

Art games: Interactivity and the embodied gaze

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Abstract

One of the most salient differences between fine art and new media art lies in the possibility for interactivity. Interactivity is not simply an inherent quality of new media, it also relates to a crucial ethico-aesthetic premise informing deconstructive art from Dada and Surrealism through radical art of the 1960s and 1970s and into the present. The ethico-aesthetic premise in question concerns breaking down the barrier between the viewer and the work of art and bringing art into life. More specifically the goal is to bring creativity into everyday life as an antidote to alienation and reification. Whereas new media art finds it relatively easy to devise art games that encourage creative involvement on the part of the viewer, fine art is severely hindered in its attempts in this direction by the traditional focus on the artist-genius and the transformation of the artistic product (whatever its material) into a precious object. It will be shown that creative games exist in fine art but they are for the most part designed by the artist for the artist. This is even the case with the most radical fine artists celebrated at the turn of the millennium such as Rirkrit Tiravanija who Nicolas Bourriaud put forward as a prime instance of so-called relational aesthetics.

Keywords

art games
art into life
creativity
installation art
interactive art
relational aesthetics

Traditionally the interaction of the viewer with the work of art has been via looking and respectfully appreciating. Today we refer to that mode of interaction as 'reading' works of art which suggests a somewhat less passive role than that of 'appreciating'. But since the advent of digital art there has been another mode of interaction that is made possible by input devices and software programs. Whereas the *post factum* reading of works of art can be described as distanced and disembodied the more hands on mode of interaction associated with digital art can be described as immersive and embodied. The argument put forward in this essay is that embodied or performative interaction provides the viewer with a more creative mode of involvement and that this can have an emancipatory effect in the sense that it disrupts if only for a moment the hegemony of instrumental rationalism.

Notions of involving the viewer are not new of course but if we examine current developments in art closely we find signs that the long-standing project to involve the viewer and bring art into life is reaching something of a crisis point and that interactive new media art seems best suited to step into the breach.

Since the 1990s installation art has risen into prominence as a major movement in fine art and in her authoritative analysis Claire Bishop suggests that our experience of installation art goes beyond looking and reading towards what she refers to as 'activated spectatorship' (2005: 11). She even suggests that such activated readership might inspire the viewer to 'active engagement in the social-political arena' (Bishop 2005: 11). The background to this ambitious statement is important because it has a long history that concerns the ethical role of art in a modern and postmodern society. Most particularly it concerns the perception that since the industrial revolution fine art has become separated from society. Moreover, it became separated at precisely the point when the power of the Church and monarchy were supplanted by democratic capitalism. The fate of art was to become a bastion for individual self-expression. At first sight this might appear to be an excellent development and in some respects it is. But problems become evident when art seeks to criticize the society that appears to offer it so much freedom. What we discover is that critical art is absorbed into the system. The artist is celebrated for her transgressions and her subversive products become transformed into precious objects. Most importantly, the viewer is placed in a subordinate position, which should alert us to the fact that something is going wrong with the discourse of freedom.

In 'The Death of the Author' (1976 (original 1968)) Roland Barthes observes that 'classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature' (1977: 148). We can easily paraphrase this as 'the art system has never paid any attention to the viewer, the artist is the only person that matters'. Moreover, Barthes made that statement in the context of what he frames as a specious claim by progressive literary critics to the effect that the reader is of crucial importance. Consider, for example, Bishop's comments on installation art:

Many artists and critics have argued that this need to move around and through the work in order to experience it *activates the viewer*, in contrast to art that simply requires optical contemplation (which is considered to be passive and detached). This activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory, since it is analogous to the viewer's engagement in the world. A transitive relationship comes to be implied between 'activated spectatorship' and active engagement in the social-political arena.

(2005: 11)

The idea that we will be so inspired by being able to walk into a work of art that we will become political activists seems somewhat overstated. What is more significant, however, is the fact that Bishop's statement echoes one of the most enduring ethical *aspirations* of fine art; but the reality is much closer to the paraphrase of Barthes offered above: 'the artist is the only person that matters'.

One can cite a fairly typical instance: Jason Rhoades and Paul McCarthy's 'Sheep Plug', 2004. This was an installation exhibited at the Dionysiac exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2005. It consisted of great deal of junk-like material spread out across a gallery floor. But as both artists now possess superstar status their post-Duchampian, 'transgressive', 'anti-art'



Figure 1: *Julia Scher, Security by Julia II, Artists Space, New York, 1989.*

detritus has been transmuted by the fine art system into precious objects. Accordingly, visitors had to be carefully channelled through the now precious stuff by a path marked out by tape stuck onto the gallery floor. This created an experience not unlike that of looking at a sculpture on a pedestal.

Such lack of immersion and segregation of the viewer from the work is the norm due to the fact that apart from some rare exceptions (such as the Palais de Tokyo in Paris) the art museum experience is akin to visiting a bank vault. One is invariably watched by guards and CCTV cameras and one's interaction with works of art is further demarked by devices such as daises, tape, beams. Whenever installation art submits to this regime – and since the 1990s it most often does – then it announces its complicity with that regime. Which is to say most instances of old media installation art do not demonstrate a new found intimacy with the viewer but a new found intimacy with the art institution.

Artists are not unaware of this situation. Take, for example, Julia Scher's 'Security by Julia II', a critique of the bureaucratic regime of the art gallery installed in an alternative space, Artists Space, New York in 1989. This work consisted of hiring personnel to act as guards plus setting up a system of CCTV cameras and a bank of monitors. *Security by Julia II* is part of a larger project in the course of which Scher created her own parodic security company. She designed the uniform, which is pink perhaps because the boss is a woman, in what was not long ago the male-dominated field of fine art. The other connotation is that pink covers up some of the more oppressive aspects of security as an apparatus of power.

In the context of the art gallery the metaphor evoked by *Security by Julia II* is that of Foucault's panopticon based on Jeremy Bentham's nineteenth century design for a liberal democratic prison in which all the prisoners were visible at all times via a central watchtower.¹ *Security by Julia II* reinforces the argument posed here that although the art gallery/museum may be open to the public, it is a panoptic regime. It allows all and sundry to enter into its sanctum while remaining extremely careful to keep an intensely watchful eye on this potentially threatening throng of people.

The fact that Scher's CCTV monitors are on display serves to focus our attention on this usually more discrete aspect of our visit to the 'public' gallery. Finally, *Security by Julia II* indicates that the maximum security of the art museum is a microcosm of the bureaucratization of everyday life that the Frankfurt School theorists referred to as the 'administered world'.

1 The metaphor of the panopticon was introduced by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). It refers to a prison which consists of a cylindrical building consisting of tiers of cells which are barred and therefore open to view. In the centre there is an atrium with a watchtower wherein the guard on duty can see everything. After a while there does not have to be anybody in the tower, because the inmates are conditioned to being under surveillance so they watch themselves.



Figure 2: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Untitled (Free), 1992, Installation 303 Gallery, New York. Tiravanija transformed the gallery into a kitchen offering free pad Tai to visitors for the course of the exhibition.

The panoptic regime of the gallery/museum is intimately interconnected with what might be termed the regime of the gaze. The ever-present surveillance creates a sense of coldness and distance, it is in a word: disembodied.

We can point to the institution's desire to keep the viewer in their place but it is also the case that there are times when fine artists make a special effort to involve the viewer.

Within the sphere of contemporary installation art the most outstanding instance of a focus on the reader/viewer is evident in the work of Rirkrit Tiravanija.

This artist is best known for installations such as 'Untitled (Free)', 1992, in which he made pad Tai every day for a month in the 303 Gallery, New York. The gallery became an open house into which anyone could enter and have a meal with Tiravanija together with anyone else who turned up. Katy Siegel and Paul Mattick note that the viewer's consumption of the meal is itself part of the art work (Siegel 2004: 164). Tiravanija has stated that his work is 'less about things in the gallery and more about the people I've met, had a conversation with, talked about things with, and looked at things with' (Tiravanija 2006). His work has become the prime instance of what Nicolas Bourriaud refers to as 'relational aesthetics' (2002), a mode of art that ostensibly focuses on human interactions rather than on precious objects.

One might expect Bishop to approve of Tiravanija's ingenious strategy for bringing everyday life into the museum and involving the viewer, but she is highly critical. She accuses him of creating artificially harmonious situations rather than focusing upon a more critical engagement with the everyday. She comments: 'ultimately Tiravanija's works tend not to destabilise our self-identificatory mechanisms but to affirm them, and collapse into everyday leisure' (2005: 119). It is certainly the case that the mere involvement of the viewer does not lead to a condition of activated spectatorship (Bishop 2005: 11) but none of the instances cited above would inspire 'active engagement in the social-political arena' (Bishop 2005: 11). And perhaps they do not need to; the fact that the viewer is being involved is in itself a major step in the context of aesthetic politics. But one of the features of Tiravanija's strategy that can be criticized is the lack of a creative game to play.

Another instance of involving the viewer without a game is Angela Bulloch's beanbag works. For 'Flexible', 1997, at Art Club Berlin she provided



Figure 3: Angela Bulloch, *Flexible* at Art Club Berlin, 1997. Three beanbags, CD-player, headphones, acrylic table.

large, brightly coloured beanbags a CD-player and headphones so that visitors could chill out on the beanbag listening to music. In another beanbag installation for a group shown at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, she placed the beanbags in front of monitors showing videos of recently released films. In each case the viewer is not presented with a work of art, instead the viewer is placed in a situation that radically questions our traditional relationship with artworks within a gallery environment.

One can understand these chill-out zones as a deconstruction of the self-importance of the gallery environment and the way in which it frames the viewer as one who should submissively and respectfully contemplate what is on exhibition. One can also understand these works by Bulloch as turning over power to the viewer. Certainly Bulloch notes that 'It was interesting to me that the person looking at the piece was involved in a level of power given to them unexpectedly or that they could take...upon themselves to use. This renegotiation of power interested me' (MCA 1997). What seems significant in the case of the works cited is that the power 'unexpectedly' given to the viewer was the ability *not* to look at art. That is certainly a step away from being conditioned to focus on great works of art but it is not participatory art. The viewer remains in the role of a passive consumer. What is more it is the artist and not the viewer who is playing a creative game. The game Bulloch is playing is that of pointing to the power afforded to the artist. But this is only possible because Bulloch is an artist; a status defined by the fact that her work is on exhibition in an art gallery.

We find a similar problem in Tiravanija's works. It is difficult to see eating pad Tai as a creative engagement on the part of the viewer. That of course is the point. The ingenuity of Tiravanija lies in his very simple solution to the problem of bringing art into everyday life. He takes the Duchampian Readymade to its logical conclusion and declares that everyday life is art. But this solution is flawed because as with Bulloch's chill-out pieces there is no creative game involved except the game that the artist is playing. The viewer simply eats pad Tai, but the artist is making a statement that is located within the language game (Lyotard 1984) that is deconstructive art. Tiravanija's action refers back to the original language game which is the Duchampian Readymade. Marcel Duchamp played on the traditional concept of artistic genius by claiming that anything that the artist chose to be a work of art was a work of art. The Readymade strategy should be understood as a creative

game as are most of the strategies invented by Dada and Surrealism. In his landmark book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* Peter Bürger notes:

Given the avantgardiste [*sic*] intention to do away with art as a sphere that is separate from the praxis of life, it is logical to eliminate the antithesis between producer and recipient. It is no accident that both [Tristan] Tzara's instructions for the making of a Dadaist poem and [André] Breton's for the writing of automatic texts have the character of recipes. This represents not only a polemical attack on the individual creativity of the artist; the recipe is to be taken quite literally as suggesting a possible activity on the part of the recipient. The automatic texts also should be read as guides to individual production. But such production is not to be understood as artistic production, but as part of a liberating life praxis. This is what is meant by Breton's demand that poetry be practiced (*pratiquer la poesie*).

(1984: 53)

Bürger takes us back to the origins of the discourse of deconstructive art and thereby helps clarify the project of bringing art into life that Dada initiated. Crucial to this project is the concept of intersecting the praxis of life with creative process. The games that were devised such as the Readymade, automatism and montage were supposed to be playable by everyone but artists kept them to themselves. Or more properly the art system which is always the condition of possibility of the continued existence of art ensured that the products of such games were treated as precious objects created by individual artist geniuses. And who can resist such adulation? It is not by accident that – like most installation art – Tiravanija's everyday interventions invariably take place within the sanctum of an art gallery.

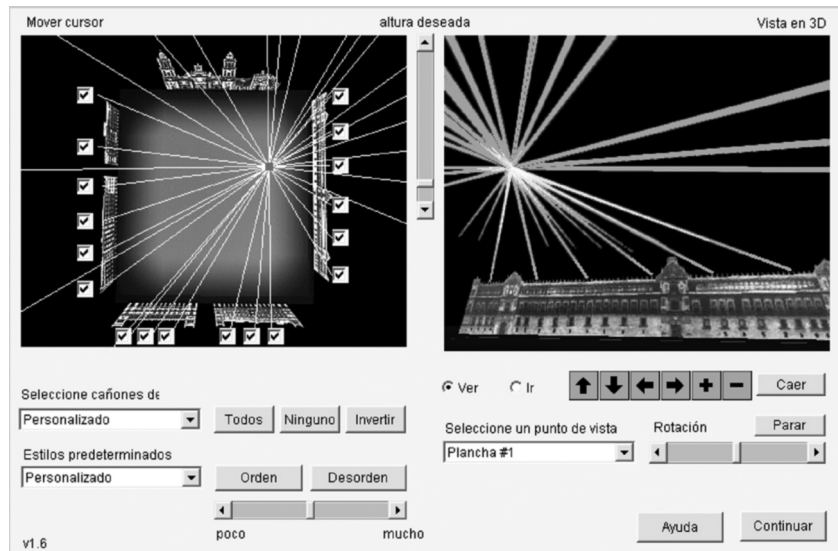


Figure 4: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Vectorial Elevation*, 2000, *Zocalo Square, Mexico*. Web-based Java graphic interface allowing general public to manipulate the pattern of lights in *Zocalo Square* via the Internet.

Given that we accept the grounds for involving the viewer and given that we accept that most old media attempts are confounded by the fact that it is the artist who gets to play the game and not the viewer we might turn to interactive media art and see if that can offer anything better. The first instance we will consider is Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's remarkable situational installation, 'Vectorial Elevation', 2000. Significantly, Lozano-Hemmer states that Vectorial Elevation would be an 'ephemeral intervention that would have no linear narrative' instead it would 'reflect on urban issues of interdependence, deterritorialization and collective representation'.² In this statement we have a reference to both the deconstructivist affinity for non-linear narrative and the desire to relate art to everyday life (evident in Lozano-Hemmer's reference to 'collective representation').

Vectorial Elevation was staged in Zocalo square, Mexico City, one of the largest public squares in the world. It has played a role in many of the political upheavals in Mexican history as well as being a site for concerts and celebrations.

Lozano-Hemmer placed eighteen remote-controlled searchlights on the roofs of the building surrounding the square. The movement of these searchlights was effected via computer and it was possible for people to program the pattern made by the searchlight beams by using a Web browser graphic interface that could be accessed anywhere in the world over the Internet. In his video documentation of the project Lozano-Hemmer claims that Vectorial Elevation introduces 'new creative relationships between control technologies, ominous urban landscapes and a local and remote public' (Lozano-Hemmer 2000). He notes that 'the Zocalo's monumental size makes the human scale seem insignificant an observation that has been noted by some Mexican scholars as an emblem of a rigid, monolithic, homogenizing environment' (Lozano-Hemmer 2000) which is to say the government building-flanked square becomes an architectural embodiment of alienation and disempowerment the artist seeks to 'deterritorialize'.

Lozano-Hemmer also notes that 'searchlights themselves have been associated with authoritarian regimes' and one can cite Adolf Hitler's resident designer and architect Albert Speer who on the occasion of a spectacular Nazi rally in the Nuremberg stadium, in 1936, made use of a line of searchlight beams pointing vertically into the sky like a Roman colonnade.

The crucial difference between Speer's fascist spectacle and Lozano-Hemmer's use of searchlights is that Lozano-Hemmer places the means of spectacle into the hands of the viewer. Accordingly, his work goes further than situating art in public spaces. That simply expands the potential audience, it does not offer a more active role to that audience. In addition, in

2 The reality of this installation is that it was open to everyone who realized that they needed to download Java runtime environment because the website interface was a Java applet which is not supported by the Windows platform by itself. But such teething problems are typical of new media art.



Figure 5: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Vectorial Elevation, 1999–2000, Zocalo Square, Mexico City.

Vectorial Elevation, the viewer is not only controlling the lights but also the public square. If Zocalo square can be understood as a site of tension between the power of the state and that of its citizenry, then for duration of his installation Lozano-Hemmer hands the spectacular power of square over to the public.

The significance of Vectorial Elevation lies in the manner in which Lozano-Hemmer creates a situation in which the public are placed in control of the means of production of spectacle. If, as Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard argue, spectacle is one of the principal methods whereby the capitalist system ensures its hegemony then Vectorial Elevation can be said to possess an emancipatory dimension.

Another crucial characteristic of Vectorial Elevation is its game-like character. We do not mean this in the sense of games in which there are winners and losers instead we are using the concept of game as a means of describing a particularly powerful way of involving the viewer in an active manner that seems much less available to old media art.

The tradition that informs old media art is that there is an individual creative genius who produces precious objects. This has been proven to hold fast even when the artist is supposedly subverting the traditional concept of the artist-creator and the precious work of art. The fact that Duchamp's urinal *Fountain* recently sold for over a million dollars bears witness to this effect (www.artprice.com). The concept of the game entails a different approach wherein the artist is not a maker of precious objects but the designer of a gamespace which will involve the viewer in a significant interaction.

Interactive installations such as Lozano-Hemmer's are a fruitful mode of deconstructive art; another tactic is to be found in the area of hypertext which has introduced a new dimension to literature and poetry. Bill Seaman has been experimenting with interactive 'recombinant poetry' for some decades. In *The Exquisite Mechanism of Shivers*, 1992, it was possible to use a mouse to construct an interactive poem by choosing words from a list. The choice then appeared on the screen in the context of a short poetic phrase which was generated by the computer on the basis of a simple algorithm. In a more recent work 'The Hybrid Invention Generator' Seaman applies similar principles to imagery. Seaman's work is significant because it brings a genuinely interactive dimension to Surrealist-like automatism. *The Exquisite Mechanism of Shivers* resonates with the Surrealist game of the 'Exquisite Corpse' a variation on a parlour game played by the Surrealists.



Figure 6: Bill Seaman, *The Exquisite Mechanism of Shivers*, 1992.

This game consisted of folding up a piece of paper and drawing on it, folding it to reveal a new blank section and passing it on to the next player and so on. The Exquisite Corpse is related to the aesthetics of chance and it is possible to argue that the strategy of chance that binds Marcel Duchamp, Dada and Surrealism opens up the work of art to performative participation. This is evident when Peter Bürger describes cut-and-paste poetry and automatic writing as having 'the character of recipes' (1984: 53).

The same can be said of Fluxus performances and Happenings of the 1960s which were informed by the concept that given a putative deconstruction of the work of art as precious object 'anyone could be an artist'. That concept never really caught on in the art market, but the theoretical framework still remains and the evidence is that the immateriality of new media art is creating a zone in which, to paraphrase Bürger, 'the recipient can become part of the creative activity'. The crucial point here is that the interaction be as creative as possible.

The reason why encouraging creative engagement is important lies in the enduring concept that capitalist culture is dominated by 'instrumental reason', a term coined by the Frankfurt School theorists. Fred Alford notes that for Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse the principal characteristic of instrumental reason lies in its 'orientation toward nature, and, ultimately, man, as an object to be overcome, dominated, and exploited' (1985: 2). And for both Marcuse and Habermas art provides a significant antidote to instrumental reason.

French post-structuralism in the form of the writings of Barthes, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze continues the critique of instrumental reason. But they contribute to the debate by focusing on play and creativity as the means whereby the domination of instrumentalism might be dislocated. Instrumental rationalism represses nature both external and internal. If creativity is inherent in human nature then the liberation of this faculty should serve as a form of resistance to both instrumental rationalism and a culture of passive consumerism.

We have cited the instance of Bill Seaman's *The Exquisite Mechanism of Shivers* but the turn to interactive digital media is also evident in the sphere of postmodern literature. For example the writer of fabulation and metafiction Robert Coover turned to computers in the 1980s. Inspired by Ted Nelson's book *Computer Lib* Coover turned from text to hypertext. He makes the following interesting observation:

Learning to read well, not just to be literate, but to read well and deeply and to be engaged in this way is one of the sought-after goals of a liberal education. Many people have thrown it away. They've let that imaginative side of themselves shrink and wither away.

(Dorr 1999)

For Coover hypertext encourages the process of active reading that nourishes the imaginative and creative side of human nature. But Coover's involvement in literature makes him focus on the reader 'reading well'. In the sphere of visual culture we want to go beyond reading. It has been noted that reading works of art is the traditional mode of interacting with art. But this mode of interaction is ultimately a *post factum* rationalization.



Figure 7: Feng Mengbo, SHOT0010_Q, 2003.

Although it is a valuable process, it misses out a crucial aspect of the creative art process which is interaction as *doing*. Combining reading and doing increases creative involvement thereby amplifying the power of the artwork to turn the viewer away from instrumental consciousness.

When progressive artists turn their ingenuity to making interactive creative games that encourage doing as well as reading they are contributing, however minimally, to a dislocation of the dominance of instrumental rationalism and the administered world.

Using the concept of art games within the context of interactive digital art leads inevitably to a consideration of the gaming revolution. Significantly the phenomenon of gaming is virtually invisible to the fine art community. There is enormous irony in the fact that a powerful and highly popular interactive art form is virtually ignored by the fine art 'avant-garde' especially when two of the key premises of deconstructive avant-gardism are (a) making the viewer a more active participant, and (b) bringing art into everyday life. If we scour the annals of contemporary art for instances where gaming is used, however, we do find a few instances. One can cite, for example, Feng Mengbo's 'SHOT0010_Q', 2003, a manipulated *shoot-em-up* video game exhibited at Documenta 11; but this work is pure spoof. On the other hand we can turn to the work of Jean Paul Bichard an inveterate gamer turned artist whose work seems more oriented to using the gaming medium to bring art into everyday life using a strategy he calls 'embedded games'.



Figure 8: John Paul Bichard, Backseat Playground, 2005.

Photo: John Paul Bichard.

In 2005 Bichard began working on two projects to 'embed' gaming into the space of the everyday in what can be referred to as a 'relational aesthetic' manner. His Neighbourhood Games is a situational project funded by Proboscis as part of the Social Tapestries research programme. According to Proboscis the Social Tapestries project seeks to 'support relationships that transcend existing social and cultural boundaries' and enable the development of 'new social and creative practices based around place, identity and community'.³ Bichard's other relational aesthetic project is Backseat Playground, 2005, Interactive Institute, Stockholm. This is a collaboration with Liselott Brunberg and Oskar Juhlin to design a game that can intersect with the everyday experience of children travelling in the backseat of a car. The game will use a Global Positioning System map database to intertwine the narrative gamespace with the environment the player is passing through on their journey. Bichard describes the concept as one of making the world part of 'a vast game engine' wherein the 'objects, places and people around you are all part of an intertwining series of episodes that make up an ongoing game plot'. One is reminded here of David Cronenberg's *Existenz*, 1999, which erased the boundary between reality and the computer game.

The notion of a creative game that can interpenetrate everyday life leads us to the concept of serious play. Serious play that maps onto what Habermas has referred to as communicative action; which is to say a mode of communication that is not instrumental and not overbearingly focused on the linguistic model. What we are considering here is a mode of communication that is as much about doing as it is about language. Gary Bridges notes that post-Habermasian interpretations of communicative action are being formulated in the contemporary feminist theory of Lenore Langsdorf, Shannon Sullivan, Sandra Rosenthal and Charlene Haddock Siegfried. These theorists are building on Judith Butler's concept of Performativity (Butler 1990) and Bridges notes that their view of communicative action is broader than that of Habermas' due to its inclusion of:

non-discursive performativity, as well as discursive communication. This approach to communication involves bodies and gestures, as well as speech and thought. It suggests that there might be all kinds of uncontrollable effects (or excess) around communication. Communicative action is fraught with inconsistencies, slippages and misunderstandings. Performativity, slips and excess in communication can be as much a resource for social transformation as the more controlled communication towards consensus, on which Habermas focused. This is the point made by Judith Butler in her work on gender norms and communication (Butler 1993, 1997).

(2005: 666)

The promise of this broader embodied concept of communicative action is important because it provides a bridge between the two most important aesthetic frameworks informing postmodern art: Frankfurt School aesthetics and post-structuralism. And as play is a central notion in post-structuralist aesthetics we can expand our concept of the creative game to include the notion of communicative play. This is a very simple notion, that art should

3 The project is supported by Birkbeck College, London; École Polytechnique Fédérale de Laussane, France Telecom R&D UK, Getmapping.com, London Knowledge Lab, London School of Economics, Ordnance Survey and Space Media Arts.



Figure 9: Nancy Burson, *Human Race Machine*. Ongoing project.

be communicative – but not necessarily in an apparently unproblematic linear manner.

If we examine Western art history we find that the fundamental difference between modern art and pre-modern art lies not only in the shift from representation but also in the shift from narrative to the foregrounding of form at the expense of sense. Which is to say art of the era of Church and courtly patronage could be understood by a much larger cross section of the population than is the case for modern art. Habermas, for instance, argues that art has ceased to be communicative except to an elitist expert community and we believe that he has a valid point. What he perhaps fails to recognize, however, is that one of the most valuable contributions of the deconstructive counter-narrative turn lies in its introduction of the possibility of *communicative play*. We see this in Lozano-Hemmer's *Vectorial Elevation*, 'Trace' and we also see it in Nancy Burson *Human Race Machine*.

Burson's *Human Race Machine* is an instance of a simple and elegant creative game that contributes to social understanding. The basic idea of the machine is to allow people to see how they would look if they were a different race (black, white, asian, hispanic, indian). The viewer looks into a video mirror and coordinates their face with an edge-detection map on the screen. When aligned the viewer presses a button to see their face morphed into another race. This is a simple but elegant game that initiates significant degree of fascination in the viewer who is able to explore his or her identity beyond their current self-image. *Human Race Machine* also has a political-narrative dimension communicating the message that race is not an indicator of significant genetic distinctions between peoples. A viewer's experience of the *Human Race Machine* is very individual which is quite different from the experience of traditional art wherein the viewer explores not their own individuality but that of another person: the privileged artist-creator.

To conclude, we propose that the instances and conceptual framework we have assembled here point to the fact that the creative game is potentially a powerful strategy that will enable deconstructive art to escape its current assimilation into the traditional values of the precious work of art and the apotheosis of the artist as genius. It has become evident that these traditional values are now for the most part (up)marketing exercises. The danger they pose is that they separate art from life which is then taken over by extremely powerful, homogenizing mass cultural forces. If art is to continue to exist as a democratic force that uses its licence for freedom of expression wisely then we believe that there must be two realizations: first, an increased awareness within the fine art community of the problems inherent in art at the turn of

the millennium; and, second, an awareness that interactive digital art could be of valuable assistance in helping art achieve its long-standing goal of bringing a liberation of creativity into everyday life.

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Suggested citation

- Coulter-Smith, G. and Coulter-Smith, E. (2006), 'Art games: Interactivity and the embodied gaze', *Technoetic Arts* 4: 3, pp. 169–182, doi: 10.1386/tear.4.3.169/1

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