

# ARTECONTEXTO

ARTE CULTURA NUEVOS MEDIOS

ART CULTURE NEW MEDIA



BILL VIOLA + THE USC EA GAME INNOVATION LAB *The Night Journey*, 2009.  
Images of the videogame. Courtesy: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial.

[RLH]

# New Art Forms, New Markets

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In the last few years the art market has witnessed an increase in the formats and trends linked to new technologies. These experiments have had a significant impact in recent exhibition proposals and public interventions, although this has been less noticeable in the commercial space, where they enjoy demand in the primary and secondary markets. Installations, in their various formats, net.art and, increasingly, video games, constitute highly representative expressions which share a common denominator which is increasingly frequent in today's art: interaction. This element is essential to one of the most interesting trends in the last decade, relational art, where technology is used in a collateral way, in contrast to the examples mentioned above, although it is worth paying attention to its applicability.

Relational art turns the event, the development of the work, forms of existence and personal relations into the definition of its discourse. For Nicolas Bourriaud, the relational is not an art theory but a "way" of creating "a world of facts"<sup>1</sup>. In order to prove this, certain electronic devices can be used to implement creative strategies, among which it is worth noting those achieved by Douglas Gordon, Dominique González-Foerster, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno and, most strikingly, Rirkrit Tiravanija. The use of email for meetings and summits, as part of a performance; acoustic sensors and speakers activated through interaction; telephones for the interconnection of individuals taking part in performative actions and video as a form of evocation and a way of registering actions, among other resources, serve as examples of this. Although innovation is not the most important element in this form of art expression, the use of technology often allows for the building of the discourse.

Relational works highlight one of the most noticeable aspects of today's creative space: the political positioning of the viewer, which in net.art has given rise to essential contributions on the basis of the implications of the use of computer tools in interaction, communication and creation. These tools transcend the artistic real and appeal only to the viewer, turned creative amateur, a critical piece in the landscape. The role of the viewer in his or her interaction with art production

reveals the undeniable democratisation of the media, and, especially in the field of net.art, it confirms the fact that communication strategies –centred on the transmission of meaning<sup>2</sup>– diluting the starring role of creative figures, re-examining their natures as individuals, the forms which define the way in which their production conveys content and relates to their audience.

Despite the variety of proposals and trends in net.art and other expressions linked to technology, this compendium could be essentially seen in terms of the applications of hardware and software. In the first case, many expressions define their discourse on the basis of the technical foundations on which they stand, from where it is possible to speak of visual and auditory experiments, combinations of the two and interactive displays (interfaces). In the case of software we find two basic trends: works created with open-source software and works created with licensed software. They both open the way to a wide universe of experimentation with images and sounds, which continues to rely on sensors and other multimedia devices in its insertion in traditional format.

The current installation trend, which features video and sound, gives rise to new sensory environments, but it is in terms of its data processing and visualisation that the most significant discursive expansions can be observed, because of the experimentation possibilities they offer. In this way, interactivity is connected to a relationship between different parties, rather than the previous model, where all that was needed was for the viewer to activate the devices in the work. Technologies from several fields, such as black-and-white infrared security cameras, home cinema devices, high definition video, projectors, speakers, DVD players and ultrasound sensors are some of the resources which have contributed to bringing down costs, giving rise to actions and effects which transform architectural areas, shedding new light on the public space, building on the potential of expressive elements, offering new versions of things, replacing the function and meaning of materials, etc. This can be observed in the work of Olafur Eliasson, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Gregor Schneider

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and James Turrell, among many possible examples, whilst Saâdane Afif and Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller reflect, in a critical way, on music as an event, as a language, as something with a social role.

Today, communication is born from immediacy and physical distance, the most day-to-day form of experience. Although net art is an expression of this, it also functions as a platform for the exchange of ideas and opinions, transcending the artistic and entering the political and social realms; all of which is the result of the efforts to turn art into an experience which forms greater part of our lives. Artists are connected like never before; they share experiences, build communities and exchange ideas, as can be seen in the work by the well-known collectives Puredyne, Planetary Collegium, onedotzero and GOTO10. To a certain degree, this is due to the use of open-source software, especially Csound, Fluxus, Icecast, Processin, Pure Data, Supercollider and Arduino, which, along with the advent of resource libraries such as Open Frameworks, have stimulated the need for exchange. In general, artists such as Benjamin Fry, Casey Reas and Clara Boj + Diego Díaz build their work on the basis of this type of software. However, a few artists generate their own (Paul De Marinis, Hyun-Chul Kim, Christa Sommerer and José Manuel Berenguer). Arduino, on the other hand, constitutes a special case, as it combines hardware and software, enabling users to work with simple interfaces, creating interactive installations and simple electro-mechanic prototypes. Recently, one of the best applications of this resource was achieved by Material Beliefs, along with J. Auger, J. Loizeau and A. Zivanovic in *Carnivorous Domestic Entertainment Robots* (2008).

Video games, on the other hand, have become the bread and butter of many artists in their role as developers and designers, and this medium is currently the object of art reflection, with and without a direct association to their use in games consoles. Video games have reached a level of conceptual, aesthetics and entertainment development which leaves no doubt as to their status as a form of artistic expression, whilst maintaining their basic nature as games, i.e. a device offering entertainment in the context of certain functional criteria. In terms of aesthetics proposals, it is worth mentioning *The Night Journey* (2009) by Bill Viola + The USC EA Game Innovation Lab, *Linger in Shadows* (2008) by Plastic and *Blueberry Garden* (2009) by Erik Svedäng. As for video games with a critical, social and political subtext, we have *Global Conflicts: Latin America* (2008) by Serious Games Interactive, *Play the News* (2008) by ImpactGames (EEUU) and the minigames of *The Croopier*, created by Abelardo Gil-Fournier.

When studying the art trends and proposals mentioned above in the context of the art market it is clear that they have been welcomed more warmly by the institutional realm than by collectors. A review of the acquisitions by large institutions in the last few years reflects an interest in new technologies, which, in fact, is surpassed by exhibition programmes which feature them widely. The recent impact of the economic crisis in terms of artwork acquisition and the production of large-scale exhibition have meant that the secondary market has

seen an increase in the sales of more consolidated values, while in the primary market acquisitions tend to respond to more relevant trends. However, there is a clear interest on the part of official and private bodies to make use of these forms of expression at large public events.

Despite contradictions and a number of isolated events, since the early 1990s all forecasts regarding the art market have been wide of the mark, with a sales growth of 132%<sup>3</sup> and a 103%<sup>4</sup> rise in the last seven years. Although since the end of 2008 and throughout 2009 things have been different as a result of the lack of liquidity caused by the economic crisis, the sales downturn has only slightly affected the position of contemporary art. At the moment, expressionism, geometric abstraction, post-war figurativism, objectual and conceptual art, which were the star-sellers for a long time, have been partly replaced by the documentation of performance, photography in its many forms, post-conceptual and post-minimalist trends, as well as the extensive experimentation with installation and painting. In this context, none of the most highly-valued artists in 2009 boasts particularly technological work (Damien Hirst, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Richard Prince, Jeff Koons, Peter Doig, Zeng Fanzhi, Takashi Murakami, Anish Kapoor, Subodh Gupta and Antony Gormley<sup>5</sup>), which leads us to believe that the attraction of the new technologies does not prevail, for example, in the face of the implications of the intense “geopolitical mutation”<sup>6</sup> which has taken place over the last years.

The increase in the number of collections at public bodies and private corporations; the consolidation of new art markets, such as in Asia and Latin America, and the improvement of other markets on a local level (Europe, North America); the sustained increase in biennales, fairs and art centres –among which it is worth noting media laboratories–; the emergence of new market niches with collectors from countries which previously did not enjoy good sales capacity as a result of their economies or political regimes; and the creation of the a large number of digital and printed media devoted to art diffusion are some of the factors which have stimulated the market growth. All of this does nothing but confirm a particularly active dynamic which has done wonders for contemporary and emerging art. In fact, their commercialisation between 2000 and 2007 saw a 47%<sup>7</sup> increase, in response to a striking increase in supply<sup>8</sup>; and, between 2007 and 2008 demand grew even more, although there were also important contradictions<sup>9</sup>. 2009 was similar to 2008, but, during financial crises, the art market functions as a “shelter value”, as its stability is greater than variable-yield securities and the real estate market. Therefore, 2009 confirmed the direction of the contradiction between the nature of best-selling art and the circulating production, where the technological has found a niche. The understanding of space-time proposed by these trends is built in terms of their transformations<sup>10</sup> rather than the old model of a specific place and a past time. Thus, pieces are presented like organisms undergoing constant changes, ratifying, with the help of technology, the potential of contemporary art to reach an even greater position in the market.

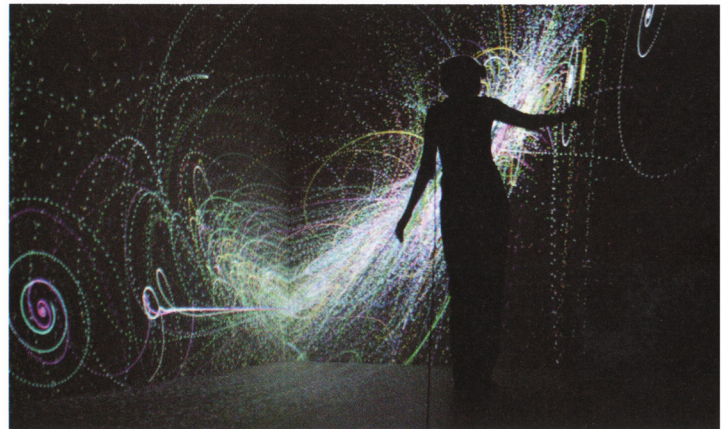
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#### NOTES

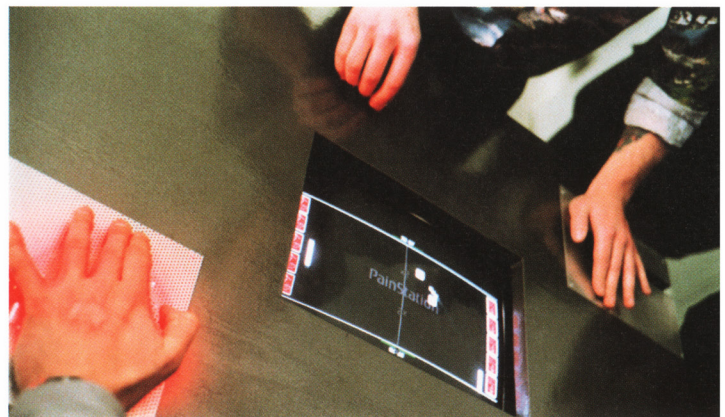
- 1.- Borriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. 1st edition. Adriana Hidalgo Editora. Buenos Aires, 2006. Pp. 19-21.
- 2.- "In the face of dominant language systems on the Internet based on efficiency, the best net. art, not only the most explicit political activism, is always a metaphor of transmission, distribution, the circulation and purpose of meanings". In: Martín Prada, Juan Luis. *El net.art, o la definición social de los nuevos medios*. [http://aleph-arts.org/pens/definicion\\_social.html](http://aleph-arts.org/pens/definicion_social.html)
- 3.- This data refers to the period between the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1991 and the 1st of July, 2008. It reflects the way contemporary art has surpassed the market segments which were hitherto most important: old masters, 19<sup>th</sup>-century art, modern art and post-war art. In *Le marché de L'art contemporain 2007/2008. Le rapport annuel artprice*. Paris: Art Price. Pp. 5.
- 4.- "Contemporary art loses its shine". Paris: Art Price, November, 2008 (<http://web.artprice.com/AMI/AMI.aspx?id=MjlyMDU1NzUwMzI5ODk=>) (<http://web.artprice.com/AMI/AMI.aspx?id=ODQ1NDU1NzY1OTk4NTk=>).
- 5.- The prices of the work by these artists in 2009 are the following: Damien Hirst ( 134.7M), Jean-Michel Basquiat ( 31.7M), Richard Prince ( 24.2M), Jeff Koons ( 23 M), Peter Doig ( 12.2M), Zeng Fanzhi ( 11M), Takashi Murakami ( 8.1M), Anish Kapoor ( 6.8M), Subodh Gupta ( 5.7M), Antony Gormley ( 4.7M). In *Le marché de L'art contemporain 2008/2009. Le rapport annuel Artprice*. Paris: Art Price, 2009. Pp. 14-30.
- 6.- The Artprice annual report for 2009 uses this term to refer to the undeniable geographic changes which are taking place in terms of interest and power, and which are positively affecting today's art. Ibid pp. 13.
- 7.- *Le marché de L'art contemporain 2007/2008. Le rapport annuel artprice*. Ibid pp. 4.
- 8.- This increase has been significantly aided by the incorporation of the art production from countries such as India and China, and its subsequent popularity. For example, the price of contemporary Chinese art has increased by 583% between 2005 and 2009. *New art markets and the crisis*. In *Art Price*, 02/2009 (<http://web.artprice.com/AMI/AMI.aspx?id=ODA2OTE4MTEzOTQ5NTk=>)
- 9.- Without a doubt, the contradictions were highly significant in 2008 (1). That year, record prices were reached, followed by significant price drops, such as those in New York, with 22.8% (2), while Damien Hirst, breaking the rules of the market, managed to sell his work for exorbitant prices through an auction house instead of his gallery. (1) *Art Market Trends 2008*. Artprice.com S.A, pp. 4); (2) *Le marché de L'art contemporain 2007/2008*. Ibid, pp. 8.).
- 10.- Nicolas Borriaud, when defining relational art as a good expression of recent art, said "The aura of art is no longer located in the world represented by the work, nor the form itself, but in front of it, in the midst of the temporary collective form which comes into being when it is exhibited." In *Bourriaud, Nicolas*. pp. 73.



**RAFAEL LOZANO HEMMER** *Almacén de Corazonadas*, 2006. Interactive installation. Courtesy of the artist.



**REJANE CANTONI** and **DANIELA KUTSCHAT** *OP\_ERA Haptics for the 5th Dimension*, 2007. Interactive sound installation. Programming: Victor Gomes. Courtesy of the artists.



**TILMAN REIFF** and **VOLKER MORAWE** *PainStation 2.5*, 2004. Courtesy: Laboral Centro de Arte y Creación Industrial.