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Within, Without: New Media and the White Cube

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A new artistic platform has emerged, one reflecting and facilitating a global society's obsession with endlessly updating, installing, applying, connecting, and configuring its representations of human experience. New Media, or digitally generated art, has become a paradigm for artists concerned with entering and mediating our relationship to technology while underscoring the increasingly surrogate experience technology affords in its supplanting of human relationships and interactions.

As with any term associated with technology, New Media's definition is constantly outdated, expanded, and updated. The term's origins can be traced from early analogue artworks to the current art of computer-based and digital technologies.¹ Generally, New Media artists are concerned with both the conceptual and aesthetic possibilities of industry-produced technologies and advancements and utilize these implements as means of their own expression. New Media artist Golan Levin notes, "there's an interest in exploring the aesthetic possibilities and cultural implications of new technology, whatever new technology means. The idea is: why should government and industry be the only ones to determine what new technology is, what it does, who it's for, and why it operates. Artists want to have a say in that."² It is clear that New Media as an artistic genre explores the interplay of technology, art, and society, with its artists often co-opting the defining features of the digital medium for their own purposes and expressions. In so doing, New Media artists redefine the nature and relationship of their chosen technologies to interface directly with viewers (sans dealers and curators) and to highlight the dramatic impact which technology has upon the human experience.

¹ London, Barbara. Interview with the author. 31 January 2007.

² Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

Gerfried Stocker, Artistic Director of the Ars Electronica Festival, identifies the four pillars of digital art as connectivity, interactivity, transmediality, and processuality.³ As unique features of both New Media as a medium as well as the nature of its relationship to its viewers, these four characteristics evidence digitally-based artists' interest in the interplay between themselves (through the means of their technology) and a larger society. Connectivity, for instance, evidences the perpetually altering shape of communication in society and its implications for interpersonal relationships. The spaces this occurs within are continually redefined and multiplied as encounters can and do occur across a variety of communications platforms—no longer exclusive to the telephone, instant message, or email conversation.⁴

Interactivity, meanwhile, extends this idea of new spaces of interpersonal communication with the technology that composes these spaces. As Golan Levin notes:

“Interactivity is something that never existed in art before. I think one thing that distinguishes New Media art is that many of these examples show an artist forming a new way of communicating, a new means of expression. And I think that the artwork is literally the presentation to the public of this new, expressive medium... And a lot of New Media art really owes a lot of debt to McLuhan for pointing out that “the medium is the message.” Literally, the subject and content of the work is the medium itself.”⁵

Stemming from the notion of interactivity, transmediality both references and categorizes characteristics of these new environments supported by a multiplicity of digital platforms—be they audio, visual, textual, or otherwise.⁶ In so doing,

³ Regine. *We Make Money Not Art*. 1 May 2005. <http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/005573.php>

⁴ Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

transmediality highlights the multiplicity of available sources of content and its repurposing over a network of integrated and interrelated media structures.⁷

Finally, processuality is the generative, algorithmic, and associative feature of digital media that allows for the form, type, and extent of New Media to take shape.⁸ As unique characteristics of media technology, processuality offers New Media artists manifold opportunities to engage with unique features of its communication platform and its own exhibition “space,” enabling them to function as both the subject and object of the work.

Although connectivity, interactivity, transmediality, and processuality are motivated directly by specific aspects of digital technology, together these four tenets comprise the conceptual basis of many New Media works which use the concepts which structure technological interfaces as the contents of the artwork themselves. The conceptual ties between these features and the postmodern notions of multi-channel influences, temporality of exhibitions, and the breaking of boundaries between “art” and “life” not only exist but also form a politically and socially significant continuity. The relationship between New Media practice and the technology it employs is thus symbiotic. While some argue that the new practices are driven by the new technologies, others hold that new technologies are driven by new practices.⁹ Frazer Ward notes, “cultures produce the technologies that they need or deserve...I think again, that’s one where the technology and the concepts are in a kind of loop.”¹⁰

⁷ Walther, Bo Kampmann. “Pervasive Gaming: formats, rules, and space.” *Fibre Culture*. 20 April 2007. http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue8/issue8_walther_print.html

⁸ Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

⁹ Ward, Frazer. Interview with the author. 2 March 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Its introduction to a culture already acclimated to a digital extension of human creativity by the postmodern critical theory of the 1980s and 1990s, early New Media Art served as a rudimentary lens with which to look upon the products of implemented theory. It can even be argued that the postmodern art of critiques facilitated the initial entry to the many concepts and works proliferating under the umbrella of New Media Art.

Similar to much of the postmodern art that preceded it, one of New Media's most significant features is its remarkable propensity to double as both subject and object of its critique of art systems and structures. In this sense, New Media Art scrutinizes the characteristics of technological production, its products, and the digital "institutions" that facilitate them. Such rudimentary examples as "web pages," "blogs," and "search engines," elucidate the shift in society's collective experience of reality. For as mediated platforms, they uniquely extend interpersonal and informational interaction, thereby exemplifying and continuing the postmodern practice of institutional critique by engaging directly with the physical and conceptual attributes of exhibition paradigms by exploiting their own means of display.

In so doing, New Media Art significantly facilitates and extends, one might even say redeems, the postmodern institutional critique that since the mid-1970s produced a new context-based content for art aimed at deconstructing, then reconstructing, the physical and ideological components of the exhibition space that have become known as the *Institution* of art exhibition practice. By its very nature, the New Media critique becomes *the* Institutional critique in that it establishes a correspondence between medium and media, site and situation, and content and context in ways once unimaginable to

artists working in more traditional media.¹¹ New Media art not only perpetuates the practices which postmodern institutional critique established in its prior discourse with the paradigms of a dramatically (and technologically) shifting human experience, but also through its discourse with the paradigmatic exhibition space. The “white cube” of the old Institutional order (whether of the gallery or the museum) has become simultaneously problematized, altered, outmoded, and enhanced in New Media’s context and content.

In exploring New Media Art as an extension of the postmodern institutional critique, replete with all the physical and conceptual challenges to the modernist exhibition space, New Media Art offers alternative projections for the future of digital curating. It should be noted that such alternatives were envisioned as early as 1976, when Brian O’Doherty penned a series of essays for *Artforum* that would eventually coalesce in the book *Inside The White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. The genesis, if not the origins, of both postmodern art and the Institutional critique are keenly evident in these writings, as is their emergence as a product of their context.

It is no small irony that 1976 is the year that the Metropolitan Museum of Art held its first blockbuster exhibition, “Treasures of Tutankhamen,” an event that marks the high ground of a new Institutional authority and cultural profiteering that came to dominate the planning of museum development teams and trustees throughout the U.S. and Europe. The mid-1970s also saw the rise of the alternative space, the counterpoint to the mainstream Institution that became a primary fixture for emerging art, much of which

¹¹ Joselit, David. *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007. Pg. 34.

was and is still generated in violation of the principles of the modernist white cube.¹² Dialectically, the museum blockbuster and the alternative space over the next three decades redrew the boundaries of the art Institution while channeling a growing audience to the competing issues of commercialism, politics, and viewership.¹³ In response, a new awareness of the art site came to inform both the visual and the theoretical components of the largely dematerialized art produced in the 1970s, as well as the theoretical framework for much of O'Doherty's critique.

In his examination of the cultural standards generated by the modern museum, O'Doherty established the origins as well as many of the tenets of the postmodern institutional critique. It is no coincidence that the analogue forerunners to today's digital New Media were at that time emerging with their primitive and cumbersome technologies from artist studios and art schools which would pervade the museums, galleries, performance spaces, and public sites. Within a decade they would give way to the digital arts that came to represent and embody the values and politics of a postmodern institutional critique while juxtaposing them in paradigms that challenge the tenets of modernist art and institutions.

By the 1980s, a proliferation of postmodern artists were actively critiquing the art Institution, challenging the rigid standards embodied by the white cube. They represented the conventional blank walls of galleries and museums as physical and conceptual subject matter to be conveyed through a multiplicity of new expressions. In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Hal Foster identifies this strategy as

¹²Foster, Hal, Krauss, Rosalind, Bois, Yve-Alain, and Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004. Pg 576.

“opening” modernism’s “closed systems” to both discourse and paradox.¹⁴ Opening art to its structural contradictions forms new meaning, and upon analysis, this meaning unleashes a critical tension within the institutional exhibition by disrupting modernism’s rigorously prescribed boundaries (i.e., its designations of “high” and “low;” “art” and “life”), and its art historical narratives (the succession and competition of movements or “isms”). In the end, the introduction of new meaning deflates the utopian classifications, the temporal situations of the exhibition space, and provisions a variety of sources to be available for an artwork’s content.

As such elements are largely interdependent within the white cube’s confines, the discussion of a singular response without reference to others is problematic.¹⁵

Acknowledging a schema (or anti-schema), however, is possible, seeing that much of New Media Art intermingles, undermines, references, and restructures the conceptual and aesthetic possibilities introduced with postmodern critiques. Placed in conversation with the white cube’s precepts, postmodernism exposes modernism’s institutionally-sanctioned value system as the locus of creation itself. As we will see, the creative and conceptual contingencies developing in the 1980s and 1990s gave way to a host of digitally-sanctioned institutions and systems in the new millennium.

Modernism, which appreciated technological innovation but was by comparison historically ill-positioned to exploit it to full effect, mandated the separation of “interior” and “exterior” contexts for the exhibition space as a parallel to its delineation of the

¹³ Ibid. Pg 576.

¹⁴ Foster, Hal, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. New York: The New Press, 1998. Pg. xi.

¹⁵ Brooker, Peter, (ed.). *Modernism/Postmodernism*. New York: Longman, 1992. Pg. 165.

entities of “art” and “life.” By contrast, born as it was amidst a flurry of affordable technological consumption, postmodernism collapses such boundaries, allowing aspects of the everyday to fluidly enter the museum’s enclosure. In this new atmosphere, art is reconfigured to engage and represent all aspects of external life. Its disruption of modernist context (in the museum or gallery) and content (the artwork) renders all characteristics of culture equal as meaningful sources for art.¹⁶ With the boundaries distinguishing “high” culture from “low” now collapsed, the idealism that informed mainstream modernism yielded to a materialist critique that holds the museum to be an outmoded institution “no longer having an easy relationship to innovative contemporary art.”¹⁷ Whether or not the materialist position holds true (so far the museum not only shows no sign of receding, it grows more robust with each decade passed), the art institution nevertheless must adapt itself to a proliferation of technologically-based art that challenges both the contexts of the modernist exhibition space and the idealist world view that once served as the chief source for the work of art.

Employing institutional critique as both a subject and a stratagem, Louise Lawler’s *Matchbooks* (see fig. 1) offer a vivid example of an artwork’s intermingling of “low” cultural contents (matchbooks) within “high” cultural contexts (exhibition spaces) in simultaneity with “high” cultural contents (artworks) presented within “low” cultural contexts (the exterior world). The *Matchbooks*’ unique ability to embody both their functional aspects within popular cultural contexts as well as their “highbrow” cultural

¹⁶ Crimp, Douglas. *On the Museum’s Ruins*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993. Pg. 287.

¹⁷ Buskirk, Martha. *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. Pg. 165.

aspects within the high cultural institution is a multivalent feature that conflates the prescribed boundaries of modernism.

This particular example of Lawler's *Matchbooks* was produced for the artist's 1983 "Borrowed Time Exhibition" at the Baskerville Watson Gallery. On the cover of the matchbooks the words "Whenever I hear the word culture I take out my check book" are inscribed, a quotation taken from Jean-Luc Godard's 1964 film *Contempt (Le Mépris)*.¹⁸ Operating on two levels, the reference to high culture as a valuable commodity is made explicit, while a second, implicit reference is made to the one time when Godard, the iconic "highbrow" auteur of the French New-Wave, produced a film for the American masses. In this light, Lawler's *Matchbooks* operate in tandem with the filmic strategy of Godard's *Contempt* by generating a series of multiples that simultaneously function as useful, popular goods and high cultural artifacts.



Figure 1: *Matchbook from Borrowed Time Exhibition at Baskerville + Watson, Louise Lawler, 1983.*

¹⁸ Keller, Craig. *Senses of Cinema*. 16 April 2007.
<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/godard.html>

The ability of the *Matchbooks* to function equally well both within the museum as well as the pockets of consumers asserts the artist's targeted undermining of the physical and conceptual boundaries which actively separate "art" and "life." In an interview with Douglas Crimp, Lawler states,

...artworks get a special kind of attention, because that's what they're made for, but to slip something in on a matchbook or a napkin can also be useful. It's a way of putting loaded information in a place where you wouldn't expect it, to give attention in other ways of producing meaning without always having to be so artlike. I'm trying to say somehow that the rest of the world counts.¹⁹

Whether focusing upon Lawler's explicated intention to assimilate aspects of popular culture within the modernist white cube, or the physical *Matchbooks* themselves, it is clear that the artist's stratagem effects a deliquescence of boundaries between high and low, while rejecting the narrative trajectory that for nearly two centuries buttressed the modern art Institution's authoritarian legitimacy.

Lawler's *Matchbooks* also challenge the conceptual linearity of modernist industrial production. Conceived from the beginning of the Industrial Revolution onward as the improvement of products with each successive generation, Lawler, in the spirit of postindustrial consumption, takes inspiration from multiple influences to compose objects of the present. In other words, Lawler's postmodernist focus pulls back far enough to include modernism's presumed "universals" in the picture, while contrasting with the highlights of a socio-cultural analysis of contemporary economy.²⁰ In Lawler's purview, economics weave with issues of culture, gender, history, and localized ideology, while

¹⁹ Crimp, Douglas, and Lawler, Louise. "Prominence Given, Authority Taken." *Grey Room*. Summer 2001: 70-81. Pgs. 78-9.

exemplifying the multiplicity of contents, contexts, and media available to the postmodern artist.

For Frederick Jameson multiplicity produces a “disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve.”²¹ Contemporary art thus serves as a medium of expression influenced directly by all facets of the present. Contemporary art is contemporary only with itself.²²

The art of postmodernism undermines the Museum’s authority by incorporating temporality as subject matter and disrupting the paginated mode of display that the modern institution upholds. By allowing several sources of content to inspire the expressive scope of a single work, postmodern artwork references a multiplicity of instances, moments, and phases in a bid to remain contemporary. In addition to the immediate exterior context that informs postmodern art, “every aspect of the past is made available. But it is *made* available—that is, it is mediated, packaged, presented, and re-presented.”²³ The postmodern institutional critique thus engages aspects of the contemporary within the exhibition space itself, undermining its traditionally static and detached mode of display by referencing a multiplicity of moments simultaneously. By incorporating temporality within modernism’s staid walls, works waging postmodern

²⁰ Taylor, Victor E. and Winqvist, Charles E. (eds.) *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Pg. 414.

²¹ Jameson, Frederic “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” *Modernism/Postmodernism*. Ed. Peter Brooker, New York: Longman, 1992. Pg. 165. & Pg. 177.

institutional critiques disrupt the narrative that the modernist exhibition and paginated mode of display would have enforced.

As one of the first postmodern agitators, artist Hans Haacke has for decades constructed scathing visual and conceptual exposés of the dark side of the privilege, patronage, and hierarchy underpinning much modernist production. Haacke's *Oelgemaelde: Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers* (see fig. 2) specifically critiques modernist exhibition paradigms with the aim of intermingling aspects of the contemporary modes of art's production with the content of the art itself. Haacke's homage refers to the iconic Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, a predecessor to postmodernism, yet an artist whose work became prototypical to a postmodern art that questions the notions of the Museum, its collections, and its history. In his nod to Broodthaers, Haacke's work appropriates the museological trappings of an exhibition display (the velvet rope, illuminating lamp, discreet wall label, gold frame, and red carpet that accent special exhibitions), invoking the Museum's traditional agenda "to enhance the artwork's aura, to designate the work of art as separate, apart, inhabiting a world unto itself."²⁴

Within the space arranged by these museological signifiers, Haacke faces an oil portrait of Ronald Reagan opposite an image of a rally held in protest to Reagan's controversial German visit to lobby for the deployment of American missiles on German soil. As a postmodern gesture, *Oelgemaelde: Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers*

²² Baudrillard, Jean. *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*. Berg Publishers: United States of America, 2005. Pg. 105.

²³ Sim, Stuart, ed. *Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Spencer, Lloyd. "Postmodernism, Modernity, and the Tradition of Dissent."

²⁴ Crimp, Douglas. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993. Pg. 247.

assimilates the seemingly disparate references to parody the legitimacy and power such exhibition trappings are assumed to signify if not confer to even the most dangerous political acts (here, the proliferation of nuclear weapons). Installations of this kind make it obvious that Haacke is chiefly concerned with infiltrating the gallery space with an iconography of high and low culture conjoined (an oil painting and a photograph) signifying a wholly contemporary equivalence in media once thought unfit to share the same auratic space.

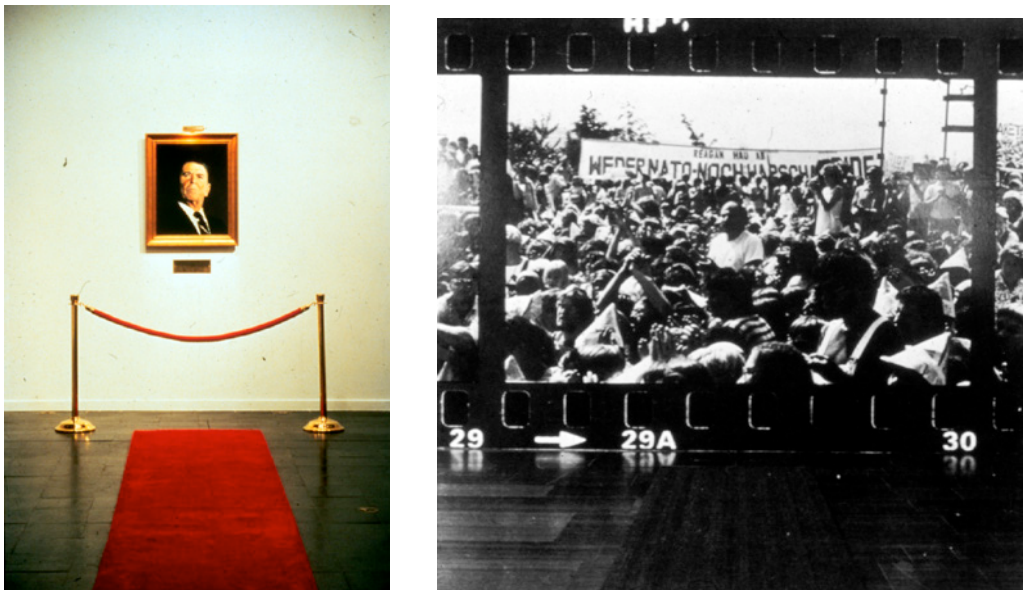


Figure 2: Oelgemaalde: Hommage à Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, 1982.

Even more significantly, Haacke “spoils” the modernist purity of the white cube by transforming it into a politically charged arena, a contextual content that undermines the museum’s valuation of “timeless” and “aesthetically pure” artistic gestures by calling attention to the museum’s discreet affiliation with power structures that simultaneously patronize art and buttress an industrial-military complex capable of annihilating whole nations. In his salient activism, Haacke reflexively converts the context of the exhibition

space into a dissident content, explaining “the context in which a work is exhibited for the first time is a material for me like canvas and paint.”²⁵

Haacke may have been among the earliest of postmodern artists to make art an instrument of authoritarian criticism, but the subsequent history of the postmodern Institutional critique has altered exhibition practices and paradigms alike. One of the more significant alterations, Dave Hickey’s 2001 Site Santa Fe International Biennial “Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitanism,” operates as an exhibition whose ideologies, strategies, and physical manifestation serve to represent the distinct shift away from the physically and conceptually rigid walls of the white cube. In Hickey’s installation, the exhibition space offers an alternative illustration of contemporary cultural theory by displaying the works within a space designed to compliment their individual aesthetics. His strategy intends to heighten the viewer’s awareness of the critically narrative role that the exhibition space plays in the overall understanding of the art it displays. Like Haacke’s *Homage*, Hickey’s exhibition conflates content and context by activating the exhibition space as the content of the art.



Figure 3 a,b: “Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitanism,” Dave Hickey, 2001.

²⁵ Ibid, pg. 248.

Hickey has reshaped the gallery walls to announce an interplay between the exhibition space and the works of art. The walls now respond directly to visual aspects of the art in order to enhance their visual impact and generate a dynamic viewing experience (see figures 4 a,b). Louis Grachos, Director of Site Santa Fe writes,

“the previously cube-like interior is newly defined by curved walls and rounded archways. Sightlines produced by opening and restructuring walls provide numerous combinations and juxtapositions for viewing the art. The picture window inserted in the back wall as part of the exhibition design not only lightens the gallery spaces and offers a view onto the landscape and railroad tracks beyond the museum...”²⁶

Hickey has not only disrupted the modernist nature of the narrative exhibition paradigm, but has also undermined the boundaries separating the interior and exterior temporalities of the exhibition, in essence the distinction between art and life. By inserting a picture window into the exhibition space, Hickey effectively allows aspects of the exterior to shape the aesthetic understanding of the interior and vice versa. Hence, Hickey’s installation at Site Santa Fe both acknowledges and embraces postmodernist concepts while dramatically reshaping prior exhibition viewing paradigms.

In a likeminded exercise, artist and architect duo Diller+Scofidio’s *Mural* removed the walls from MOMA (under renovation at the time) upon which revered works of modern art had long hung. The pair then re-installed and re-contextualized the walls within the Whitney Museum of American Art, whereupon a drill programmed by a computer’s algorithm pierced one of the walls at random intervals as it moved (see fig. 4a,b).²⁷ To remind us that an act of perpetual redefinition of the space based upon the computer and the drill’s algorithm was underway, the drill’s buzzing sound disrupted the

²⁶ Hickey, Dave. *Beau Monde: Toward a Redeemed Cosmopolitanism Site Santa Fe’s Fourth International Biennial*. Santa Fe: Site Santa Fe, 2002. Pgs. 12-13.

exhibition space's usual serenity. It also slowly demolished MOMA's transposed walls, so that by the conclusion of the show's three-month tenure, the exhibition area that had originally posed as a darkened video projection room was now flooded with light from the corresponding exterior.²⁸ Of their destabilizing and dematerializing gesture, the artists have stated:

“We started to think about the inevitability of the white wall to set off any of these pieces ... when we considered the invention of the white wall as a system of segregation from the world, and as a system for the start of a new narrative, we decided it would be interesting to make the walls a self-conscious piece—the object of the show.”²⁹

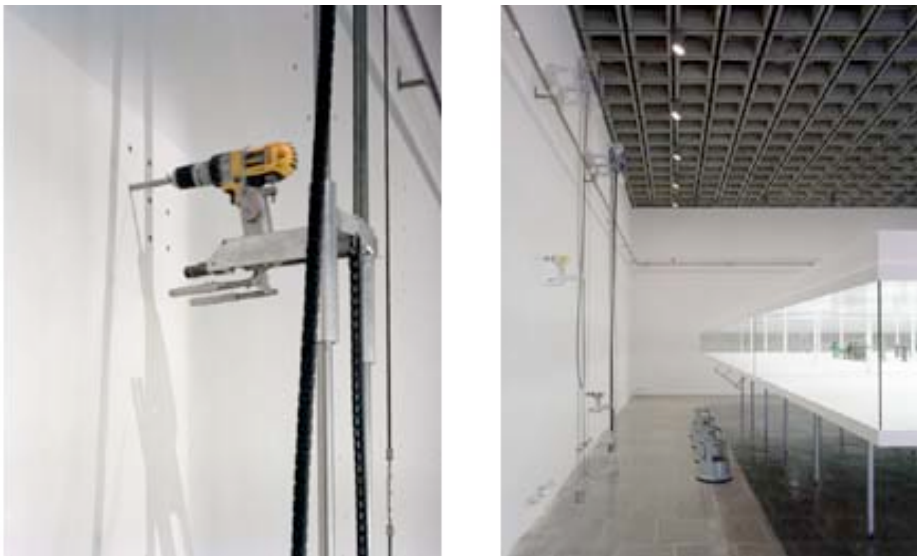


Figure 4: *Mural*, Diller + Scofidio, 2003

Not only does Diller+Scofidio's *Mural* subvert notions of the auratic spaces of the modern Institution, it directly confronts the darkened spaces dedicated to video and New Media work by calling attention to the influence of the museum's structural and ideological architecture to necessarily shape a work of art. Over the course of the three months of its installation, *Mural* slowly eroded the boundary set between the white

²⁷ Lubow, Arthur. "Architects, in Theory" *The New York Times*. Feb. 16, 2003

²⁸ Ibid.

cube's exhibition of traditional media and the "black cube's" exhibition of New Media. In placing emphasis on the structural aspects of the Institution's architecture, the work displays the inadequacies of current museological strategies for the presentation of non-traditional art objects: namely, works referred to as New Media.

In bringing New Media into the postmodern institutional critique, one can immediately see how its facility for creating sites out of non-sites directly addresses the conceptual and physical challenges New Media pose in its confrontation of the physical white cube with the infinite, virtual exhibition space. A particular strain of New Media work, "Net Art," is defined as any form of artwork whose content or means of display is related to the Internet's range of spaces. As discussed above, the defining features of technology are continually updating and expanding, as does the breadth of this term in parallel.

Conceptually, Net Art perpetuates the trajectory of the critique mounted by postmodernism in their challenge to similar modern institutional paradigms. We find instances of this engagement with the linear progression of the art historical narrative, the conflation of context and content, the insertion of temporality into typically timeless display, and the collapsing of boundaries between art and life. The institutions Net Art critiques, however, are no longer solely museums, as the physical embodiments of modernist conceptual concerns have expanded to encompass the defining aspects of the Internet. In this redefinition, reinterpretation, and reconstruction of current technological advances, artists allow us the opportunity to construct, interpret, and define our own

²⁹ Ibid.

relationships to the products of these novel spaces. As stated by New Media artist Roberto Bocci,

New Media, as technology evolves and changes over time, is redefined and changed every day. Every day there is something new that is invented and reconstructed by the industry for utilitarian purposes and then eventually artists pick that technology and use it, subvert it, for their own purposes and expressive needs.³⁰

The subversion and personal purpose to which Bocci refers is the culmination of three decades of postmodern institutional critique. It is irrefutable that New Media has established the Internet as its alternate exhibition “space.”

To approximate the extent which the Internet has supplanted the Institution, we need only examine Martin Wattenberg’s *Idea Line*, a work which constructs a “timeline” of net art and presents it as a single work of art. Aesthetically, the viewer at first confronts a grey screen divided by a series of white lines emanating outwards from a single point to the left of the screen’s view (see fig. 5). Above these fanned lines, points demarcate a progression from pre-1995 artworks through to those created in 2002. To the right of the lines, a top-to-bottom list is displayed of thirty-three artistic and technological strategies employed by net artists in the creation of their art. The brightness of each of the lines changes over time as the number of artworks produced at each point in time escalates or decreases.

³⁰ Bocci, Roberto. Interview with the author. 2 March 2007.

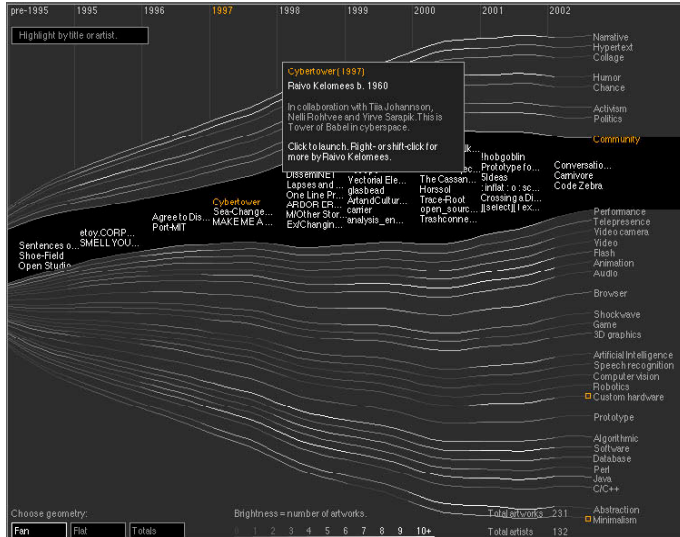


Figure 5: *Idea Line*, Martin Wattenberg

It is clear that Wattenberg’s interest lies in the capability of technology to paginate and classify technology—an obvious nod both to modernist interest in the linear progression of an art historical narrative as well as to the transmediality evident in New Media Art. Here, however, the implausibility of producing an exhaustive representation of the scope of Net Art is more tangible to the viewer than those that *Idea Line* represents. The proliferation of information (and artworks) on the Internet renders the finite definition of this trajectory obsolete. In his artist statement, Wattenberg notes “we sent out a public request for help to several Net Art forums. Almost one hundred artists responded. In addition, we entered data on many popular or influential artworks that were not covered in this response.”³¹ The subjectivity of his method of data collection renders the representational nature of this catalogue obsolete, undermining not the work’s authority, but the rigorous mechanisms of

³¹ Wattenberg, Martin. *Whitney Artport*. 1 March 2007. <http://artport.whitney.org/commissions/idealine.shtml>

pagination upheld by modernist exhibition paradigms in the face of New Media's challenges.

Whereas modernist exhibition paradigms mandate the delineation of the contexts of art and life as well as the boundaries between one work and the next, postmodernism draws these boundaries together to produce new meaning. In this spirit, Paul Chan's *Alternumerics* (see fig. 6) offers the possibility of further breaking down such boundaries by allowing the viewer to define the physical and conceptual features of the work from their own keyboards. By allowing viewers to download fonts and utilize the artist's expression within their daily lives, *Alternumerics* undermines the barriers typically lying between one work and the next in the fonts' ability to be used, reused, altered, and arranged indefinitely—all under the viewer's own conditions. Chan writes:

*“Alternumerics explores the relationship between language and interactivity by transforming the simple computer font into an art form that explores the fissure between what we write and what we mean... Alternumerics transforms any computer connected to a standard printer into an interactive artmaking installation.”*³²

Chan not only highlights the interactive nature of Net Art, but also gives viewers the opportunity to use his work to infiltrate and alter aspects of everyday life. For postindustrial citizens, the keyboard is an undeniably integral component of everyday life, and in shifting its relationship to the individual viewer Chan offers us a new perspective on our relationship to technology, communication, and language.

³² Chan, Paul. *National Philistine*. 15 December 2006.
<http://www.nationalphilistine.com/alternumerics/index.html>

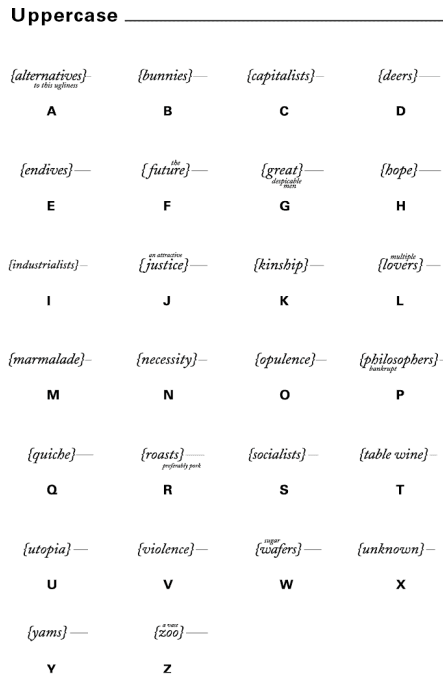


Figure 6: *Alturnumerics*, Paul Chan

In contrast to postmodern institutional critique, which often utilizes aspects of its exhibition space as the content of the work itself, the exhibition space in Net Art is the Internet, by which the available aspects of display context are exponentially expanded. The Internet as a postmodern realm has no internal boundaries or separation of contexts. Its ability to influence and be influenced by any number and combination of data simultaneously allows for its products to reflect and magnify the possibilities for artists and viewers alike. In this respect, Golan Levin’s *The Dumpster* employs the Internet as the work’s content. Employing teenage “blogs” as the source for his chronicle of breakups among teen couples, *The Dumpster* uses visualization software to categorize the type and magnitude of each breakup according to the color and size of the outlined circular shapes amassed on the screen (see fig. 7). “Clicking” on a circle results in a text box detailing a blogger’s account of the failure of their relationship.

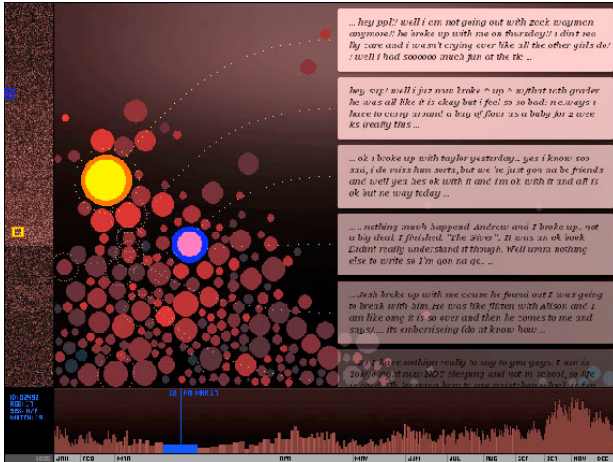


Figure 7: *The Dumpster*, Golan Levin and Kimal Nigam

Levin calls attention to the technological intrusion on human lives. Private information is now offered as objective data to be quantified and displayed to an undefined Internet community around the globe—the audience of Net Art. As the product of blogs, *Dumpster* renders the experiences of nearly 20,000 individuals as a distinguishing component of the Internet’s environment. In making the teenage experience the defining feature of the site, the content of real human lives is the work itself.

Much of Net Art is generated by means of an algorithm, meaning that infinite variations of the piece are created in real-time based on a certain set of codes.³³ With an algorithm figuring as a defining feature of these forms of Net Art, the works are displayed as perpetually contemporary entities continually defined and redefined as products of the code’s process.

One such algorithmic work is Mario Klingemann’s *Islands of Consciousness*, a “narrative” work comprised from a stream of tags generated from the database on

³³ Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

flickr.com, a website allowing users to upload and share their photos with a larger web community. Klingemann notes that the work's algorithm creates "an endless virtual videoloop that is in perpetual metamorphosis...the selection of images is not totally random but follows an associative stream-of-consciousness rule: each new image shares at least one tag with the previous one. As you will see this creates a visual rhythm that follows certain thematic patterns."³⁴

Intriguingly, these thematic patterns differ with every concurrent visit to *Islands of Consciousness*, as the original determining image renews itself and thus alters the topic from which the following stream of videos is "tagged." Once the algorithm generates a new image in the stream, it is transposed atop the others and added to the accumulation of still images to the side of the work (see fig. 8). The resulting "narrative" is a unique, composite stream of imagery related to the defining characteristics of the initial image. The Internet as a mechanism of display here not only produces the content of the work from its surrounding context, but also allows its own perpetually agglomerating nature to be reflected in the work itself. Temporality within the exhibition "space" is thus produced by the work's relationship to its environment of display and the unique aspects of the Internet that provide for the stream of data to be generated.

³⁴ Klingemann, Mario. *Rhizome*. 1 November 2006.
http://incubator.quasimondo.com/flash/islands_of_consciousness.php

the Slovenian Pavilion at the 49th Venice Biennale, *Biennale.py* questions notions of what art and authorship can become in our digital age.³⁵ If an artist, or collective of artists, produces a virus as their means of expression, is it still a work of art?

```

# biennale.py _____ go _____ to _____ 49th Biennale di Venezia
# HTTP://www.0100101110101101.ORG _____ [epidemic] http://www.epidemic.es
from difflib import *
from string import *
import os, sys
from stat import *

def fornicate(guest):
    try:
        soul = open(guest, "r")
        body = soul.read()
        soul.close()
        if find(body, "[epidemic]" == -1:
            soul = open(guest, "a")
            soul.write(sbody + "\n\n" + body)
            soul.close()
        except IOError: pass

def chat(party, guest):
    if split(guest, ".")[1] in ("py", "pys"):
        fornicate(party + guest)

def join(party):
    try:
        if not S_ISLNK(os.stat(party)[ST_MODE]):
            guestbook = listdir(party)
            if party != "/" : party = party + "/"
            if not lower(party) in work and not "__init__.py" in guestbook:
                for guest in guestbook:
                    chat(party, guest)
                    join(party + guest)
    except OSError: pass

if __name__ == '__main__':
    mysoul = open(sys.argv[0])
    mybody = mysoul.read()
    mybody = mybody[:find(mybody, "***") + 3]
    mysoul.close()
    blacklist = replace(split(sys.exec_prefix, ";")[-1], "\\", "/")
    if blacklist[-1] != "/": blacklist = blacklist + "/"
    work = [lower(blacklist), "/proc/", "/dev/"]
    join("/")
    print "> This file was contaminated by biennale.py, the world slowest virus."
    print "Either Linux or Windows, biennale.py is definitely the first Python virus."
    print "[epidemic] http://www.epidemic.es _____ HTTP://www.0100101110101101.ORG"
    print "> _____ 49th Biennale di Venezia"

```

Figure 9a: *Biennial.py*, 0100101110101101.org

Of course, today such questions mean little to their provocateurs or their audience. Yet we have nonetheless returned to the predicament faced by visual and conceptual culture when Duchamp introduced an inverted urinal in the gallery space. The artists (that is, the creators of the virus) have been quoted as saying, “The source code is a product of the human mind, as are music, poems, and paintings...the virus is a useless but critical handicraft, similar to classical art.”³⁶ The same can be said of Duchamp’s readymades, only the mode of dissemination, of course, is digital, and any viewer with Internet access is a potential receiver of the art’s “message.” As materiality is no longer a

³⁵ P.D.M. “Art is Dead, Viral Art is Live and Kickin” (Duchamp of course)” *Content Wire*. 4 June 2001.

³⁶ Jana, Reena. “Want to See Some Really Sick Art?” *Wired*. 27 June 2001. <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2001/06/44728>

concern in relation to net-based art, the potential audience is that much more expanded and, in this case, that much more vulnerable to the work's ultimately harmful form.

The unlimited nature of *Biennale.py*'s diffusion is simultaneous to its concurrent damage, for the artwork is physically damaging to the viewer's "exhibition space," their computer. Capitalizing upon the characteristics and capabilities of the Internet as an unprecedented mode of display, the work achieves multiple postmodern goals simultaneously, one of which is challenging (in effect closing down) the display mechanism by which they come to be known. The Internet, in this instance, provides the work's means as well as its disassembly.

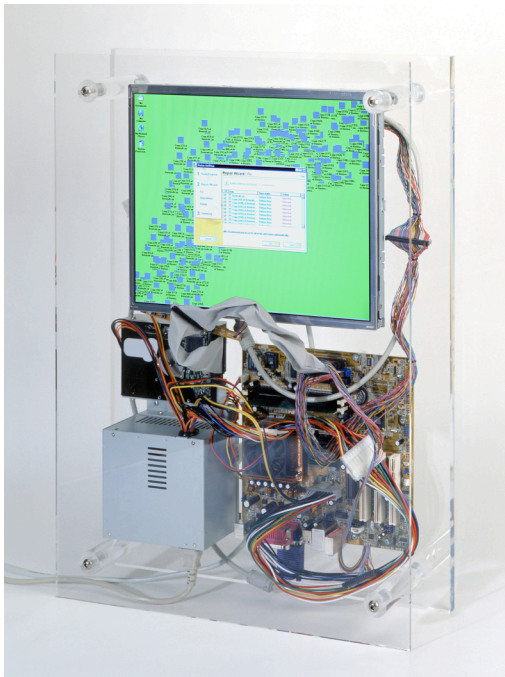


Figure 9b: *Biennial.py* installed at Slovenian Pavillion, 0100101110101101.org

When displayed in combination with the Slovenian Pavilion at the New Media-heavy 49th Venice Biennale, *Biennale.py* had a physical counter-component, a computer ginfected with the artwork/virus housed within the Pavilion itself (see fig. 9b). Over the

ensuing days of the Biennale, visitors were able to view the infected machine under the virus' siege, continually copying and recopying its files on the desktop and ultimately causing the computer irrevocable harm. As an artwork functioning in the realm of the Internet (a virus without a physical counterpart), the work serves to challenge both the Internet and the computer as its ultimate modes of display—and successfully so.

However, this notion implodes in the context of the Biennale's exhibition environment. Placing a computer infected with *Biennale.py* within the Pavilion reflects a yearning from the Institutional perspective to produce an object as the physical embodiment of the work of art. By objectifying the intangible challenge that the virus poses to its technological context, the artwork ultimately succeeds in acknowledging the latent necessity for the artwork's display in a traditional museological context and negates its preliminary intent as an Internet-based work.

The display of *Biennale.py* as an object in the Slovenian Pavilion reflects the Institution's predominant historical disregard for New Media work. Perhaps the clearest example of a New Media work threatening a physical, Institutional counter-component is artist Miltos Manetas' 2002 *whitneybiennial.com*, a Net Artwork directly challenging the exhibition simultaneously on display at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The artist was able to purchase the domain name *whitneybiennial.com* as the Whitney Museum had failed to purchase the name itself, an obvious nod to the Institution's consistent neglect of the Internet as a legitimate means of display, despite the fact that the 2000 Whitney Biennial was heavily based in New Media Art.

The physical components of the artwork were the famed (yet nonexistent) U-Haul trucks-turned-monitors (each projecting a page of the website) that the artist purported to

surround the Whitney Museum with the night of the Biennial's opening.³⁷ Independent curator Patrick Lichty describes the work:

The concept was to create an “exhibition” concurrent with the opening night of the Whitney Biennial consisting of U-Haul trucks that would circle the museum showing projected Flash-based snippets... via rear-projection screens. The idea would be to question the relevance of shows like the Whitney Biennial, the material gallery and like strategies by recontextualizing such cultural spaces in light of online art.³⁸

In reality, the physical component of *whitneybiennial.com* never existed as anything more than a public relations stunt organized to garner interest in the website-turned-work-of-art. The spectacular nature of *whitneybiennial.com* nods to the Institution's legitimization of the work of art—even when actively critiqued by it—while acknowledging the tactics employed by Net Art to access power and gain credibility and attention.

Whitneybiennial.com further serves to parody the Whitney Biennial's institutional structure by depicting a “virtual” white cube aesthetically similar to the composition of the Whitney Museum's modernist exhibition paradigm. Although sketchy black lines atop white web pages separate one work of Net Art from the next in “cube like” voids—the virtual exhibition space is more malleable than the physical walls of the “white cube”—it is ultimately possible to stream (and interact with) multiple works in the exhibition at once. In fact, when using Michael Reese's *Turndtable* exhibited on the site, the viewer is able to use each piece in the .com show as a “sample” with which to

³⁷ Manetas, Miltos. *WhitneyBiennial*. 6 April 2007.

<http://www.manetas.com/eo/wb/files/story.htm>

³⁸ Lichty, Patrick. *Voyd*. “Confessions of a WhitneyBiennial.com Curator.” 6 April 2007.

<http://www.voyd.com/voyd/texts.htm>

ultimately “DJ” their own composition created with works on the site.³⁹ As a gesture in virtual space, *Turntable* invites visitors to interact with and create their own work from the artworks exhibited. This interaction, like the audience participation of 1960s Happenings, breaks down the divisions that had traditionally existed between the artist and audience while making them both context and content, ultimately diminishing the artist’s role as creator by conferring to viewers a collaborative role in the creation of the digital art being exhibited.

Large-scale events like the “launching” of *Whitneybiennial.com* as well as the prevalence of smaller-scale (yet similarly effective) works have finally produced a moment in which the Institution has begun to grapple with New Media Art, both as physical components displayed in galleries as well as virtual works exhibited on designated portions of their websites. In a conversation with Golan Levin, the artists states:

New Media work has been ignored by Museums for a number of years...I mean specifically computational New Media work...but Museums have not known what to do with New Media work, it’s only now that they’re beginning to incorporate it because they feel that it’s received legitimacy, now that it’s been around for 40 years, they think that it’s finally time to make some distinctions about high and low.⁴⁰

Such “distinctions,” as he says, have spawned web pages such as the Whitney’s Artport, the New Museum’s Rhizome.org, and the Tate’s Tate Online. In sponsoring the projects displayed on their websites, Institutions produce a new form of legitimization in the digital age. This is a twofold process, functioning to both separate Net Art from the greater surrounding environment of the Internet as well as from other net-based works by

³⁹ Manetas, Miltos. *WhitneyBiennial*. 6 April 2007.
<http://www.manetas.com/eo/wb/files/story.htm>

offering a centralized viewing system for the works, while creating an apparent “hierarchy of web pages” which may ultimately constrain the multi-channel accessibility of the Internet itself.⁴¹ In effect, by sponsoring their own websites in order to exhibit work, Museums ultimately paginate virtual space in parallel to their function as guardians of a certain elevated physical space.

The alternative conception of Net Art’s relationship to its surrounding environment capitalizes upon the Internet’s (predominantly) ready-accessibility and connectivity as opposed to its localization around Institutionally-branded behemoths. As such, the Internet’s paginated mode of information dissemination is leveled, and the most “successful” works are those which garner the most attention by way of the Internet’s characteristics—such as buzz about the works generated by blogs, web pages, email chains, etc.⁴² According to Golan Levin:

...the real message of whether or not something is successful on the Internet is whether it gets blogged—is it interesting, are people talking about it, is it something that creates a buzz? Something doesn’t need to be on the Whitney site to do that. You have a better chance of being discovered sooner, but you can do interesting projects, post them on your own webpage, email a few friends about them, and if the project’s worth anything, they’ll tell their friends and your project will be legitimized based on the Internet’s own characteristics... (the Institution’s web pages) confer legitimacy to people who believe in it.⁴³

The contrary relationship between these two notions of Net Art’s success parallels opinions of art’s legitimization in actual space. Here, however, the situation is altered by characteristics of technology. While it is undeniable that the “clearinghouse effect”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

⁴¹ Ward, Frazer. Interview with the author. 2 March 2007.

⁴² Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ward, Frazer. Interview with the author. 2 March 2007.

occurs while engaging with an Institution's website in its ability to localize the proliferation of information (and Net Art) available, the success of these works will and must be conferred by the characteristics of the Internet, such as the number of "hits" a site may receive. The question remains whether the works displayed on these Institutionally-sanctioned pages are inherently more successful than those appearing on alternate websites due to their more popularized mechanism of display.

MOMA Media Curator Barbara London notes, "the work of art changes because the work of art is about experience."⁴⁵ As such, displaying physical works of New Media in the context of the Institution highlights the prevalence of communication and interactivity in our multimedia-oriented postmodern society, using them not just as concepts, but as subject matter for the works themselves. Such works do not so much challenge modernist exhibition paradigms, but rather through digital technology highlight the relationship of the viewer to these paradigms, in effect shifting the possibilities of what the art could or should be. Employing postmodern subject matter to express the nature of the dramatically, technologically modified human experience, such art projects the digital realm into the exhibition space as both context and content of the work.

In a work entitled *A Fair Chance*, New Media artist Roberto Bocci employs video and sculptural installation to document his 'transglobal' relationship with artist Simone Paterson since her 1998 visit to Florence, Italy. Comprised of two casts of the artists' faces which are wired so that viewers can interactively trigger a stream of digital video imagery illustrating various aspects of their relationship (see fig. 11),⁴⁶ the interactive

⁴⁵London, Barbara. Interview with the author. 31 January 2007.

⁴⁶ Bocci, Roberto. *Roberto Bocci*. "A Fair Chance." 10 December 2006. <http://www.robortobocci.com/html/afc.html>

video collage that results establishes a parallel structure between the viewer's relationship to Bocci's art and the artists' technologically-facilitated relationship to one another. *A Fair Chance* highlights the novel characteristics of interactive technology, particularly the ways in which the human experience is altered and mediated by techno-communications. The work is as much about the relationship between the two individuals as it is about the media itself. In this context the work is as much about the relationship between the two artists as it is about the media being used to represent it.

Bocci comments:

My work has some postmodern elements in that it reach viewers on multiple sensory levels and collapses the idea of what media is—is it sculpture? Sound? Images? It's everything, it's an amalgamation and a hybrid form. The idea of hybridity is very much in keeping with postmodernism, taking from all places in culture—low, pop—and elevating it to high culture, finding a meeting ground between the two.⁴⁷

Placed in the context of the exhibition space, the digitally-mediated relationship between the two artists is further expanded by the viewer's interaction with and manipulation of the content representation of the two artists' relationship according to each viewer's personal utilization of the digitized face casts. It becomes evident through Bocci's work how New Media physically embodies the conceptual aspects of postmodernism while bringing them within the context of Institutional display.

⁴⁷ Bocci, Roberto. Interview with the author. 2 March 2007.

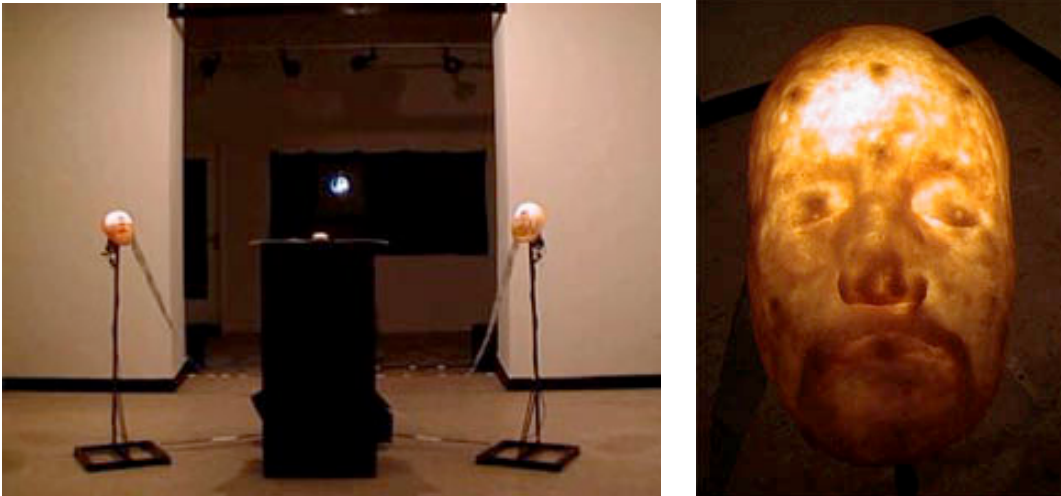


Figure 10: *A Fair Chance*, Roberto Bocci

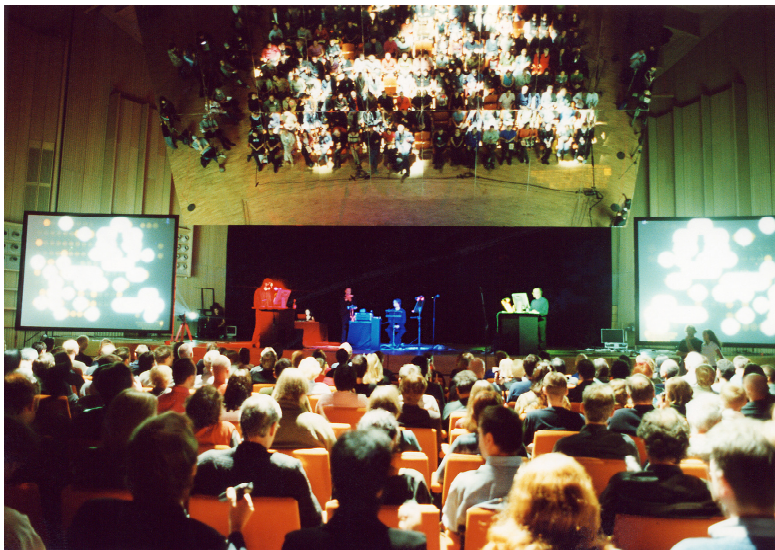
In a similar vein, Golan Levin’s *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)* merges technology with the context of the exhibition space, but here each viewer personally owns the technical device functioning as the content of the piece—a cell phone. By collecting and registering each audience member’s cell-phone number into a system that successively downloads a new ring tone to the handheld device,⁴⁸ Levin establishes an increasingly heightened tension between technology and the exhibition space. In the resulting work, a concert performance is staged (as opposed to a physical installation), in which, according to Levin,

The audience’s mobile phones are brought to life by a small group of musicians who perform the phones *en masse* by dialing them up with a specially designed, visual-musical software instrument. Because the audience’s positions and sounds are known to the *Dialtones* computer system, the performers can create spatially-distributed melodies and chords...it is hoped that the experience of *Dialtones* can permanently alter the way in which its participants think about the cellular space we inhabit.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Levin, Golan. *Flong*. “Artist’s Statement: *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)*.” 2 November 2006. www.flong.com/telesymphony/

⁴⁹ Levin, Golan. *Flong*. “Artist’s Statement: *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)*.” 2 November 2006. www.flong.com/telesymphony/

By expressing the unique (nearly prosthetic) relationship that individuals share with their cell phones, Levin's *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)* illustrates the nature of the relationship between viewer and cell phone as similar to saying "someone hit my car" versus "someone hit me." Obviously, the ringing cell phone is equated with the phrase "someone hit me," a correlation Levin describes as a "weird digital event" whereby viewers are continually caught in the moment between answering the phone as someone is calling them and realizing that their phone is ringing as part of the performance.⁵⁰ Levin furthers the telephonic context in *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)* by substituting a concert hall (see fig. 11) for the traditional exhibition space, a displacement that calls attention to the acoustical space, a realm of the voice and the ear—those faculties which render personal communication most articulately—a place that postindustrial residents use the technology of telecommunications as their most meaningful, perhaps most beloved instrument of daily existence. In this context, sound becomes a subject of the work in a way which viewers instantly and instinctively recognize.



⁵⁰ Levin, Golan. Interview with the author. 26 February 2007.

Figure 11: *Dialtones (A Telesymphony)*, Golan Levin

Although this novel connection between personal technology (personal “exhibition space,” personal “acoustic space”) and art is elucidated through uniquely situated Net Art, the power of the traditional, visual exhibition space is not entirely negated. There is something about the nature of our bond to modernist paradigms that still holds. Although virtual work may communicate a sense of “place,” the Internet is still largely a space incorporated into a viewer’s everyday experience. And yet there is now much less distance circumscribing where an artwork ends and where its surrounding context begins—an ambiguous and shifting boundary that is both the strength and the weakness of New Media work, challenging the Museum’s status yet keeping it intact.

As we move forward, however, it becomes apparent that the technical and archival challenges of New Media work are becoming a premiere concern of Institutions. Museums are employing IT staffs to support the installation, de-installation, and troubleshooting of digital work,⁵¹ while digital technicians are constantly on call to better ensure that museums and galleries keep apace with the rapidly evolving technology that threatens New Media archives and collections with impending obsolescence, a fact of the industry that prevents viewers from appreciating the significant impact New Media is having on current art markets and history. As Barbara London notes,

When you’re a museum, you’re looking at work you acquire for future posterity. You’ve got to take into account technology as it changes...I say we have to get a file folder on an artist—know the work, know where they’re coming from, even if they’re young or if they’re old. You want to understand their vision, what their aesthetics are, and, especially if they’re

⁵¹ Electrically-dependent New Media Art is vulnerable to hard-drives crashes, electronic corrosion, and a general breakdown of parts, requiring Museums to secure support for sound, projection, playback, and Internet connections.

working in media, how we can accommodate that in the future because software keeps changing and that's a big responsibility.⁵²

The Museum as the default mechanism for the New Media manifold must not only account for the proper display of New Media Art, but also the way in which such art is to be stored for posterity. The challenges, many of which may yet be unforeseen, must be a commitment taken up by Museums and archives.

As the modernist Institution persists, the Internet as an exhibition space can and must provide an alternative. We already have seen that some exhibition paradigms are shifting over to the Internet, making it imperative that a “sense of place” is heightened in relationship to the Virtual. The Internet’s “sense of place” requires that its art be composed of features unique to the Internet—features such as Stocker’s four tenets of digital media—which encourage an alternative place of exhibition as opposed to a replacement for the physical exhibition space, a space created for and supported by its own internal features and which necessarily generates its own unique identity.

In so doing, the audience, artists, and curators for New Media Art will develop the technological realm to its capacity—not as something “instead,” but rather something “other.” As technology’s rapidly adapting nature will attest, the characteristics of the digital age are not exclusive but rather function as a rudimentary lens with which to parse the multiplicity of potentialities related to the Internet. As such, the Internet as an exhibition space, in accordance with its own characteristics, provides a remarkable context for the production, expansion, and potential of New Media Art.

⁵² London, Barbara. Interview with the author. 31 January 2007.

Appendix: Interviews by the Author

A basic template of questions tailored to the work and interests of each interview subject was created to inform the particular position offered by this essay. Among the questions posed to the participants were:

- How does each subject define New Media?
- Does the “alchemy” of the institutionalized exhibition space occur in the context of the virtual space? Is there a hierarchy of web pages?
- The white cube implies a closed viewing experience where context and content are interchangeable. How has this evolved in the realm of the virtual and how must viewers adapt their prior viewing paradigms in order to accommodate for this change?
- In the context of New Media, are the artist and the exhibition space forced to adapt faster than prior periods of media transition?
- Does the external content surrounding a computer impact a viewer’s experience of a web-based work? At what point does a web-based work end and the external world begin? Must the boundary between art and life be delineated by physical walls?
- Are the tenets of New Media motivated by postmodernist concepts or by specific features of the media itself? Are these conceptual or physical concerns?
- Is it possible to create a sense of “place” comparable to the white cube in the realm of the virtual?

- Will the exhibition space ultimately be able to reshape itself in order to display New Media work? Is there a comparable or definite exhibition paradigm in virtual (Internet or other digital) space?
- If the exhibition space must reshape itself, will the virtual space be able to do a work of art justice? Is the wall of the white cube comparable to the wall of a webpage?
- Is there a particular strategy to accommodate New Media's challenges as we move forward or is the response work-specific?

Interview: Barbara London, Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York.

January 31, 2007

AN: In my research thus far, I've defined New Media in its broadest context—as any form of artistic expression produced by multimedia digital technology. How do you define New Media?

BL: To me, New Media is an industry term specifically about the technology. For the museum and I—we've been involved with media for a very long time. I've seen it go from the analogue to the digital domain to digital computers; then we moved into this area that we loosely call New Media. For me, definitions are terms that work for a while, but definitions are constantly being updated. Media could mean installation, something with interactive components, or something using the Internet. You were also asking about

the Douglas Gordon work, *Play Dead*. That is an installation that involves media but, of course, it has to be turned on to work. It's silent, dead otherwise. Its just equipment.

AN: In what way do you see New Media challenging the exhibition space in ways that Modernism's paradigmatic "white cube" did not?

BL: It's definitely challenging traditional space. You know, I joke: we've got white cubes, black boxes, and in China they're calling some things yellow boxes. In China, artists and curators and theorists are looking at other contexts because it's not just a white, Caucasian world. Of course we need to think about the global. For example, I'm working on a show for June in the Media Gallery. It's called "Automatic Update"—playing on an industry term. We're always updating our hardware and software. I will try to work with the Media Gallery and deal with it slightly differently. There will be a tabletop piece by Jennifer and Kevin McCoy that has a live video element. There will be a piece by Raffael Lozano-Hemmer, it's his piece called *33 Questions A Minute*. There will be a piece by Cory Archangel, Paul Pfeiffer, and I'm exploring the possibility of doing something on "Second Life." As you may have read, I've gotten the Museum to do something on YouTube. So, I'm always interested in these new technologies, new ways of creating exhibitions or working with these new systems.

AN: As an institution, MOMA has had to contend with these challenges within its pre-established model. Do you see the way in which it has grappled with these

challenges as different from the way in which an institution with a shorter history may have done?

BL: Yes. Experimentation is always going to happen, and with this comes the critiques. Institutions like museums are behemoths, you know? They have a way of doing things, they have a history. And it takes a long time for change to happen within. Alternative galleries started in the '70s and they were raw and rough but were among the first to do performance and installations, and then museums took it in. So, I look at some of this DIY activity happening in Philadelphia and, of course, New York, people doing rough and ready things. Ultimately, those critiques and institutions become aware or try to adapt or work in these new approaches—sometimes we're leaders, sometimes we're followers.

AN: One work that I recall as functioning particularly well within MOMA's exhibition space was Douglas Gordon's piece *Play Dead; Real Time* in which the elephant was displayed on two opposing screens within the gallery. A viewer was able to circle the piece similarly to the way in which one would circle a three dimensional object. Is there a particular instance when you can recall an optimal display of New Media's potential within the gallery space? Or an example when it failed?

BL: We've worked with our spaces sometimes brilliantly. We did a show in the mid-70s called "Video Spaces" and there's a remarkable work by Teiji Furuhashi called *Lovers*. I think it was as successful as *Play Dead*. Brilliant work. And I think what you've asked

about, to me, is Gordon's best work. So it's dealing with space, surrounding the viewer, playing with scale, sound, a slight interactive element—almost a performance. A lot of the best media artists also have a background in music and there's a reason, I think. Dealing with time, understanding composition. It's not just about cinema.

AN: What do you think that you, or MOMA, has learned from these effective pieces? Is there a particular strategy to employ moving forward to accommodate media's challenges or do you think it's work-specific?

BL: I think it's both, because you can't say one thing. The institution, as I said, is a behemoth and we learn by doing. Something else very interesting is the consortium between SFMOMA, Tate, and MOMA. We're very seriously looking at media art and establishing procedures that are largely around exhibitions: how works come into the collection, the issues, the artist's intent, how we make sure those aesthetics are understood and passed on to future generations, because it's not just this moment. When you're a museum, you're looking at work you acquire for future posterity. You've got to take into account technology as it changes.

AN: Tangentially related to this, do you think that it is possible for the exhibition space to continually reshape itself in order to exhibit media work?

BL: We'll have to keep re-thinking, the museum can't be rigid like that.

AN: Do you see a comparable future exhibition paradigm in virtual space?

BL: I think we'll have virtual spaces, but I think we'll have a mix.

AN: You briefly mentioned "Second Life" when we spoke before, how are you thinking about "Second Life" or virtual space in general?

BL: Well, in "Second Life" I am looking at an event that would occur both in the real and in "Second Life" simultaneously, it's not yet worked out. It's something in consideration.

AN: In terms of virtual space specifically, how are you thinking about it? I personally have been thinking about the context of the virtual. As the situation occurs now, everything surrounding a computer shapes a person's experience of that artwork in general. Do you see this experience as parallel to a viewer's external experience of a work of art within a gallery, or is it something different?

BL: Well, I think all about context. When someone goes to the Museum of Modern Art's website, or they go to the Museum, that is a context, like a branding. So, you can experience the Museum by specifically being here, you can look at the shows and the concepts, some work would be inappropriate to have in a gallery—like an artist's website. It's really meant to be seen online. That's a one-on-one, personal experience. So to me, "Second Life" is a development of this. Taking it into a new plane, we're a little wet behind the ears, all of us—both artists and institutions. And it's not going to be the best

thing since sliced bread, you know? It's about a museum evolving as art's evolving. You only can get the definitions and take yourself to a new level by doing it, by taking the criteria that you've been using and evolving from the past.

AN: Do you see the “alchemy” or “legitimization process” that occurs within an Institution’s walls occurring within virtual space? In relation to MOMA and “Second Life,” specifically? You’d briefly mentioned branding...

BL: It's a really big world out there, and for some people they don't even know MOMA. And for you and the MOMA audience, we're the be all, end all. And for a lot of people we're just a little blip on the radar, right?

AN: In the context of postmodern institutional critique (which capitalizes upon the modern artist’s identity as the creator of a work of art) how do you see the implications of critique shifting as museums move toward the virtual?

BL: The work of art changes because the work of art is about experience. It used to be a painting on the wall and you (the viewer) would approach it and return to it the way you return to a poem that you have in your mind. Each time you read it or come back, you're coming with your mood that day, or the weather, or what you just read, or who you just spoke to.

AN: It was just October 2006 that MOMA announced you as Associate Curator of its newly created Media department. What do you see as the future of the Media department and what can we as viewers anticipate for the future?

BL: We certainly have ideas. We look towards media being more integrated into the contemporary program. Up until the expansion, media was here and there in little bits, but now we have a Media Gallery. Maybe you read that now we're going to have another building initiative within four years: the lot next to us is going to come up as a building with several floors of new galleries, so one can only imagine what role media will have in that. There'll be more installation work; we of course contextualize contemporary art. It used to be Bill Rubin and Alfred Barr: they approached things several ways. Bill Rubin said we didn't have to be the first to buy a new thing, we maybe wait five years—but then, of course, prices go up and we miss the boat—where Alfred Barr was out there really the first pioneering these acquisitions. I always have said we exhibit first and we acquire second. I also say we have to get a file folder on the artist—know the work, know where they're coming from, even if they're young or if they're old. You want to understand their vision, what their aesthetics are, and, especially if they're working in media, how we can accommodate that in the future because software keeps changing and that's a big responsibility. So, a painting is a big responsibility because we have to conserve it, store it, it's light sensitive. But media has other issues concerning its future.

Interview: Roberto Bocci**March 2, 2007**

AN: In my research thus far, I've defined New Media in its broadest context—as any form of artistic expression associated with multimedia digital technology. How do you define New Media?

RB: New media, as technology evolves and changes over time, is redefined and changed every day. Every day there is something new that is invented and constructed by the industry for utilitarian purposes and then eventually artists pick that technology and use it, subvert it, for their own purposes and expressive needs, which is what I like to do. I am very interested in this idea of reversal engineering. Taking technology that is used for utilitarian purposes, like keyboards, and taking them apart somehow, deconstructing them, and then using that technology within my artwork to create different kinds of person-to-machine relationships, which is something I've been doing with my sculptural forms that are interfaced with sensors. Rather than a person interacting with a mouse or keyboard, you're actually touching the form, and this touch triggers sound files, video events—which makes it a much more human interface. So, to go back to New Media, it refreshes and redefines itself every day, and the way artists use it is up to them. It takes on new meaning as artists and people use it and redefine it. If you look at the history of art, technology and art go hand in hand. Since the 12th and 13th century, fat and oil painting was invented to supplant tempera because they needed to produce more paintings faster, and that corresponded to a socio-political-economic condition that was a

transition from the feudal position to the city-state. Egg tempera was just too slow, they needed to paint fast and blend the paint on the canvas and oil allowed for that. So, the technology can be seen throughout history. So, I guess, today, our digital age of New Media is reflected in the technology that we use and artists use it for their own purposes.

AN: Obviously, in the digital age, everything is faster. Do you think that New Media challenges the artist and the exhibition space to adapt faster than past media transitions over time?

RB: Well, media artists often undergo and renew and refresh our knowledge all the time. It can be frustrating. In order to keep up with technology, we have to constantly learn and relearn. As far as art goes, if your work requires the software technology, you have to update your knowledge faster. Really, digital media is so diverse that it really depends on the type of work that you do. One thing is that people think that digital media is easy and fast. I don't really agree. I travel for two months just to shoot my footage. Then I get back home and I take all the frames, animate them, add sound. It's endless work. Not only is it shooting, it's the sound, it's the interactivity, it's the software design. So, it's a huge, monumental task. I started out as a photographer and it seemed so much more immediate. Even now, I do a series of photographic images. After an evening if you've got one or two images that feels great. When you work on an installation, on the other hand, you start and then show it in two years. It takes a lot of time; although, of course, it depends on how you approach it. I try to make a viewer see it, sense it, feel it—the process.

AN: How do you see these characteristics of New Media shifting the way in which the modernist “white cube” is challenged?

RB: Well, I think New Media requires a different kind of space. You need to have a different kind of equipment if you’re going to show Internet art. Of course, this is pretty logical. You need connections to the Internet. As much as we have this idea of the ubiquitous connectivity to the Web, there are barriers. Museums have successfully created spaces dedicated to New Media with support for sound, projection, DVD playback, whereas a modernist space only ultimately requires a white wall to hang a picture on.

AN: From what I’ve observed in your work, much of it directly confronts the tension between Virtual and Actual spaces—particularly your piece “A Fair Chance.” What strategies do you typically think about when approaching these issues? Are they conceptual or physical concerns?

RB: Its both. I think that practice and theory go hand in hand. Physical concerns: how people interact with a piece and ultimately are connected to the conceptual concerns. “A Fair Chance” was basically this trans-global relationship that I had with a friend of mine. We met in Florence and I kept visiting her; the piece is kind of a diary, a collage of small movies that we both worked on and then finally made these two interfaces [which became] the installation. The installation is my face, her face, and viewers went up to touch our sculptural faces. As they were touched, sequences were triggered about our

trans-global relationship: she lived in Australia and I lived in Italy. But I think that theory and practice go hand in hand. When you work on an installation, you think about all of the technical aspects in relationship to what they eventually can mean. My goal is to make those technical elements transparent, so you don't even see them. My goal, when a person walks into a space, is "where is the projector?" "Where is the projection coming from?" So you're not thinking and paying attention to technology but paying attention to the piece and what it brings to the viewer and how can the viewer bring his or her subjective perspective to the work. The same with software design, if the interface is cumbersome, that takes away from what the Internet site is about. You want to make this transparent. If you struggle to interact, eventually you'll lose the viewer.

AN: Many of your works, such as "New Faces," seem to work with the exhibition spaces' constraints as opposed to challenging them. Is this the way that you see New Media moving forward as a genre?

RB: I try to adapt my work to every space so the piece can constantly adapt into an ever changing form. You can do that with installation as a genre. New Media can have a version for the web: small spaces, large spaces, a disc that can be installed on a computer that doesn't have an Internet connection. With my work, the stuff you see on the Web is more of documentation. Ultimately, the content of the piece is the same, but it will adapt to the space that it is in, be it the Internet or actual space.

AN: Do you see the future of New Media as something that can adapt to both virtual and physical spaces?

RB: There's something about the work of art in a gallery. It really depends on the type of work. If the work requires a physical space and the presence of a person in a space triggers events because there are sensors, you have to be in the space and be surrounded and enveloped by the quadraphonic sound that shifts from one angle to the center to the back to the right side, and back again. And there's no way that you can experience that movement of the three dimensional space and its physicality. One idea in my work is to make viewers aware of their physicality, of their imprint within the space, by manipulating the direction and perspective of the video.

AN: I think that's something unique about your work: using digital technology to make a viewer aware of their presence in physical space based on their interaction with the piece. Digital "theatricality," if you will...

RB: Yeah. In a way, there is a sort of interaction with the viewer in most New Media works, but it's more removed. I'm really interested in the relationship between viewers and the work and how viewers interact with the work in an installation type setting to create an experience with the piece and take them on a journey, to displace them through sound and images. This is the strength of the possibilities that New Media has within the exhibition space. I don't think that the Web is ever going to be able to recreate that

experience. Even in the documentation of my works that I put on the Web, I try and recreate that feeling as much as possible.

AN: Many of the ways in which the New Media challenges the exhibition space parallel many of the tenets of postmodern ideas of institutional critique—examples like, questioning notions of temporality within the exhibition space and the linearity of the art historical progression. Do you see your work as a part of or continuation of these practices?

RB: I feel my work draws from so many different art historical instances. My work has some postmodern elements, in that it reaches viewers on multiple sensory levels and collapses the idea of what media is. Is it sculpture? Sound? Images? It's everything. It's an amalgamation and a hybrid form. The idea of hybridity is very much in keeping with postmodernism, taking from all places in culture—low, pop—and elevating it to high culture, finding a meeting ground between the two.

AN: I'd like to talk with you a little about virtual space. Many of your works are posted to your website, although they are representations of installations which exist in physical locations and are not "Net Art." How do you see this relationship and how do you see the realm of the "virtual" effecting future works of art?

RB: I think the Web is a very interesting place for artists to create pieces. However, personally, I still haven't been able to use the Internet and Internet space to create art that

I was satisfied with because I need high bandwidths of four or five channels of video streaming at the same time. I really need to run all of my installations directly from a hard drive. But again, that's going to change. If one day I can load my multimedia pieces online, that experience will be close to the possibilities within the gallery space. As the bandwidths expand, artists will have more and more ability to expand and express on the Internet.

AN: Is it possible for the exhibition space to reshape itself in order to properly exhibit New Media work? Or is our future exhibition paradigm purely virtual?

RB: I think so, yeah. Technology is adapting itself so quickly that soon it won't be necessary for the space around it to adapt. It will encompass the work itself. Anything can be modified.

Interview: Douglas Crimp

March 23, 2007

Among questions posed in advance were:

--In "The Postmodern Museum" you write, "Employing various strategies, these artists have worked to reveal the social and material conditions of art's production and reception—those conditions that it has been the museum's functions to dissemble...in short, "my" postmodernism subjected the reigning idealism of

mainstream modernism to a materialist critique and thereby showed the museum—founded on the presuppositions of idealism—to be an outmoded institution, no longer having an easy relationship to innovative contemporary art.”

Do you also see these challenges posed similarly by New Media artists?

--In a similar way, the notion of a website as a temporal means of display seems to translate to the characteristics of digital-based artwork itself. This seems to operate in opposition to the universality and timelessness inherent in modern display. Do you see this as a product of the medium itself or its concepts?

--In “The Museum’s Old, the Library’s New Subject” you write, “For at a certain moment photography enters the practice of art in such a way that it contaminates the purity of Modernism’s separate categories, the categories of painting and sculpture. These categories are subsequently divested of their fictive autonomy, their idealism, and thus their power.” Do you see New Media as an extension of this trajectory established in photography?

D.C.: I'm worried that I'm not going to be able to help you because I am so ignorant about New Media.

AN: To be honest, I'd like to look at New Media conceptually with you if possible, in terms of what it does to the exhibition space.

DC: I think that in terms of looking at them conceptually, one of the things I thought to say to you was that in terms of the example that I was dealing with photography, which was essentially a "new medium" for the museum when I was trying to theorize postmodernism, I couldn't have done that without specific examples of photographic practice. Especially Sherrie Levine or Cindy Sherman, who I wrote about early on. Or, to take other examples, Rauschenberg, Warhol, the way that photography was hybridized with painting by them. Or Ed Ruscha. So, on the other hand, what I was dealing with was maybe a larger conceptual issue that might be more analogous to what you're dealing with—which would be the way in which the Museum embraced photography as a medium as a whole. But in my experience, and this may be different from yours, has the Museum done that with New Media? Would the institutionalized art world? (When I say the Museum in my work, I mean the paradigmatic Institution and structure of the Museum in modernism. I'm not even sure that that holds anymore because it seems that the Institutional structure of art is now the market, although that was encompassed by my notion of the Museum when I was working with it. But the market is so overwhelming at

this point.) What do you think of that? Is it in your experience that the Museum as Institution is embracing New Media?

AN: I'm dealing with the Museum as Institution because I'm interested in these institutionalized notions of the Internet—the Whitney's ArtPort, Rhizome.org; the Tate Online. Of course, these artworks could exist on an alternate webpage, and I think its an interesting phenomenon that's occurring—where artworks in the “actual” world can exist in a museum or on the sidewalk. In the “virtual” world artworks can exist on a museum's website or on some alternate site, be it the artist's or an organization's, etc. When you're talking about the market and the corresponding legitimization of culture, at the end of the day there is no difference between a museum's webpage and another webpage that could have the same platform for the same artwork, no longer the museum's physical walls as superior to a viewer seeing an artwork as they stand on the sidewalk. Yet, because the modern paradigm still largely holds in terms of institutional legitimization in many ways, the Whitney's Artport somehow “seems” more legitimate.

D.C.: Yes, in fact it would be one of the curious conditions of the Internet as I experience it, which is much less probably than you do. To me it is hard to call it an Institution. It is so all over the place, so unregulated. So unregulated in a sense that anybody could put anything on the Internet and it has a kind of legitimacy. Not an equal legitimacy, because of course legitimacy is conferred by a price, I guess. In terms of Google, legitimacy is determined by having something come up higher on a search. You can get greater

institutional legitimacy in certain search engines by paying for keywords in a search. Paid content will be higher up than something that you or I could put up, I suppose. So I guess that that is an institutional structure, but I guess a different one. The other thing that I thought in terms of the questions that you posed to me was that a lot of the work I was doing on postmodernism and the way in which the system of modernism became visible to us at a certain moment historically through institutional critique—artists that were actually looking at the institutionalization of art and making that the subject of their work, the question that I thought of in relation to your project is, are Web or New Media artists thinking about questions of the institution of which they are dealing as a subject matter for their work? If the Internet has become a new sort of “art institution,” are they making that Institution the subject of their work critically?

A.N. In my opinion, there are a lot of cases when they are. I’m not sure if you’re familiar with Golan Levin’s *Dumpster* which takes the contents of teenage breakup blogs and uses them as the subject matter in the work. Its been quite central to the way that I’ve been positioning my thinking about New Media because it so clearly exemplifies these postmodern tenets by taking (literally) its surrounding context (the internet) and utilizing it as the content of the work, collapsing the distance between high and low culture (blogs as the subjects of a work of art that is displayed on the Whitney’s Artport), and it goes on. In cases like this, I think that Net Art can and does comment upon the Internet as an Institution. And, of course, the work is displayed in a “legitimized” space, and thus reaches a wide audience. It also has this universally understood aspect, as technology is so ubiquitous at this point, so

integral to daily life. Of course there's a lot of New Media work that has nothing to do with this. But I've been focusing on work that does, because it's an interesting lens to begin to parse such a huge topic with.

DC: I guess the complicating question for me, because I'm just old fashioned enough to not be looking at art in ways other than I've always looked at art, like going to museums and galleries and reading about it. The Internet itself, New Media itself, is such a subject of its own, such a revolution in culture and one that I think we can't even begin to predict and to know how it has already changed people's lives and how it will further change it. I suppose I know it in one other field better, which is to know how it has changed the nature of gay communities. For example, how surfing the Internet for sex has changed the way in which social spaces based around sex have been organized, how they've changed or been diminished. For example, how these social spaces like bars, bathhouses, sex clubs, all of those kinds of things that functioned in relation to sex or because of sex always became spaces that were much more than that. They were also spaces of political organizing, conversation, a sense of community, everything that is social. Whereas, in some ways, everything that is in Freudian theory sexual is kind of antisocial in the sense that is so much about the self and the destruction of the self, the very self which can constitute a relation to another. And so actually, in my sense of it, the Internet, although it has promised a certain kind of interconnectivity and community building, has actually more often resulted in a kind of atomization. It's harder for people to organize politically and to feel part of a world, a real world I suppose, a face to face world where you actually have a wide variety of people that you constantly see, have a conversation with, get to

know something about their lives, because the Internet spaces that provide all of this are spaces that are much more a fantasy than they are a reality. So that's something that I know a little about, although I'm not a user of it in a way that many younger people are, I see how the spaces of use that I did know have changed. And that change to me actually seems quite drastic, quite enormous, quite momentous. So, I'm assuming that that is something that is true, has changed the nature of childhood, probably, because children are so computer literate and because of their sense of self in relation to others and their sense of who they are also is based on this structure of the games that they play on the internet and so on. This is really speculated because this is not a field of knowledge that I am directly engaged with. I don't really read about this stuff, this is just really about my own minimal experience. But I'm saying all of this because I think that probably when you think about New Media art and the relationship of the Internet to conventional media that are materially-based (media that actually require being physically related to in one place or another and physical encounters with them where you actually go and see them) that seems pretty huge to me, that difference.

AN: I realize how large these assumptions may seem, but I think they are assumptions that I lend meaning to everything occurring in the contemporary with which we have no precedent to judge with, no lens to parse with. There's very little writing on it, and what does exist is largely inconclusive, or it was written two years ago and is now all but obsolete. That's why I'm conducting these interviews as opposed to library reading.

DC: Right. I can see how this is the case. One always needs a kind of structure when one looks at these things, but I think that's one of the reasons that I find New Media as one of those things that makes me feel old, that it's not a medium that I can comprehend because I didn't grow up with it. But I think for other people it's the space of consciousness in some ways, probably somewhat more for people of your generation.

A.N. Absolutely, in some ways it truly is. I think that in some ways what it does now it couldn't do before. And why is that? What kinds of paradigms are beginning to shift?

Interview: Golan Levin

February 26, 2007

AN: How do you define New Media?

GL: A funny definition that I heard recently was: anything that was created after you were born. So actually, for most of my students the computer is not New Media, but it is for me. But it changes quickly. In general, there's an interest in exploring the aesthetic possibilities and cultural implications of new technology, whatever new technology means. The idea is: why should government and industry be the only ones to determine what new technology is, what it does, who it's for, and why it operates. Artists want to have a say in that.

AN: Generative art is a more specific term for New Media that is generated by algorithms. Do you see this as New Media's future?

GL: Potentially much closer to New Media's past. The first computer art about 40 years ago, that was done by people like Manfred Mohr, Naacke, Lillian Schwartz, and Kenneth Knowlton, was generative because they were exploring the idea of algorithms in a variety of forms. You would put in an algorithm and get infinite variations on a shape and that was computer art. They would print it out. Generative art is one of many different subgenres of New Media art practice (so-called "hactivism") that is a really active field right now: people working with political feeds and using that work to achieve an end. Folks like Ubermorgen, with really sophisticated "hactivism," or the IAA (Institute for Applied Autonomy), which uses New Media technology to question surveillance. I don't think that generative art represents *the* future of generative art, but I do think it represents *a* future. There are some people who work in the field of generative cinema: you hit a button and you get a different ending every time. That's a really active part of the field right now.

AN: At the Cybersonica festival you noted that the four pillars of digital art are transmediality (tangibility, audiovisuality, environment), processuality (generativity, algorithmic processes), connectivity (communication, connection) and interactivity (creative flow, play, cybenetic feedback). Do you see these tenets as motivated by Postmodernist concepts or by specific features of the media itself?

GL: Definitely the latter; they're not my categories. I'm indebted to Gerfried Stocker who's the curator of the Ars Electronica Festival for pointing these pillars out to me. Obviously there's lots of different ways of cutting New Media, and that there should be only these four, or that these are the only four, would be patent nonsense, but it's a good first cut. Connections between your background in postmodern critical theory are more rarely applied than you might think. New Media has been in its own ghetto for the past thirty years and quite distinct from many trends in contemporary art which have been much more informed by postmodern critical theory. I think that the four features really have much more to do with features of the medium and how it operates in relation to people. Connectivity is really about the fact that technology connects people in a virtual space like on the telephone—you and I are connected now in a virtual space.

Processuality is something that is really leftover from modernism. One of the more interesting questions is how New Media practices connect with process art in the 1960: people like Sol Lewitt and Mel Bochner. And the interesting thing is that they were contemporaneous, but not really. In fact, those guys didn't like each other. The New Media artists were like "our stuff actually works. We built a machine to do this process for us instead of having to use subjective verbal descriptions." The conceptualists were like "we don't need a machine. All we need to do is say it." There was the rift.

Transmediality is something that is coming from the idea that you can map any kind of other data. And that's really coming out of digital theory and computer science—what happens when things become digital. And the consequences are vast. Interactivity is something that never existed in art before. I think one thing that distinguishes New Media

art is that many of these examples show an artist forming a new way of communicating, a new means of expression. And I think that the artwork is literally the presentation to the public of this new, expressive medium. The artist is actually developing a new means of expression. And this medium has as much expression as a computer or a television, except that it's a lot less useful. I think that a lot of contemporary art still believes that medium is a vessel for communicating some other kind of idea. Like video: you have a video about something. And a lot of New Media art really owes a lot of debt to McLuhan for pointing out that "the medium is the message." Literally, the subject and content of the work is the medium itself. The idea that one could communicate in this way. I think that that's the real differential from contemporary art: paintings and videos are necessarily about something. If you buy McLuhan, there isn't anything in that. The place where postmodern critical theory comes into New Media art is where it relates to repurposing cultural assets. An example would be Jennifer and Kevin McCoy with chopping digital information up and reassembling it in interesting ways, it has a lot to do with media-based media, but also a lot to do with the means of reassembly and decontextualization.

AN: The way that I've positioned my research on New Media thus far is as an extension of the postmodern practices of museum critique which disrupted the traditional art historical narrative, brought temporality within the exhibition space, dissolved boundaries between "high" and "low" culture, disrupted the symbiosis of context and content, and allowed for a variety of sources to be available as the content of artwork. Do you see your work as this same type of extension? A work

that sticks out in my mind which engages with many of these concepts is *The Dumpster* by way of its use of its surrounding context of the popular “teenage blog” as the source of content for its expression as well as its display on the web pages of many prominent institutions such as the Tate Online, the Whitney’s Artport, and Turbulence.org...

GL: I think you could make an argument for all of that, but it’s only because New Media is now beginning to find its way into the Museum. It’s not the other way around.

Dissolving content and the boundary between authorship of the artist vs. the audience has precursors in contemporary art history before New Media existed. Fluxus, for example.

But, you know, it hasn’t really been intended as a reflexive way of questioning the Museum and authorship. It’s more that the medium itself just does this. And the Museum has largely avoided it, frankly. But I think that all of these ideas definitely play a role in New Media work, but I’m not sure that they figure prominently in the conceptualization of New Media Art. I actually think that it’s only now that postmodern critical theory and New Media are coming together in a substantive way. If you look at the main compilations of writings on New Media, most of it is coming from the history of technology. It talks about the ways that technology will affect our lives. And artists have looked at these cultural implications. New Media work has been ignored by Museums for a number of years. I mean specifically computational New Media work. For example, by context, video has been embraced for just as long. So I’m not talking about *that* New Media. But Museums have not known what to do with New Media work, it’s only now that they’re beginning to incorporate it because they feel that it’s received

legitimacy. Now that it's been around for 40 years, they think that it's finally time to make some distinctions about "High" and "Low." You could make an argument that Net Art existed on the Net because it was trying to critique the museum, or you could say that it was created by artists who thought that work could exist on the Internet.

AN: Expanding on this question, do you see the nearly alchemical legitimization process which occurs when a work is displayed in the context of a museum occurring when a work is displayed on the wall of an institution's webpage? Is there a hierarchy of web pages?

GL: Maybe. Museums have the authority to confer legitimacy on just about everything they touch. For example, the Tate Online and Whitney Artport are attempting to have a little bit of art on their websites, but they're really on limited budgets and go from year to year, and it's always a question if they will continue. In many cases museum directors don't even know what they have on there. Partly, my *Dumpster*, for example: the fact that it was sponsored by the Tate and the Whitney gives it a certain legitimacy among people who believe in that sort of legitimacy. So, for example, I'm a professor at Carnegie Mellon and at my tenure review process they'll see that I had a commission at the Whitney and think it's great. But the real message of whether or not something is successful on the Internet is if it gets blogged, if it's interesting, if people are talking about it, if it is something that creates a buzz. Something doesn't need to be on the Whitney site to do that. You have a better chance of being discovered sooner. But you can do interesting projects, post them on your own webpage, email a few friends about

them, and if the project's worth anything, they'll tell their friends and your project will be legitimized based on the Internet's own characteristics. So I think to answer your question, it confers legitimacy to people who believe in it.

AN: Getting back to the Institution and the physical exhibition space for a minute, a few of your works such as *The Hidden Worlds of Noise and Voice* and *RE:MARK* utilize New Media technology but are actualized in “real” as opposed to virtual space. A commonality shared by these works, however, is their dependency on viewer interaction—a major tenet of digital art in general. In your opinion, what is the nature of this relationship and how does the “real” space change conceptions of your work in relation to your solely net-oriented pieces, which are also interactive and viewer-dependent?

GL: That's interesting. I mean, I do all kinds of work: performances, installations, Net Art. I would like to speculate that my range is a bit on the wide side. Many New Media artists tend to focus in maybe one of those areas. Obviously, one of the major things I'm interested in is the use of the full body, the full corporeality of the person and the way of exploring different forms of interactivity. So, for example, I'm working now on a new piece that uses eye-tracking software to tell where the viewer's pupil is located. This kind of exploration using those kinds of technologies can only be done in so-called “real space.” You just don't have that ability on a browser. On the other hand, a browser gives you its advantages. You have ready connectivity virtually guaranteed, you have a convenient format that will more or less work on people's machines, and you have an

URL format that people can pass around if they like it. So the reasons for doing these different kinds of works are concerned with different ideas. All my works are concerned with communication. The Net Art that I've done is concerned with how people communicate online. You know, what the subject of peoples' blogs are, how they use numbers on web pages. The installation work I've done is concerned with the use of the viewer's body and communication, whether it be their voice, or using their eyes, their gestures, their posture. For me, interactivity is a subject. And it's a progress. There are many New Media artists that do not use interactivity as a subject at all.

AN: *Dialtones*, on the other hand, utilizes an aspect of the popular (the cell phone) to infiltrate the “exhibition” space without the viewer’s active participation. In fact, it is merely their ownership of the device which relates them to the piece. How do you see these aspects of culture as particularly pertinent and meaningful to the Institutional space?

GL: I felt kind-of awkward about *Dialtones* when I made it, because I'm so concerned with interactivity, and it is concerned with ownership. But the strange thing actually is that people feel surprisingly close to their cell phones; they're actually a little extension of their body. The piece is more interactive than I'd expected, because all they had to do was own the phone. But when they were sitting in the performance space and suddenly their phone rang, something happened in the mind. Probably, something like, “Someone's calling me, I have to answer my phone.” A mental event transpires there. And to catch yourself and realize that it's a concert is something that was played out

nearly 8,000 times in a half-hour performance. People kept getting caught in this weird digital event. What's important about that is that it's the difference between being in a car and driving and getting rear-ended by someone, and thinking, "Hey, someone hit my car," and "Hey, someone hit me." You actually think the latter, though they actually hit your car. I think that the concert made that clear with the mobile phone.

AN: What do you see as the major challenges which New Media poses to the exhibition space that modernist works did not? As we move forward, is it possible for the exhibition space to reshape itself in order to properly exhibit New Media work or will our future paradigm be purely virtual?

GL: Exhibiting New Media work in the Museum is a real challenge because museums lack an IT staff, and computers present a challenge that marble sculptures don't. Computers fail after a while; hard drives crash; electronics corrode. In the case of electromechanical installations, there is certainly failure after repeated use. Especially electronic things that people are touching, even more so if it's interactive. I have one installation where all people touch is the microphone, and you let it run for a year and the hardware and the computer is fine, but the microphone is totally damaged, if not outright stolen. So, there are challenges to presenting New Media work in that people need to understand how to care for it. There's another question now as to how to care for New Media work not five, but fifty years from now when technology is different. John Neopolitano has written really interesting stuff about emulators and ways of archiving digital works in ways that you're not archiving documentation of a work, but rather how

you keep software running for fifty or one hundred years, though it may not be the same computer. There's this thing called an emulator—when I was twelve years old I had this thing called an Atari 2600 computer which ran a lot of classic arcade games, and now those computers are pretty expensive. So if you don't happen to have one, you can buy this thing called a software emulator and it will pretend to be the Atari 2600 and emulates all of the wiring and programming of the 2600. It's a Virtual computer running on an actual computer. So, I can take my old computer and “burn it” onto my new computer. So that's what an emulator is, and that may hold the key to archiving important works of New Media art. Museums aren't just interested in how you present New Media work, but they're interested in its longevity, how you keep it. No one is building computers to last fifty years. So, that's the future, I think. It depends on Museums getting a technical staff.

AN: I've been thinking about the possibility of creating a sense of place within the virtual realm, specifically in relation to spaces such as “Second Life,” etc. How do you see this future unfolding and how will our viewing paradigm adapt from that of the “white cube” aesthetic?

GL: Its funny, in the early 1990s you had a huge amount of interest in Virtual Reality, particularly in European New Media work. Everyone thought that the future of New Media work was going to be putting on a helmet and virtual effects and avatars. I think this idea comes around again and again and again. I think that there's a lot more continuity in this idea than you might expect. I think there's a future in it, you don't even

have to look at “Second Life,” even just multiplayer gaming. Forever ago people had Lambda Mu; it was basically a text-based Virtual Reality.

AN: The way that I’m thinking about it is that that’s as close as I can tell of a sense of place in the virtual. I personally have trouble seeing a wall of a webpage as comparable to the wall of a gallery at this point, and “Second Life” feels closer to achieving that.

GL: I think you’d be surprised as to how certain digital works can communicate a sense of place even though I can’t think of good examples. 3D Virtual Reality is not the only way of doing it. You have to be open to other ways and different possibilities.

AN: Many of your works, such as *Dumpster* and *The Secret Lives of Numbers*, utilize aspects of the Internet itself as the content of the work. In consideration of postmodern practices and Institutional critique, do you see this work as a critique of the Internet as an Institution itself?

GL: The Internet is not really an institution in the traditional sense. It’s massively distributed; it’s not a hierarchy at all. There’s nowhere to compete; there isn’t a boss of the Internet. It’s possible to critique ways people use it, things people say on it, investigate kinds of communication you find on it. In the pieces you’ve mentioned, I was more interested in the patterns that people use, particularly in this new space. In a way that’s quite timeless. I think that in *Dumpster* you have a certain timeless quality, people

have been breaking up and having heartache for a long time. *The Secret Lives of Numbers* doesn't need to be on the Internet, it just takes advantage of the fact that the Internet is compiling all of this stuff for us. It uses the Internet but it's not really critiquing it. There is some really great Net Art that critiques institutions on the Internet. For example, Ubermorgen's work on Google...*Google Will Eat Itself*. Playing with notions of what the Internet could be used for. It could be used for auctioning votes, etc.

Interview: Frazer Ward

March 2, 2007

AN: How do you define New Media?

FW: In brief, I don't. All of the common designations entail problems. "Digital," for instance, is true, in terms of hardware, but a poor description of web-based projects, say. And "New Media" has a progressive slant that I don't care for. As a practical matter, I probably use "digital media" more often because it does at least refer to the nature of the technology. But that's not entirely satisfactory.

AN: In what way does New Media challenge the exhibition space in ways that modernism's "white cube" model did not?

FW: One modernist dream was "simultaneous collective experience," which access to material by computer does not exactly provide. It's possibly temporally collective, though not necessarily, and of course everyone is at their own computer in their own

room. Perhaps Web access will redefine “collective,” and perhaps “public.” The white cube had the advantage of setting off a discrete area in which experiments of certain kinds might take place (given that, of course, the museum and gallery were always in fact caught up in a web of socio-economic relations). Web-based practices, as participatory as they may be (and I take a very qualified view of that), jostle and compete with every other commercial and non-commercial bit of information on the Web.

AN: Continuing with your idea that web-based works refuse to “set off a discrete area” where a work of art functions, do you see the external context surrounding a computer impacting a viewer’s experience of the content of a Web-based work? At what point do you see the experience of Web-based work ending and the external world beginning? “Net Art,” if you will, seems to conflate notions of art and life and force a new viewing paradigm for the future. How do you see this?

FW: This is a very good question. Typically, perhaps, one uses the computer in a domestic setting, which is subject to all sorts of forces. I have seen a number of discussions on listserves that address a gender gap in certain forms of participation (Who has the time to write long posts? etc.), and tie it to the demands of domestic labor. This may also be true of the reception of work on the computer.

AN: Expanding upon this question, many institutions themselves have set up Web-based counterparts such as Tate Online, Whitney Artport, Rhizome.org, and Turbulence.org. Do you see the modernist legitimization process occurring when a

work is displayed in the context of the “white cube,” or when a work is displayed on the wall of an institution’s webpage? Is there a hierarchy of web pages?

FW: Legitimization is already occurring with the appearance of computer terminals in museums, museums keeping online archives of new media work, etc. Exhibitions like “01 01” and so on. Whether that process is a desirable or adequate one is a different question. There are many online practices that wish to distance themselves from just those processes. And there are new institutions developing that will offer slightly different criteria for, and paths to, legitimacy.

AN: What is the greatest challenge that New Media poses to the exhibition space?

FW: At one level, the exhibition space isn’t going anywhere: museums are an important part of the culture industry, major tourist venues that are part of multi-billion dollar industries. Maybe the question needs to be posed the other way around, so to speak: How will the exhibition space/culture industry affect or absorb New Media? Will New Media serve as research and development for the culture industry?

On another level, the advent of the Web as a kind of space for the appearance of artworks (if that remains a useful term), ought to broaden possibilities of aesthetic production and reception, and take those possibilities beyond the purview of the white cube, though it’s not yet clear what the most interesting avenues might be.

AN: Does this in some way connect to a specific instance or example that you've encountered within your own work?

FW: Not especially. Things that seem potentially interesting have relations to games, mainstream media outlet webcasts, social networking, and wikis. But I wonder whether the more interesting areas may turn out to be at the level of codes.

AN: Is it possible for the exhibition space to reshape itself in order to properly exhibit New Media work? Or is our future exhibition paradigm purely web-based?

FW: As I observed, the museum's not going anywhere. But new kinds of institutions are already appearing and will continue to develop, whether they do so under the aegis of museums or otherwise.

AN: If the exhibition space won't reshape itself physically or conceptually, can the virtual space do a work of art justice? Is the wall of a white cube comparable to the wall of a webpage?

FW: Looking at a painting online is obviously useful for the classroom and just as obviously unsatisfactory, as against seeing the thing first hand. So no, they're not comparable. But by the same token the wall isn't very useful for viewing an interactive online project.

AN: In his *Inside the White Cube*, Brian O’Doherty writes: “the ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is “art.” The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conversations are preserved through the repetition of a closed system of values.” The “white cube” thus implies an enclosed viewing experience where context and content are interchangeable. How is this evolved in the realm of the virtual and how must viewers adapt their prior viewing paradigms in order to accommodate for this change?

FW: The white cube might have wanted to do that, especially during the era of high modernism, but almost everything that’s come after that (Minimalism, Conceptual Art, Performance and Video, the art of Institutional Critique, etc.) has worked to undermine the idea of a purely aesthetic experience (which is why I prefer the metaphor of the laboratory). This is only carried further in Web-based practices.

AN: Do you see this as an enhancement or a deterrent?

FW: It may be that similar boundaries have always applied to museum visits, etc., though there are many more things to pull one away from the computer at home, so there is a different form of attention at play. You might want to look at some of the discussions of “continuous partial attention,” in this context. But the average time that people spend in front of an artwork in a museum is tiny, too.

AN: The way that I've positioned my research on New Media thus far is as an extension of the postmodern practices of institutional critique (which disrupted the traditional art historical narrative, brought temporality within the exhibition space, dissolved boundaries between "high" and "low" culture, disrupted the symbiosis of context and content, and allowed for a variety of sources to be available as the content of artwork). Do you see New Media as a continuation of the trajectory of these challenges?

FW: I think that this is certainly one way to read it. My hesitation is that the relation between technology and art is much older than that. The dissolving of boundaries between high and low culture happens at various moments. It happens in Cubism. And Dada obviously—those people have a relation to technology as well. Temporality, I think, is interesting. My own feeling about these discourses about participation and participatory aesthetics is there's a continuity from postmodern practices and specifically Performance Art. And I think a lot of the rhetoric of participation and performance has migrated to New Media in different forms. So, broadly, do I see New Media as a continuation of the trajectory of these challenges? Yes. But, you would need a little more specificity. You can make a generalization of that, but within that you need to connect specifically a bit more. Certainly emphasis on the part of some New Media practitioners on disrupting traditional means of Art with a capital "A" so its not a museum, and from there on.

AN: Artist Golan Levin has noted that the four pillars of digital art are transmediality (tangibility, audiovisuality, environment), processuality (generativity, algorithmic processes), connectivity (communication, connection) and interactivity (creative flow, play, cybenetic feedback). Do you see these tenets as motivated by postmodernist concepts or by specific features of the media itself? A conceptual or a physical concern?

FW: And, you know Lev Manovich has his own ideas about the pillars of Digital Art. I think if it's an algorithmic process, that's probably a feature of technology. But the question of the relationship between practice and technology, people often want to argue that new practices are driven by new technologies, but the other argument which I have some time for is that cultures produce the technologies that they need or deserve. But then the answer would be something like neither or both. I think again, that's one where the technology and the concepts are in a kind of loop. That's how I would tend to see it.

AN: The postmodern conflation of content and context allowed artists practicing Institutional Critique to utilize aspects of the Institutional space itself as the content of the work of art. In many ways, digital artworks utilize aspects of the digital age, and especially the Internet as the content of the work—specifically regarding the proliferation of information, notions of intimacy, new relationships of private and public, anonymity, and the quantification of societal values and norms. How do you see this?

FW: I do think that some people argue that the work is a critique of the Internet itself, absolutely. An interesting thought is on “Second Life,” which in a way touches on this question. My feeling is that there’s a lot of technophilia about it in the people that are making something that might be called “art.” There’s still a lot of, as one friend of mine puts it, “I want to be my Ipod.” And so it’s hard sometimes to wade through that. But I think that there are people who are using the Internet but also mounting a critique of aspects of it. Probably Nathalie Bookchin: she made a piece that was called *MetaPit* that was a game. Game-based work, I think, does that. Some people like Mary Flanagan, who does things like “mining your hard drive” and it’s a little bit aesthetic, but some of its implications might be critical of the ways in which the Internet shifts privacy, for instance. Barbara Lattanzi has done some really funny works, like *CSpan Karaoke*, where she uses the web to intervene in mainstream media, and also what she calls “idiomorphic cinema.” And certainly there’s a critical edge to some of the things that are out there. But, also, it’s still kind-of the technophilia aspect, the “Oh cool I can do this” you know? And that’s just because some people are more interesting than others. Some people are still working in... if you look at early video art, there’s a moment where there are a lot of people working in video that are basically working out what they can do. And that’s the “oh cool” moment. And then, relatively soon after that, you start getting a lot of people using video loops where a viewer will enter into some sort of video environment. Nauman would be one instance of this—where they see themselves reflected back and they are put in this position of both observer and observed—often a very uncomfortable position if you use Nauman as an example where the viewer is “surveilled.” And that comes up pretty quickly; and it’s a pretty implicit critique of aspects of the technology

itself. In that instance it ends up being a critique of television, because it's the same technology. And you know, now we can watch TV on the Internet, get the news on the Internet, sit in bed and look at the Internet. So I imagine that work will start to emerge that takes the ubiquity of the Internet up.

Here's something interesting about the Museum and the Internet. The good thing about the Museum is that it gives you a centralized source of information. That's also a bad thing about the Museum, because it's hierarchical. On the other hand, sometimes when you try and deal with Internet Art, you kind-of wish it was a little more hierarchical, because somebody tells you about something that they found and you think it's really interesting and they found it because they were on some listserve, or because somebody sent them a link to it. There are some centralized clearinghouses of information. But there's a bigger possibility that somebody will be off somewhere doing their own thing that might be terrifically interesting, but you'll never see it.

AN: I think that it's that proliferation of information that is integral to New Media work itself and which provides much of its content.

FW: I think that's true. And it's not always clear whether that's an advantage or a problem. There are a lot of people talking about activism and participatory culture that have a radical or a democratic tension, and how you measure their efficacy is complicated, which is also true of any art practice that has a political agenda or sees itself as having a political function. So this is not so new in some ways.

AN: I think a lot of the questions that New Media faces are not necessarily new questions, but there's just the potential for new answers for them.

FW: Yeah. Sure. There are more things to answer them with.

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