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For a critical perspective of the value of web art

ABSTRACT

1. *The current article discusses the fact that art does not have a place in contemporary*
2. *society and points to some solutions for a critical approach to web art and techno-*
3. *logically endowed contemporary society. The article begins with a brief and general*
4. *description of art's lack of meaning and its problems. It goes on to discuss practical*
5. *examples that illustrate some possible solutions to art's critical value today.*
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KEYWORDS

web art
critic
obsolescence
subversive

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THE OLD OBSOLESCENCE OF ART'S LABOUR
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11. The role of art in society has been declared obsolete since Hegel. In addition
12. to this, in the contemporary scenario, the art of 'new communication technol-
13. ogies' (NCT) sets art even further apart, towards a higher aesthetical purpose,
14. since it has been more concerned about the technical discussion itself. In this
15. section we intend to approach the debate to find some possible solutions for
16. the value of web art.
17. As in the beginning of the modernist era of Hegel, today we have the
18. impression that life's difficulties decay. It seems like this improvement is a
19. result of the 'bigger complexity of our social and political life' and this questions
20. 'the role of art and its place in the scenario of our lives' (Jimenez 1999: 186).
21. Since the widened usage of new communication technologies, changes
22. in aesthetical perception have been strengthened by art like never before.
Contemporary art online radicalizes the sharing aspect and the dialogue of
the aesthetic experience, also efficiently reaching an ever-widening group of

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participants. The challenge of contemporary aesthetics explores the 'how to do' aspect of art today, whilst at the same time adapting to new conditions, examining how artists are offering invitations to break down routine (Jimenez 1999: 390).

Through proposals that can intrigue, shock, disorient, irritate, sometimes also create enthusiasm and dazzle, the work of aesthetic consists in paying attention to artworks in order to perceive the relations they establish with the world, with history, with the activity of an age. The contemporary aesthetic experience offered by net.art also helps – even more so than previous artistic manifestations – with Kant's demand that art abandons the loneliness of the individual and of subjective experience; instead suggesting that experience be open to as many people as possible (Jimenez 1999: 390).

In this context, art keeps offering an aesthetic experience that acts according to great principles without a particular purpose which affects any benefits towards human freedom (Jimenez 1999). Art executed inside communication dynamics, such as the Internet, should offer human beings new freedom in relation to subjective experiences lived, accessible and valid universally (Jimenez 1999: 139).

On the other hand, the notions that Kant proposed, such as 'uninterested satisfaction' and with a 'not intentional intentionality', seem to belong to the field of naïve utopias (Jimenez 1999: 142). According to Marc Jimenez (1999) the contemporary attitude of art looks in the opposite direction to that of Kant's demands and hopes for the transcendent meaning of interest to all of humanity. Today art, in its realization as well as in its reception, responds to multiple interests of distraction, hedonistic pursuits, self-celebration, the promotion of a cultural politics and, naturally, financial benefit and profit. Our current relationship with art does not fit with the rational exercise of looking for its appropriate place and function in society (Jimenez 1999: 180). Thus it seems that today we verify art's obsolescence just as it was the case for Hegel during his lifetime (Jimenez 1999: 180).

As Mario Costa stated, 'Philosophical thought from Jochmann to Hegel, from Nietzsche to Ortega, from Adorno to Gadamer, from Geiger to Sedlmayr, denounced the progressive loss of sense and futileness of art' (Costa 1995: 45). It stopped achieving a crucial role and was dissolved in consumerism, in decoration and in entertainment. The author proposes a solution for aesthetics as well as for contemporary artists, in the hope of enabling them to face the new context as a proper environment to develop proposals beyond pure entertainment. It would thus seem that an appropriate role for artists today would be the translation of the new forces of technology on behalf of education. This education would concern the oncoming times in relation to what it means to be human (Costa 1995: 45). They must, according to Costa (1995: 42), assume an impersonal position and build upon the idea of human strength and of rational superiority.

New technologies promise and make possible a real revolution of the spirit: work on a sublime objectivity that, without belonging to anyone, helps improve the spiritual life of all. That is what artists are called to do.

(Costa 1995: 57)

In the particular context of technologies such as the Internet, artworks are still able to be thrown into crisis within bourgeois civilization because they

1. withdraw from the mainstream, from inherited behaviours and systems such
2. as 'good manners', which impede human beings to fully experience their
3. own freedom, just like Umberto Eco proposed in 1962. Thus, artwork would
4. fulfil the pedagogical function of creating models, schemes and strategies that
5. would permit a possible recuperation of autonomy (Eco 1962: 148).
6. However, theorist Arlindo Machado notices how art does not have a criti-
7. cal position in relation to the social context today, leaving aside its most radical
8. perspective (Machado 2007: 54–56). When it comes to artistic activity utilizing
9. new technologies such as the Internet, the discussion of aesthetics and the
10. search for creative ideas was almost completely replaced by technical speech.
11. Instead of the subversion of hegemonic rules and a claim for life, what is now
12. being discussed as part of artistic parlance is algorithms, as well as software
13. and hardware. New electronic technologies now seem to be more concerned
14. with professional aptitude and risky technical abilities: these substitute art's
15. more radical attitudes in relation to the most profound and dramatic questions
16. of our time. Therefore it is necessary, according to the author, to re-establish
17. the link between creative activity and nonconformity in contemporary art; a
18. link that was originally severed for the benefit of a nonsense thesis about the
19. postmodernist era (Machado 2007: 54–56).
20. For Machado, social issues should be reflected by art made in these
21. contexts. Art should, according to the author, problematize new ways of
22. domination based upon class, race, or nationality, as well as be a potent critic
23. of imperialistic wars, genocides, terrorism, international migration and intol-
24. erance towards foreigners, amongst much else of this nature, e.g. universal
25. surveillance, predatory globalization, the spectacularization of life, and envi-
26. ronmental degradation (Machado 2007: 54–57). Machado suggests that art
27. should include a debate about new ways of direct social engagement based in
28. telematic networks, tactic media, utilization of multi-user systems of distribu-
29. tion for the creation of collaborative works (which are collective in the true
30. sense of the word), the search for new politics of the body and the expression
31. of different cultural identities (Machado 2007: 57).
32. A new sense could emerge in contemporary art which looks for specific
33. approaches to new technologies within peripheral contexts. These artworks
34. can invite people effectively and more actively, and can bring us together to
35. live in collective ways, thus saving us from art's futility (Costa 1995). This is
36. why it is necessary that an artistic approach that considers what is of particular
37. concern to artists from the peripheries be established. In this way their
38. labour may represent aesthetic positions pertinent to the societies to which
39. they belong and which, despite the global scenario of the Internet, are still
40. shrouded in silence. As Arlindo Machado states:
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42. The challenge of new media's art is not merely the naïve apology of cur-
43. rent creative possibilities. New media art must, on the contrary, trace on
44. the one hand a vivid difference between industrial production of pleas-
45. ant stimulus for mass media and on the other hand the search of an
46. ethic and aesthetic for the electronic age.
47. (Machado 2007: 17)
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49. Furthermore, authors of artistic proposals dealing with collectives of periph-
50. eral contexts must also be critical in relation to the very technology itself: art-
51. ists, or at least many of them, talk about the machine as if they were fusing
52. with it, becoming machine, a machine themselves: turning into algorithms

and communicating channels. While this fusion may have brought a precious result for a brief, introductory moment the long-term effects are predictable: '… In a first moment, impressed and out of breath for the technological assault, terror produced by radicalism and novelty of announced changes' (Santos 2003: 12). This quote describes the moment when Dos Santos was submerged in the problematic of 'machine' itself, as happens when a technology is arrogated by art. Thus, the artist embedded within this technological context initially assumed the responsibility of initiating society in the sensitive changes brought about by new technologies, prescribing formulas of future and abstract aesthetic possibilities which were deemed to be able to be uncloaked through the auspices of the so-called new communication technologies. However, seventeen years have passed since the Internet's emergence, and at this point it would appear to be necessary to conduct a critical approximation regarding art and its societal impact developed inside and in relation to the web. A technology like the Internet, which is still endowed with endless means of sophisticated manipulation (despite the fact that even a teenager can direct its operation), requires such a critical approach regarding the output rendered through its channels. It is thus asked of the net.art author to enter a second movement coming, this time, from inside the social sphere:

> The impulse of trying to understand and explore un-instructing and/or re-structuring effects caused by techno-logia in the political perception of reality can be manifold. With the spirit of refusing to admit the suppression of politics and believing on the contrary that in its contemporary situation politics must consider techno-science to be its object of critique par excellence.
>
> (Santos 2003: 12)

Following McLuhan's famous adage that 'the medium is the message' the authors of new communication technologies used to share the status of authorship with the communication machine (Valvedere 2007: 91). However, for theorist Giselle Beiguelman (2008) each reader of the Internet is a potential editor and the validity of informational content goes through instances such as the strength of cultural education, the importance of a person's name or status, the brand of a company or the emblem of institution. As the theorist points out, the danger today is that the problem of authorship on the web would be similar to that of a copy-editor (Beiguelman 2008). Thus an author should see technologies as tools to be used for communication purposes and not as the final purpose of his or her labour. Through such an approach the danger of dealing with authorship as a shared status between the author and the machine, in creations inside virtual communicative networks, may effectively be eliminated.

We believe that art can display, if not real solutions and exits, a critical exhibition of society. Searching for an improvement to spiritual life and for equality for all, we believe that art's labour in telematic networks can also be considered a critic of the alienation of cultural products. Facing the paradox of being alienated by something that we have ourselves produced, the artist can generate new approaches to separate us, at least a bit, from this alienation (Eco 1962).

In the contemporary context there is a glorification of products and of the benefits of technological progress promoted by marketing strategies, which try to oppose any critique as a risk in the assumption of a strategy for total technological acceleration. The work with new technologies has not been discussed in all its complexity: 'technological options are always socio-technical questions

1.   and must be faced for society as of public interest' (Santos 2003: 11–12). It
2.   would follow that art is called upon to debate these issues.
3.   It is necessary to discuss our dislocation from the centralized producers
4.   of technology – even more so if, in peripheral contexts, the access to techno-
5.   logical goods is selective and discriminatory. We believe that this approach to
6.   technologies, though different and marginal, would amplify aesthetic experi-
7.   ences and independent artistic proposals, both those of a societal problematic
8.   nature and those that are divergent from the norm, and that occur simultane-
9.   ously in different parts of the world (Machado 2007: 31).
10.   This is also an expected outcome of the crisis of value of web art; solving
11. this involves a diversity of proposals using the tools of new communication
12. technologies, including the critical ones in relationship to their context. In this
13. way art would enrich the polemic of the use of contemporary technical media
14. in artworks in order to improve its critical labour in society, debating about
15. the expressive generosity offered by new media.
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18. **SUBVERSIVE WEB ART**
19. In order to improve the critical labour of art some examples of web art have
20. become close to subversive manifestations. These proposals exhibit the prob-
21. lematic complexity of the variety of realities composing the virtual sphere.
22.   It has been said that art for the Internet must be global; that is, homog-
23. enized and shared by everyone, based upon the assumption that once one is
24. in the virtual sphere one loses all cultural and geographical background. The
25. very simplicity of this idea already exposes the danger of cooperating with this
26. mindset, which refuses to transfer the differences and marginalization of the
27. real world into the global one. This would be one good reason for insisting
28. upon the physical place of origin as a starting point for creating potent rela-
29. tionships with other artworks for the Internet. This not only allows a far more
30. diverse and fair representation of what is in contact in the virtual realm, but
31. also permits an urgent debate on different political and aesthetical approaches
32. to technologies happening in different global contexts, albeit in parallel.
33.   With this basic approach and an attention to the call of art as a tool for
34. reflecting contemporary society, Claudia Sandoval created *The Game of*
35. *Revolution*, an artwork produced in 2008 that consisted of abandoning a pack-
36. age similar in appearance to a home-made urban bomb in a shopping mall in
37. the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil.
38.   The project, which explored both nationality and geographical place as
39. a starting point from which we experience the world, intended to question
40. the paranoia about terrorism prevalent in contemporary societies globally.
41. Experiencing the world from the perspective of a Colombian passport holder
42. (who would know at first hand what it is like to be seen as an international men-
43. ace for no good reason), the project called attention to the unrestrained fear with
44. which we seed our daily lives, in an unbalanced relation with our direct experi-
45. ence of the city and our daily routines. The artwork is also a strong provocation:
46. it invites us to pay attention to the state's justification for using labour/resources
47. etc. to fight against all manifestations of terrorism, while also acknowledging the
48. fact that this distracts attention away from other pressing social, political and
49. economic issues, as well as causing deviations of economic resources.
50.
51.   Political powers reign, or at least attempt to reign peacefully in civil
52.   societies. However this is not undertaken in any way to suspend war
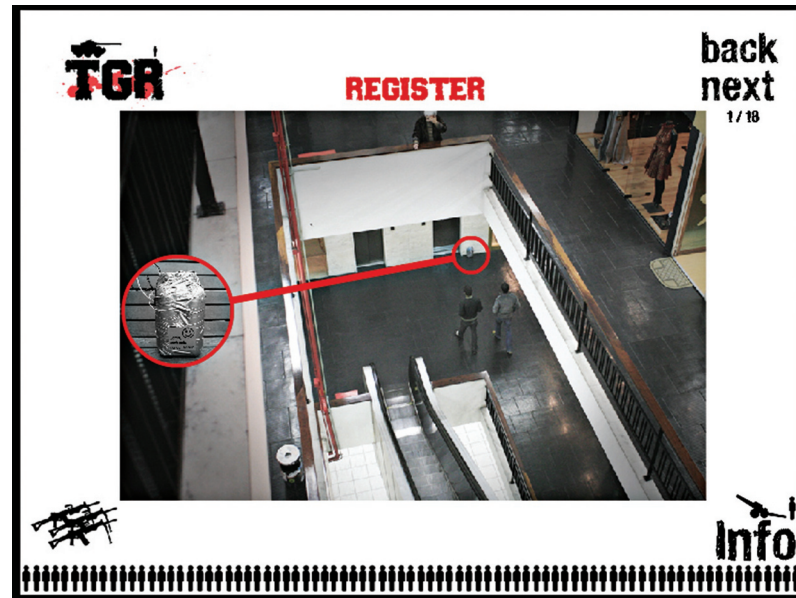
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Figure 1: The Game of Revolution, http://claudiasandoval.com.br/ gameofrevolution.html. Accessed 13 April 2010.

> effects or to neutralize the imbalance manifested in the final combat against war. Political powers, within this thesis, would have a function to perpetually re-introduce a sort of silent war, and re-introduce it in institutions, economic disparities, in language, even in the bodies of one and another.
>
> (Foucault 1999: 23)

The Game of Revolution also intends to question the exaggerated fear experienced nowadays (a product of a strong political machinery) that the state needs to fight against the giant ghost of terrorism, or the 'paranoid omnipresence of an invisible war' (Žižek 2003: 53). And this only happens once the institution of 'state' has become redundant for the needs of contemporary society.

In his essay 'Wasted Lives' (2005), Zygmunt Bauman affirms the end of the welfare state, pointing at the current practice of western states towards a socio-economic reorganization of the welfare state, a concept instigated after the end of World War II and implemented until the late 1980s throughout the western world. This reorganization has resulted in a crisis surrounding the legitimacy of the state, which has had to look for a way to justify its existence, since it is no longer disposed to offer social services to all of its citizens. Thus, according to Bauman (2005: 68) 'the contemporary State must look for other varieties, not economical, of vulnerability and uncertainty on which to base its legitimateness (…) (such as) criminal activities, the sub-class's anti-social behaviour and (…) global terrorism' (Rodrigues 2006: 159).

On the other hand the idea of a 'culture of terrorism' prevails in western civilization in a profoundly settled manner (Chomsky 2001: 120). The state of 'war against terror' seems to work by capitalizing on fear, politically and economically, in order to improve the military and the petrol industry, increasing the need for insurance and stricter security laws. 'The state of "war

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1. against fear" implies the constant production and dissemination of feelings of
2. fear and insecurity' (Ferraz 2006: 45).
3.   With *The Game of Revolution* a debate revolving around these issues was
4. expected as a final outcome after the intervention was executed in a public
5. place, a shopping mall in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The performance was also trans-
6. mitted in real time online and a new debate was also developed on Facebook
7. about the role of art in contemporary society[1], where art seemingly pretends
8. to lose the barrier of being a 'representation of life', where it trembles between
9. the soft borders in which it is deposited, to make it belong to society, to an
10. institution, to obtain an economic profit based upon it.
11.   No national manifestation would use this kind of artwork as a souvenir.
12. This kind of proposal exposes the politically correct and 'crafty' character of
13. art in the current context, as well as the necessity of new media to produce
14. critical statements about its usages and the cultural differences hidden under
15. the appropriate idea of a lack of place and a sharing of the same background.
16.   In the city of Sao Paulo it is common to intimidate people in public
17. spaces letting them know that they are under video camera surveillance. This
18. is accomplished through the usage of signals where a smiley face declares:
19. 'Smile, you're being recorded by a video camera'. In order to produce a small-
20. scale action, with the humour of a bad taste joke, there was a smiley sign
21. on the back of the fake package. Nevertheless, a greater machine had been
22. already activated and control of the scale of action was lost. The project thus
23. showed the value that contemporary society gives to fear, turning it into an
24. unquestionable character of our time. In a similar way to how we set money
25. into our scale of values, fear revealed itself to be something 'not to be toyed
26. with': a shapeless shadow to be faced at a respectful distance.
27.   The building was evacuated by the Grupo de Ações Táticas Especiais
28. GATE, a group of special tactic actions 'focused on high risk situations'[2] and
29. in charge of the security of the 19 million inhabitants of Sao Paulo.[3] The great
30. scandal was referred to the day after in all national and regional media[4] and a
31. legal action was taken against the net performer, who was placed in danger of
32. deportation from Brazil.
33.   The proposal was attempting to take to a further / deeper level the idea of
34. art as a description of an age's sensibility, when this sensibility manifests to be
35. about intolerance, fear, terrorism, control, and surveillance. It is also another
36. way to illustrate other realities, like the one lived by the 46 million inhabitants
37. of the third most populated country in Latin America[5], Colombia, a country
38. torn apart by civil wars and violence. *The Game of Revolution* points the finger
39. at civilians' responsibility, and at how their lack of criticism approves the states'
40. fight to maintain the dynamic of surveillance. Needless to say, the project deals
41. with the deprived idea of life built on the current experience of fear.
42.   Another work of this kind is 'Mejor Vida Corp' by Minerva Cuevas which
43. questions the power of corporations. 'Mejor Vida Corp' freely distributes
44. products such as subway tickets for Mexico City, lottery cards, student cre-
45. dentials, fake barcodes of products in supermarkets, as well as offers serv-
46. ices such as surveys, recommendation letters, cleaning assistants and public
47. donations (Baigorri 2006: 74). Apparently these kinds of projects seem to be
48. legitimized outside artistic institutions; they also seem to be self-sufficient
49. and do not need the approval of the institution because of their direct rela-
50. tionship with the user, and because the permanent diffusion offered by the
51. web already covers their goals and necessities. However, ultimately this turns
52. out to be an illusion. Minerva Cuevas is represented by a commercial gallery

1. The facebook profile of 'Guerilla Art': http://www.facebook.com/#!/profile.php?id=1315162465&ref=ts. Accessed 27 September 2010.

2. http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grupo_de_A%C3%A7%C3%B5es_T%C3%A1ticas_Especiais_(S%C3%A3o_Paulo). Accessed 27 September 2010.

3. http://www.cidadedesao-paulo.com/sp/br/sao-paulo-em-numeros. Accessed 17 August 2010.

4. For instance: http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/SaoPaulo/0,,MUL605118–5605,00.html. Accessed 27 September 2010; http://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/interna/0,,OI2957200-EI8139,00-Estudante+deixa+bomba+falsa+em+galeria+de+SP.html. Accessed 27 September 2010; http://www.vidauniversitaria.com.br/blog/?p=11927. Accessed 27 September 2010; http://jbonline.terra.com.br/extra/2008/06/18/e18066462.html. Accessed 17 August 2010; http://www.ofir4news.com.br/2008/06/18/estudante-poe-falsa-bomba-em-galeria-em-sp-para-fazer-tarefa-de-faculdade/. Accessed 17 August 2010; http://www.tvcanal13.com.br/noticias/estudante-deixa-bomba-falsa-em-galeria-26052.asp. Accessed 17 August 2010.

5. http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demografia_da_Col%C3%B4mbia. Accessed 27 September 2010.

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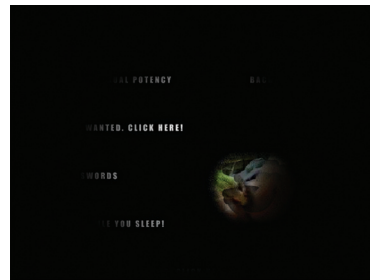
Figure 2: (top left) Mejor Vida Corp/Better Life Corp, http://www.
irational.org/mvc/english.html. Accessed 13 April 2010.

Figure 3: (top right) South Beach
Disco, http://www.idiotrobot.com/
paintings/. Accessed 14 April 2010.

and spends most of her time at festivals, meetings, seminars, and workshops (Baigorri 2006: 75). In much the same way, proposals such as the *South Beach Disco* by Antonio Mendoza attack the laws of copyright; making free usage of copyrighted images, sound and scripts while encouraging the spectators of his collages to do the same. This proposal reveals the senselessness of the vocabulary and and the imaginary nature of this 'new' economy (Baigorri 2006: 76).

One of the unfortunate effects of 9/11 attacks has been the improvement of surveillance on the Internet. Protected by law of harassment and the fight against terrorism, western governments have increased their ways of spying and invading the rights of privacy, not only of their own citizens but also of citizens of the entire globe. Artists have made pronunciations as an answer to surveillance practices on the Internet. Some of these are Echenol, Enfopol and Carnivore. Also prevalent are corporative pages which collect evidence of collected information and navigation itineraries (Baigorri 2006: 77). Artist Lucas Bambozzi has made a statement creating 'Meta4walls', in 2002.

It consisted of collecting electronic trash or Spam (unsolicited messages) since 1999 to discuss the dimensions of the private and the public spheres

Figure 4: (bottom left) Meta4walls, http://www.
comum.com/diphusa/meta/Portal_a.html.
Accessed 14 April 2010.

Figure 5: (bottom right) Nike Ground.

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1. online through the eyes of a voyeur. The artworks' approach, through
2. 'inviting' links, shows the virtual 'underworld'. The work participated in
3. Net Art Brazil and in the XXV Sao Paulo's Biennale.
4.   (Nunez 2005)
5.
6. We can also include in this group of questioning actions, a group called the
7. Electronic Disturbance Theatre, a group of electronic social disobedients.
8. Their performance consisted of sending political questions, such as 'can
9. I find html justice in this server?' to the Mexican government's servers. To
10. which the Mexican server answered: 'Justice is not found in this server'. The
11. action therefore operated as a reflection of real political conditions in Chiapas,
12. Mexico (Dominguez 2006: 197).
13.   Another net performance revolved around the rumour that
14.
15.   Karlsplatz, one of Vienna's main squares, is soon to be renamed
16.   Nikeplatz. Apart from the new name, it appears that a huge monu-
17.   ment in the shape of Nike's famous 'Swoosh' logo will also be built in
18.   Nikeplatz. Needless to say, the rumour was fake and the one-month
19.   campaign was only instigated in order to provoke the reactions of
20.   Viennese citizens, city officials and, of course, the Nike group, which
21.   denied any involvement and started legal actions to put an end to the
22.   bizarre performance.
23.   (Mattes 2003)
24.
25. In the same way the work *Coyote* by Claudia Sandoval, created in 2009, is an
26. artwork that manifests in the shape of a manual to cross the North American
27. border. Through interviews with illegal aliens in the United States the work
28. pertains to question the limits of art in relation to legality as an inconsist-
29. ent concept of contemporary society. To some the coyote epitomizes perfidy;
30. to others it symbolizes imagination, independence, and a powerful will to
31. survive. In the border area between the United States and Mexico the term
32. coyote also refers to a very special type of human being: the traffickers of
33. immigrants, who, for a fee, offer their knowledge of how to cross a state bor-
34. der without the usual paperwork (Schneider 2002). *Coyote* stands as a manual
35. to avoid the horror, offering parallel ways to confront it and cross it success-
36. fully. The work faces illegality in the current cultural context that permits and
37. repulses aliens depending on the occasion.
38.   In a world that increases its trespassing controls at the borders, the Internet
39. emerges as a new fictional, ideal place, which incorporates, if not real solu-
40. tions, the illusion of being interconnected and sharing in a global experience
41. of the world. Facing the paradox between real and virtual frontiers, artists have
42. developed particular proposals in which they question the problem of border
43. transits, using the Internet as a tool for exposing their enquiries. In order to
44. question the boundaries between legal and illegal dynamics inside the web,
45. the project *Passport* was produced by Claudia Sandoval in 2008, where falsi-
46. fied passports were offered as a product of an online contest – the documents
47. on offer being passports from France, Cuba, Colombia, Russia and the US. As
48. a fake online contest – the award for which is a falsified passport for all voters
49. of the winning team – the contest opens up a discussion about the problem of
50. the arbitrary benefits of the possession of a certain kind of passport.
51.   Is the Internet so open and so anonymous that it can be used as a tool for
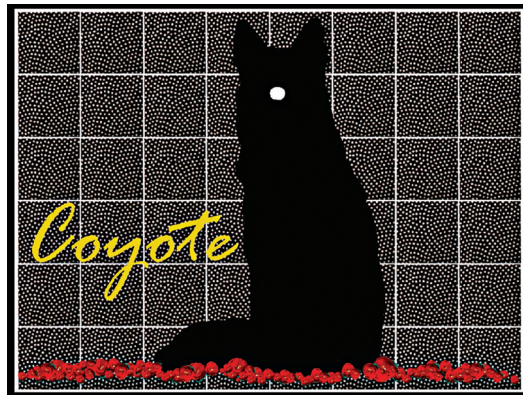52. art in support of illegal actions? The proposal appropriates social scenarios

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Figure 6: (left) *Coyote,* http://claudiasandoval.com.
br/coyote.html. Accessed 14 April 2010.

Figure 7: (right) *Passport,* http://claudiasandoval.
com.br/passport.html. Accessed 14 April 2010 and
14 August 2010.

such as blogs to produce art. In this way art invades low-tech platforms in
order to create an ever-widening range of interactions. A document is raised
collectively in order to expose which passport participants would like to have.
By doing so new perspectives are brought to light about the complexity of the
contemporary, overemphasized preference to choose a place to live according
to that country's economic and political situation.

The wish for translocation is done, either due to discontent with the exist-
ing social milieu, or because of the syndrome of contemporary (postmod-
ern) nomadic yearning and the need to go beyond the restrictiveness of a
particular country or continent (Kalcic n.d). The paradox of an increasingly
interconnected world of new technologies can be compared to the ever more
restricting laws to impede citizens from developing countries to freely circu-
late through privileged ones. The proposal pertains to call attention to what
Milton Santos (2000) pointed out as the ultra exhibition of hegemonic centres
while peripheries are left aside, e.g. the isolated becoming more invisible.

All these proposals question – within a wide gamut of expression – the
subversive ways in which the relationships between art, criticism, and society
can be tackled. Using communication tools as purely expressive media, and
thus far removed from a point of pure technological interest, they propose new
places in which to locate artistic manifestations of the current era, describing
the sensibility of our times.

BACK IN THE GOOD OLD WORLD

In the case of the metaverse, and particularly the economically based build-
er's world of *Second Life*®, the author wonders how the notion of subver-
sion has been explored. At cursory first glance it would certainly seem that
the generosity of the genre provides sufficient tools to deal with the idea of
subversion. However, the cases in which *Second Life*® art pieces are related
to a critical approach to society are not common. One reason for this notable
absence of social critique within 3D embodied virtual worlds such as *Second
Life*® might be that the artwork engendered in it might well deal with the

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1.   virtual world from a purely aesthetic or representational point of view, and
2.   as such provoke no danger. It is simply not 'real' enough to provoke the
3.   subversive spirit!
4.   An interesting way one might subvert/ become involved in subversion
5.   is through the acquisition of a novel identity through a *Second Life®* avatar.
6.   'Stadtplandienst vs. Me' by the German artist Joachim Stein (2007/2008), an
7.   experimental intervention in collaboration with Hans Finckh and (involun-
8.   tarily) Meissner & Meissner Lawyers, employs just such a tactic. The work
9.   consists of a spoof video of a *Second Life®* court of law which was created
10.   when the artist was called to pay the fee of a €225,00: a license for using the
11.   online map service 'Stadtplandienst.de' to illustrate his work 'Running Myself'
12.   in Real Life:
13.
14.   On April 1, 2008 (this is no joke) a hearing took place at Amtsgericht
15.   Charlottenburg. I defended myself arguing that my artistic freedom was
16.   compromised if I was not allowed to use Stadtplandienst the way I did
17.   and that my artistic freedom was more important than the copyright
18.   claimed by Stadtplandienst.
19.   (Stein 2008)
20.
21.   Another use of *Second Life®* is as a platform to meet and debate about
22.   contemporary issues; this perspective is exposed by artists like Peggy Weil &
23.   Nonny de la Pena. On 24 October, at the Global Kids' International Justice
24.   Center in *Second Life®*, digital artists and activists talked about virtual art and
25.   civic engagement, exploring themes like immigration, nationalism, and civil
26.   liberties (Panganiban 2009).
27.   French artist Fred Forest presents the same perspective in the 'Centre
28.   expérimental du Territoire' (also created in *Second Life®*), a collective tool for
29.   political and social reflection. According to Forest, the artists must constitute
30.   symbolic centres of power with the purpose of creating a balance with other
31.   powers of society. The tool proposed by Forest is an exchange platform, the
32.   goal of which is to collect and activate opinions for a better world: a world that
33.   is more supportive and less dependent on profits (Cerf 2009).
34.   But these kinds of proposals are still far from being subversive and do
35.   not really question society in a way that would represent a real danger to
36.   it. A possible explanation for this lack of hard core subversion might be
37.   that *Second Life®* residents, including artists practising within the domain,
38.   may have become accustomed to seeing the virtual world in the shape of
39.   a representation, rather than as an extension of the 'real world' endowed
40.   with 'real problems', which would then need to be tackled with a strong
41.   stance. This state may also have been brought about through the overall
42.   video game aesthetics with which the immersive experience of *Second Life®*
43.   can also be associated. In yet another example, Eva and Franco Mattes' per-
44.   formance of a hanged man[6] resulted in a scandal of bad taste which *Second*
45.   *Life®* representatives could not seem to afford – even more so given that it
46.   has all been seen before and can closely be associated to death scenarios in
47.   computer games.
48.   Consequently it appears that the good old world is still a closed reality with
49.   very few novel 'real' exits that are capable of questioning it. The virtual world
50.   of the Internet has demonstrated, in some shapes, a capability to open these
51.   doors; however, in the 3D embodied metaverse environments the creaking of
52.   the doors of subversiveness are yet to develop.

6. http://www. 0100101110101101.org/ home/nofun. Accessed 27 September 2010.

Claudia Sandoval

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When examined from a technological context, present day artists can use a plethora of available tools to analyse and create novel means of expression and formulate new strategies. Proposals which are not concerned with 'belonging' to the existent art system but instead prefer to embark upon a critical approach towards new evolving societies show the contradiction of the worldwide web, which has been developed on the basis of impeccable codes designed too command and control, but has instead provided abandoned spaces that be used efficiently and symbolically for subversive causes.

The boldness of these projects, as well as the critical initiative of their authors, transcends ideas of territory and the notion of countries and physical borders. Instead these artists choose to talk about what is happening in the here and now, in our own house, on our very own planet. Their proposals belong to and originate from the needs and desires of segments of society that stand apart from the 'complete image of the world'. These artists create different ways to reflect on their immediate context, fulfilling their subversive brief through 'incomplete' performances which point to solutions and places outside of common sense and shared reality.

These proposals ask us to approach the breaking points of 'complete images of the world' making possible a wider spectrum of what it means to live in the current time.

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