projects. This installation was inspired by the pioneering digital design of Roy Ascott's *LPDT*, rethought 30 years later by Max Moswitzer, Selavy Oh and Alpha Auer, first with *LPDT2* in SL in 2010 and then, in 2012, with *LPDT3* in the New Genres Grid (Fig. 09). Max Moswitzer and Selavy Oh were responsible for the planning and architecture, while Alpha Auer was in charge of the soundscape and avatars. However, the entire project was designed by the three authors, with additional collaboration from Heidi Dahlsveen, known in the metaverse as Mimesis Monday, in the animation of avatars (*LPDT2/3*, 2012). The environment here becomes a visual and auditory flow, where the plurality of authorship is combined, without any loss of consistency. Avatars merge with such ease into the environment that it often becomes difficult to distinguish space from body.

This is sometimes also the case in works by Eupalinos Ugajin, an artist famous for both his responsive buildings and his shape-shifting avatar, which is always substantially different from all the avatars that can be found in the metaverse. If the playful dimension of art is a feature in virtual environments in general, for Eupalinos Ugajin it becomes the main feature. The artist literally plays with all kinds of virtual artefacts, remixing his materials with creations from other authors, which we can think of as virtual ready-mades. In many instances, his avatar includes attachments that make it hard to distinguish between the avatar and its surroundings, giving it a performative dimension – effectively mixing all three categories: environments and objects,

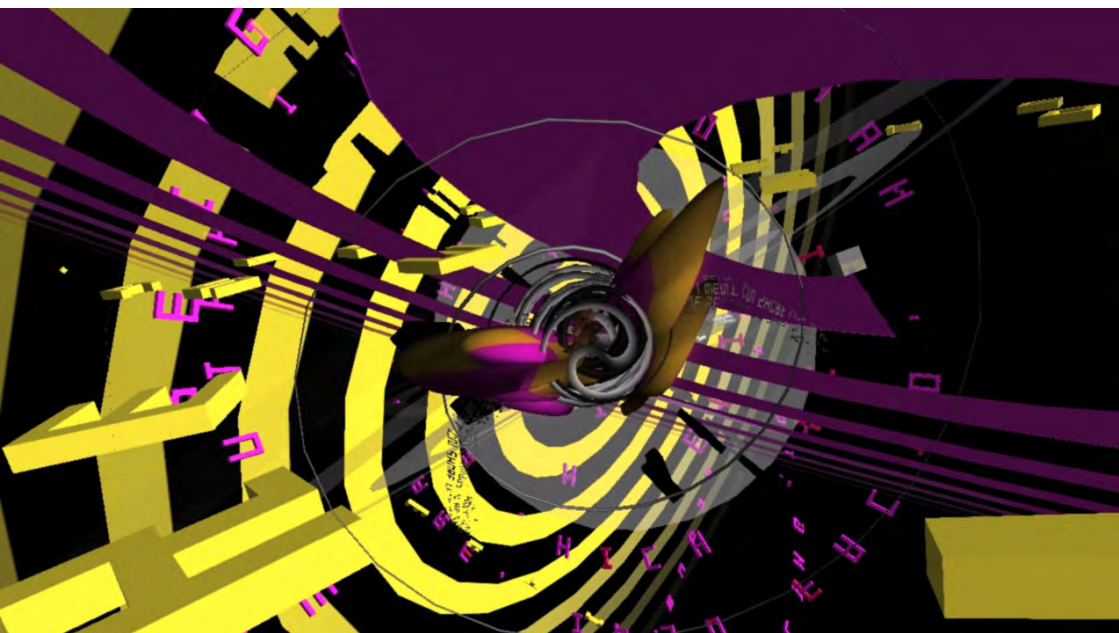


Fig. 09 - Max Moswitzer, Selavy Oh and Alpha Auer, *LPDT3*, 2012 (environment and avatar). Screenshot by CapCat Ragu.

avatars and performance (Figs. 10-13). Both his buildings and his avatars become assemblages of body parts, objects, sounds and animations. Ayiter considers that these creations emerge from a bisassociative process, a creative process advocated by Athur Koestler, who believes that the creative act is the result of the juxtaposition of two apparently antagonistic frames of thought (Ayiter 2011: 31-36).

Eupalinos Ugajin is also the initiator of the 2013-14 project *Moving Islands*, at the Linden Endowment for the Arts (LEA), an open-ended artistic collaboration where several artists created rafts or islands that drifted over the flooded SIM. Ayiter and Ugajin consider that one might think of this project as an extension of the way in which the artist uses his avatar – “an entire virtual landmass that acquires an aggregated identity that reflects the participants of the project, coming into being through their combined prims” (Ayiter and Ugajin 2015). More than thirty artists participated, accepting Ugajin’s challenge to create this environment in a collaborative way. Ayiter and Ugajin highlight the fact that these artists came from different backgrounds, with different methodologies and different formal and conceptual approaches. Nevertheless, Ugajin managed to create a unifying environment for the pieces by using windlight. The way light and colour were reflected by the several artefacts became the unifying trait for these singularities.

In Bryn Oh’s *The Singularity of Kumiko*, in Immersiva SIM, in SL, the author created an array of artefacts including spaces, sounds, objects and animations (Fig. 14). The environment’s windlight is pitch black, except in illuminated key areas, and the visitor’s avatar is equipped with a head-mounted torch to light up the way. Apart from obvious references to the film *Donnie Darko*, Bryn Oh brings to this narrative stories and characters from previous projects. The visitor is invited to navigate a non-linear narrative that gradually unfolds, not only

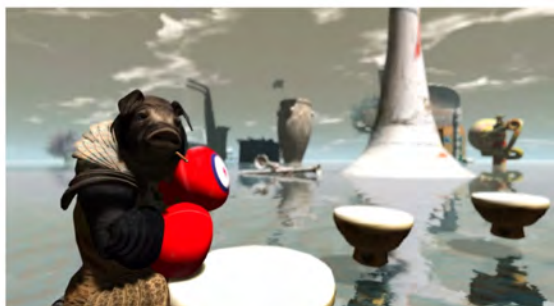
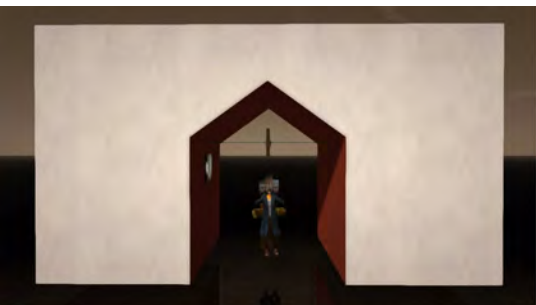


Fig. 10/12 - Eupalinos Ugajin, *Chutes d'Images and other stories*, 2013. Machinima screenshots by CapCat Ragu.

Fig. 13 - Eupalinos Ugajin, *Musiclandia*, 2013. Machinima screenshots by CapCat Ragu.

inside Second Life, but also using hyperlinks as a way of expanding the playing field to the World Wide Web. Of particular relevance to the present study is the way in which this artwork relates to Bryn Oh's previous work, i.e. through the use of the machinima Juniper. This movie was associated with a poem in one of the rooms in the *Imogen and the Pigeons* installation, from 2013, also in Immersiva. Juniper is not the only character running through different works and different narratives by Bryn Oh. Their stories share relations and hyperlinks between them. The 2013 machinima appears in the 2014 installation as a link to a video-sharing page. So the film, designed as an art work, is based on previous work undertaken by the artist and is used as part of the new work. This is indeed a demonstration of the specific characteristics of the virtual environment, which encourage rhizomatic relationships between various projects, forms of expression, and even platforms.

Senses Places, a project initiated by the Portuguese choreographer Isabel Valverde and the New Zealand engineer Todd Chochrane, is an innovative example of performance practice in virtual worlds (Fig. 15). Their experimental and participatory dance project in SL combines physical and virtual performance using sensors. Both performers and audience participants (in the physical environment and in the virtual world) animate avatars in real time, while performing. Real-time video of the physical performance is broadcast in SL, while SL real-time rendering is projected onto the physical performance space. Clara Gomes (2014) refers to it as “a project of participatory cybperformance in a mixed reality environment seeking to develop corporeality, body awareness and amplification of the senses through the kinaesthesia running through the convergence between virtual and real”.

Meta_Body is an ongoing project, initiated by Catarina Carneiro de Sousa, known in the metaverse as CapCat Ragu, with Sameiro



Fig. 14 - Bryn Oh, *The Singularity of Kumiko*, 2014. Screenshot by CapCat Ragu.



Fig. 15 - Multiple participants, *Senses Places*, performance at Slactions, 2013. Screenshot by CapCat Ragu.

Oliveira Martins, known in the metaverse as Meilo Minotaur, in 2011. Here the avatar is rethought as the body of language, open to experimentation. Eighteen avatars are made available to all residents. They are free to use, copy, modify and redistribute them, giving total freedom to ‘producers’ (Bruns and Schmidt 2010). This term, ‘producers’, was chosen over audience, as the project openly engages its participants and embraces their creative flow. A text note was distributed along with the avatars, with an open call for derivative works. 120 contributions were selected and presented as virtual photography and machinimas.

Shared creativity

The Meta_Body Project relies on a creative process we call ‘shared creativity’, in which creation cannot be reduced to a single author. Several components of the project were built by different authors and producers, working together in order to create a flexible, unstable and always unfinished body of work.

We propose three different approaches to the concept of shared creativity: collective creation, distributed creation and collaborative creation.

The first, collective creation, is the process used by Meilo Minotaur and CapCat Ragu in the construction of these avatars: a cell group acting as a single author, in a very intimate form of creative process. The complete dissolution of one’s identity in a group is utopian — a co-creative process where everyone is an equal partner in the process is very difficult to achieve in large and medium-sized groups, so that an equal partnership has more chance of success in a cellular structure.

The second, distributed creation, is the way in which the derivative

work was created. The first set of avatars was drawn upon to build new creations, which, in turn, fuelled a reserve of the new materials available. This relates to the concept of ‘produsage’, developed by Axel Bruns – a process in which the participants easily shift from users to producers and vice versa, originating a hybrid role in between (Bruns and Schmidt 2010). Such is the case with online communities organised towards creative sharing, mostly focused on the dissemination of visual results, from pile-ups on Flickr to Creative Commons collages, and including fan art on platforms such as DeviantART. This type of creation is community-based, i.e. it involves a large group with fluid roles, and not a team.

In 2013, a second phase of this project was started: *Meta_Body II*. We called upon residents to share derivative avatars that had *Meta_Body* avatars as their starting point. Any part of *Meta_Body* avatars could be used, as well as parts built by residents themselves or others (Fig. 16). All avatars should be provided with full permissions. As a result, twenty-two creators built twenty-six new avatars. The variety of participants ranged from renowned metaverse artists and designers to new residents, experiencing the Second Life platform and avatar building for the first time.

To distribute these avatars, four virtual installations were built by CapCat Ragu and Meilo Minotaur in four separate levels, designed as a tribute to the avatars they housed. Each level featured its own unique soundscape, also heavily inspired by, and evocative of, the surrounding materials, aesthetics and themes. Sound clips were scattered and layered onto the virtual spaces, forming seamless textures, melodic sequences or asynchronous compositions. As each sound unit is audible only within a certain radius of its placement, this causes the soundscapes to change when moving the avatar through space, thus creating a more immersive aural experience.



Fig. 16 - CapCat Ragu, *Untitled*, 2013. Virtual photography of the avatars *Appointment by the garden*, by Simotron Aquila, 2013, for *Meta_Body II* and *Godiva*, by CapCat Ragu & Meilo Minotaur, for *Meta_Body*, 2011.

This brings us to the third approach to the concept of shared creativity: collaborative creation, a process in which each artist retains their personal mark in a creative dialogue with others. The term collaboration comprises a wide range of creative processes and forms of organisation. As an open-ended concept, it refers to diverse methods of working together (Lind 2007). However, when we refer to collaborative creation, we are not using the term in this sense. Instead, we are describing a specific creative process, one that differs from those previously characterised. In the work resulting from this kind of process, one can roughly distinguish each author's work, even though they can blend in, making it difficult to define a borderline between them.

This was the case with the soundscapes, which Takio Ra designed as a contribution to the virtual installations built by CapCat Ragu and Meilo Minotaur. Even if the sound did not change any of the visual or physical aspects of their work, which remained untouched, it radically altered the perception of the environment and, in the end, became a key part of the project's design and experience. The sounds used are also being distributed with full permissions, feeding the distributed creation branch.

Conclusions

Pierre Lévy considers that the "canonical genre of cyberculture is the *virtual world*" (Lévy 2001: 125). However, he is not referring to what we defined earlier as CVEs, but to any "digital store of sensory and informational virtualities that are actualized only through interaction with human beings" (Lévy 2001: 125). Within this broad definition, the author also distinguishes two major types of virtual worlds:

- those that are limited and editorialized, such as CD-ROMs and 'closed' (off-line) installations by artists;
- those that are accessible over a network, and infinitely open to interaction, transformation, and connection with other virtual worlds (online)" (Lévy 2001: 126).

The distinction between online and offline that Lévy suggests (note that the author stresses that this is not an opposition) is essential to the type of work that is proposed: a work of flow, a work-as-process, and a work-as-event. This sort of work, although it also exists off-line, is typical of cyberculture and is enhanced by the possibilities brought by web 2.0. They are co-constructed metamorphic works, which resist totalisation, either by intention (by the author) or by extension (through recording) (Lévy 2001: 127-129). This means that multiplicity in cyberculture art defies unification on account of *a* creator subject and origin, or unification as *a* work object, fixed and crystallised. Lévy considers that the new art arising from the possibilities opened up by both the new media and the World Wide Web embodies Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of rhizome. For Lévy, the cyberculture artwork lives in the rhizome (Lévy 2001: 129). As we have demonstrated, beyond the obvious affordances of creating in a world free from the constraints of real world physics (such as gravity or the laws of thermodynamics), CVEs widen the possibilities and broaden access to co-creation and distributed authorship in an unprecedented way, thereby enhancing unforeseen kinds of rhizomatic connections.

Although they are still far from amounting to a mainstream experience, a growing number of artists are using CVEs to develop their artistic research and practice, as they offer conditions and allow for experiences not found anywhere else. Today, there is a growing

number of emerging, accessible technologies, such as affordable head-mounted devices for virtual reality, ranging from Oculus' Rift to Samsung's GearVR to Google's Cardboard. Technological development and artistic research are coming together on various fronts. The sum of these circumstances points us to the threshold of a new era in CVEs, one of the new challenges, but also the new possibilities for digital art.

Notes

¹ Whenever possible, we have provided the CVE artists' real names, as well as their avatar names. However, most of these artists choose not to reveal their real names and sign with their avatar names. For this reason, we refer to the real name only when first mentioning the artist and thereafter we use the avatar name.

² Alt is the term used to describe alternative avatars of the same subject.

³ <http://zikiquesti.blogspot.pt/>

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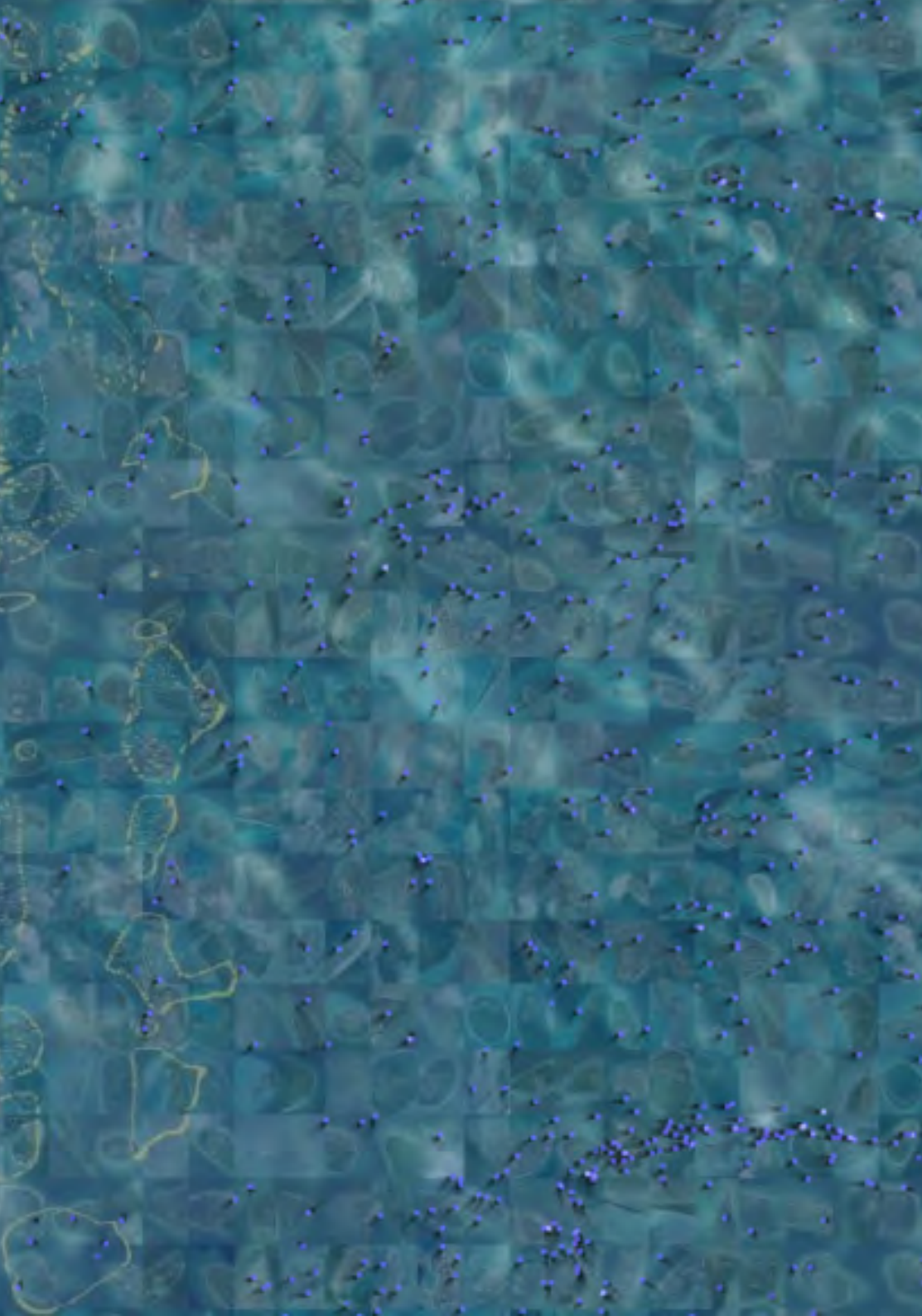
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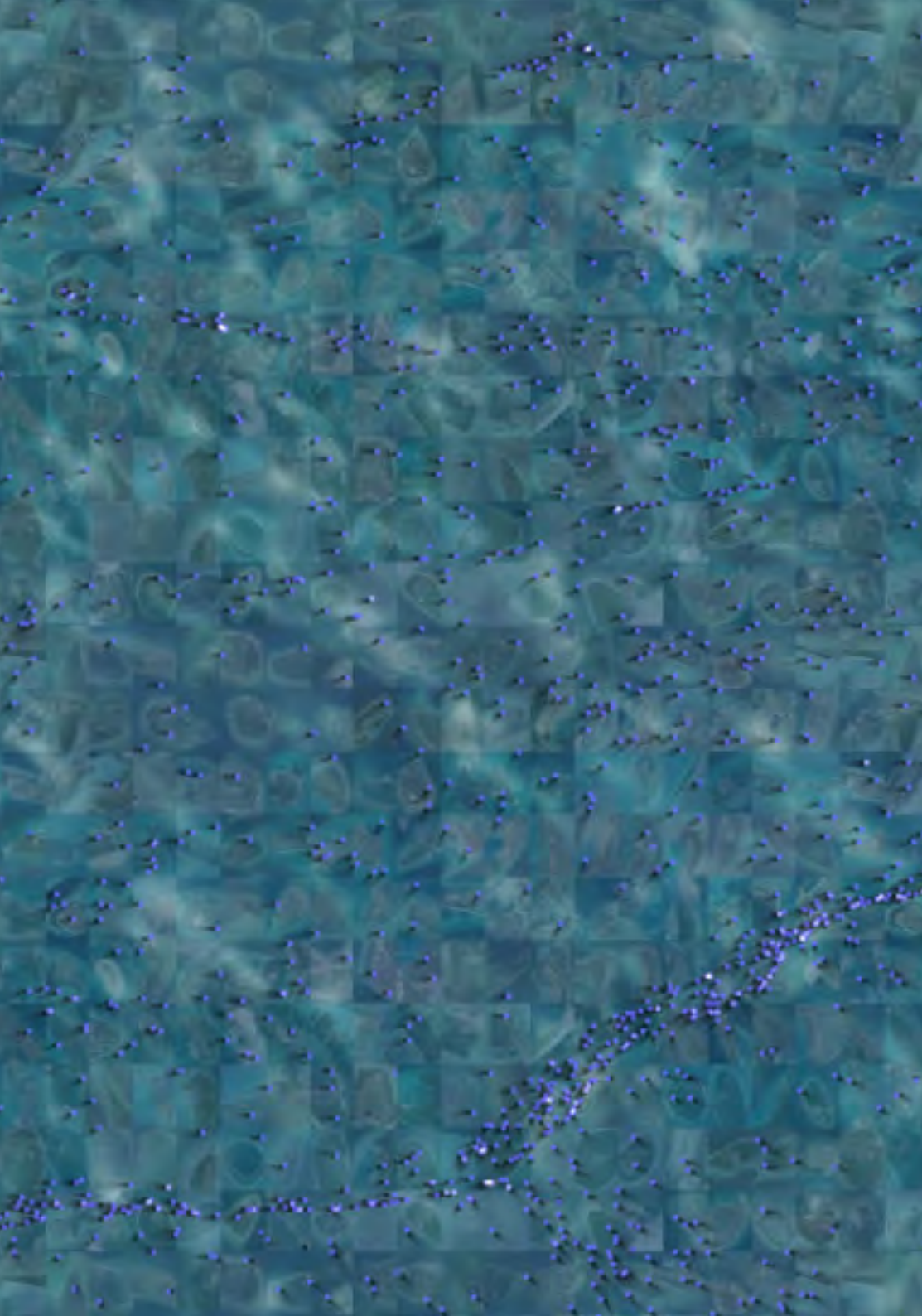
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