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Participation in the Digital Public: New Media Art as Online Community

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Participation in the Digital Public: 
New Media Art as Online Community

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Media, Art and Text Program at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Acknowledgment

I want to thank my wife Traci H. Garland for standing with me over the past several years as we have worked to get to this point; I am in her debt and could not have done this without her. Her love and patience is extraordinary.

I also want to thank my family who has supported me in all my endeavors. I am honored that in attaining a Ph.D. I can follow in the footsteps of my father Dr. Jack R. Garland who is a hero and an inspiration.

Sincerely,

Vaughn Whitney Garland
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PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL PUBLIC:
NEW MEDIA ART AS ONLINE COMMITTEE

Vaughn Whitney Garland, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Media Art and Text Ph.D. Program at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2013

Major Director: Dr. Richard Fine, Professor, English

Participation in The Digital Public: New Media Art as Online Community examines community online art projects—works of art produced and orchestrated by artists who employ the interconnected and participatory nature of the Internet. Garland contends, in part through a reevaluation of a statement made by artist Nam June Paik concerning a radio performance by John Cage, that community online art projects exist as the newest example of new media art because of a utilization and implementation of established and functioning technology. Through the application of Internet technology, contemporary artists, along with their collaborators and spectators, have the potential to create, build, engage, and exhibit new works of art and form new concepts for the production and practice of art making. This dissertation maintains that Community online art projects serve as the most current example of new media art because they examine the shared uses of the Internet. Participation in The Digital Public: New Media Art as Online Community includes examples and critiques of new online artworks as well as historical analysis of the theories of new media, participation, interconnectivity, and remediation in art through the 20th century.
VITA

**Vaughn Whitney Garland** received an M.F.A. in Painting and Printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2003 and is ready to defend his Ph.D. dissertation in the Interdisciplinary Media Art and Text program at Virginia Commonwealth University. As an independent curator of art exhibitions Garland continues to be a community activist in the arts and has held board member positions on several public arts organizations, including the Chair of the Public Arts Commission and Richmond Urban Design Committee.

### Education

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### Professional Experience

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Introduction

Imaginary Landscape 4

In the course of a public event with the American composer John Cage in 1986, renowned new media artist Nam June Paik made an offhand remark about his conception of media art that, while overlooked until now, Paik’s comment that day could alter how artists, historians, and critics conceive of the relationship between art and digital technology. Almost thirty years after Paik and Cage publicly met in a University of California in San Diego lecture hall, a select group of online works of art reveals the prescience of Paik’s comments that day. Instead of defining new media art in terms of technological presence, where “new media” means that artists incorporate new technologies into production, Paik’s assertion may alter the way we consider not only all of new media but also how artists of the past used technology as a creative instrument. Through Paik’s assessment we may view new media with more nuance and clarity, as the technological applications put into practice and developed by engaged users but examined and repositioned by artists. This dissertation seeks to analyze a series of art works that combine Internet technology, online community, and social participation/collaboration while, at the same time, revealing how these new works of art conform to Paik’s 1985 conception of “new media” art.

Renowned for his artistic use of television signals and communications satellites, and as such often cited as an early new media artist, Nam June Paik declared in his lecture that John
Cage’s 1951 *Imaginary Landscape 4* signaled the birth of “media art.” Referring to the composer’s modernist arrangement, in which 12 musicians turn on and off 24 radios, Paik exclaims to Cage and their audience: “I thought today about the history of media art, the first real media art big break was *Imaginary Landscape 4* of radio.”

Paik suggested that *Imaginary Landscape 4* was significant because it looked at the production of sound in a different way: “Until 1951 *Imaginary Landscape* there was electronic music like Schaeffer or Paul Hindemith [who] made electronic art music by turning a turntable or record fast and slow…Still, that is not media art. Your radio piece, *Imaginary Landscape 4*, is some kind of quantum leap. You could call this media art from then.”

Why did Paik consider *Imaginary Landscape 4* so significant? He linked Cage’s collection of radio signals to the relationships between shared technologies and the users who could transform those technologies into products for new creative collaborations. In his interpretation of the birth of media art Paik seemed more interested in the ways in which Cage called attention to the active landscape of radio technology for making art. Paik states: “Only short wave makes various noises, not FM or AM, but short wave there is a lot of beautiful noise…it is unwanted noise…You disorganize the existence of radio waves, and hardware called radios, and the American installation of a lot of radio stations, and then those ephemeral things

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2 Idem..
called software.” In this version of art and technology, Paik indicates that Cage’s capturing of signal transmission from radio waves, especially from a group of users of such technology, transformed the material into a potential instrument for manipulating sound. Fundamental to Cage’s appropriation of the radio technology is the use of the broad technological procedures and applications needed to engage and transmit with the radio wave.

Paik’s statement to Cage calls our attention not only to this particular work but also to artists using the Internet in a similar way, as well as the current conceptions of new media art that calls into question the centrality of the computations as a defining characteristic of new media art. It is through this re-evaluation of the relationships between technology, community and art that we may view observe media artists working with the Internet as a rich and functional resource for manipulation. By calling attention to the radio system, and those constantly broadcast radio waves, Cage emphasized that radio transmissions can be manipulated by artists. New works using the Internet may work in the same way.

It is an interest in technology, or how technology exposed connectivity, which Paik saw as crucial to Cage’s work and which signaled for him a new direction in media art. As a new media artists himself, and much in a similar fashion as Cage evaluated the radio, Paik scrutinized television and satellite technology, which where the newest forms of technologies for him. In Cage’s and Paik’s investigation of the radio, the television, and satellites, and I argue in all forms of media art, the artists investigates shared technologies in the ways that we, as a society, actually utilize their functions. Paik is correct at this time to call Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape 4* as a work “media art” because he, Paik, was working at that time with the newest forms of media in video recording and television. This meant that Paik could be defined as a new media artist

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3 Idem.
and Cage, at this time, a media artist. If we were to take Paik’s definition we can see media art extending backwards throughout history to any artistic explorations of the technological uses shared by a group.

Crucially, for Paik, the first new media art did not depend on the computer or digital code. According to media theorists such as Lev Manovich and Mark Hansen, new media, by definition, begins with digitization, the development of computers, and the appearance of code. While Manovich asserts that new media is a product of the computer’s binary code and process of digital programmability, which are key functions of the computer, Hansen suggests that since at some point all media become byproducts of computation because of their digital remediation.

There is, however, a problem in defining all new media within this digital context. When an increasing number of artists incorporate the computer into the production of new work, like a filmmaker who works with the digital camera, labelling these artists “new media artists” makes the term initially meaningless. In fact, limiting “new media” specifically to those that explore the uses and functions of a technology will enable better understanding of such art and, at the same time, incorporate previous works of art that have developed in similar fashion. My position is that new media art is not solely a product of computation but involves an investigation into the shared uses of all technologies.

Consider, as an illustration, how a series of large scale computer prints were considered “paintings” during the Whitney Museum exhibition by artist Wade Guyton. In this exhibition the artist used the computer to create his surface instead of relying on the traditional painterly materials of paint, brush and canvas. As journalist Carol Vogel noted when she visited the artist’s studio, “There is no smell of turpentine, no haphazard array of easels, no cans of paint or stacks of used canvases. In fact, there are none of the things one would expect. Instead all the
creating is executed on computer screens and printers.”

Guyton’s exhibition demonstrates how many artists now incorporate the computer into their creative production while still framing their work within the context of defined art disciplines. In Guyton’s case the computer is part of the creative process, but this does not mean that Guyton is a new media artist. Instead, Guyton appears to be a new type of painter, transforming the brush into a computer program and digital print.

On the other hand, John Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape 4* extends past such simple uses of technology. What Cage formulates with his radio work is a system of users, or performers, who collaborate in order to compose. Cage’s repositioning of radio technology as a creative expression becomes a dialectical examination of the technology as a system defined by group use and appropriation. While much of twentieth century art, especially Modernism, is determined by the fact that the art object has a “presence” of its own, where a spectator is asked to look into the work in order to uncover its being, *Imaginary Landscape 4* works outward. The capturing of the radio transmissions uncovers the ways in which we work as a community of users of technology. For this reason Cage’s composition is innovative for the artist is on the outside of technology, looking in. This re-presentation of technology, this recursiveness, is, to my mind, why Paik suggests that media art be defined according to the use of a technology’s use.

Thus, if we embrace Paik’s interpretation of new media in art, we must define new media not just by their use of computers and digital technology; on the contrary, any artistic work that uses communication technologies of any kind can be legitimately termed a work of “new media.” Artists who use the Internet, telephone, telegraph, television, satellite

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transmissions, cell phones, mobile devises, and even the United States Postal Service singularly or in combination are in fact working with “new” media. Artists working in these media seek to create new works of art by exploiting already existing technological constructions, while self-reflexively examining their relationship to them. Since, the Internet is the most current and most “newest” technology, artists employing the Internet are as important now as Cage’s *Imaginary Landscape 4* was for that time or Paik’s works with satellites and televisions were for his. What is fundamental to my position in the next few chapters, and similar to Paik’s own challenge concerning *Imaginary Landscape 4*, is that much more work needs to be completed on works of art that incorporate technology in this way. Paik exclaims: “I think that meaning of that piece [*Imaginary Landscape 4*] has not been very properly appreciated.”\(^5\) For this reason, this present dissertation focuses on works of art that have developed out of collaboration and which use those new online advancements. The focus of my argument below will center on three primary characteristics of new media works of art that employ the Internet: participation, interconnection, and remediation.

I argue, in re-contextualizing Paik’s original statement, that what I term Community Online Art Projects (COAP) investigate socially shared applications of new Internet technologies in much the same way Cage investigated radios. Contemporary online participatory artists, along with their collaborators, have the potential to create new works of art that embody new concepts for the practice of art making through the application of Internet technology. Community online art projects serve both to illustrate and to support Paik’s claim. For, at the center of these art projects, communities come together through technology in order to create

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\(^5\) Cage and Paik
new experiences with art. This dissertation explores how a present-day evaluation of Paik’s claim offers a nuanced understanding of new media art on the Internet.

In doing so the present dissertation seeks to reevaluate those uses of Internet technology, as well as its uses for artistic production. Like art historian Edward Shanken, who argues for more consideration of technology in the historiography of art, this dissertation seeks to locate COAPs historically by investigating the relationships of Internet technologies to participatory art production - how Internet communities and networked groups that are participating and collaborating in making new art. Like Shaken, I believe that all too often the canon of art overlooks technologies and their applications. This failure to analyze technology as an important discussion of art production, which Shaken speaks of, must be addressed. This is especially true when a growing number of artists employ Internet technologies during studio production of all types. In an attempt to correct the current failure to link art and technology, Shanken seeks to “rewrite” the canon, placing more emphasis on technology in art practice and methodology:

Just as the field has failed to incorporate the study of technology (both as history and applied science) as a basic method, so the canon of art history similarly reflects an impoverished understanding of the role of technology in the history of art-making and the contributions of artists who have been important innovators in that regard…At the same time I am also committed to rewriting the canon—that grand scheme of our collective field—to reflect the importance of technology throughout the history of art, thereby forcing a critical reconsideration and reconceptualization of artists, artworks, art-making practices, and historical narratives that previously have been excluded, marginalized, or not understood to their fullest potential.6

This dissertation analyzes those Internet technologies that enable users to collaborate with an engaged group led by artists. These interconnected Internet technologies allow new opportunities for user participation and collaboration simply because they are implemented across so many technological devices and used in such a variety of ways. In fact, the Internet’s

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complex system of smart technology crossed with the immediately accessible and massive networks to information and user groups offers artists innumerable ways to encourage participation and collaboration. Not only can artists present new projects, they also may become collaborators and managers. Due to overlapping and connected Internet devices, digital networks, and linked communities, a COAP-engaged user can help define the conceptual direction of a work and have the power to share in its production. Additionally, online collaborative creativity calls into question considerations at the heart of current art production, including issues of originality and reproduction, the relationship of artists to audience, and the nature of artistic authorship and collaboration.

Figure 0.1: (Left) Martin Agency Technologists installing LED lights for *The Light of Human Kindness* RVA Street Art Festival September 11, 2013 Courtesy Patience Salgado. (Right) Online Image From *The Light of Human Kindness* campaign RVA Street Art Festival September 11, 2013 Courtesy Patience Salgado.

Where users have the potential to instantaneously engage with each other via Internet connectivity, the technology offers a host of new ways to create works of art and reflects a complicated relationship between use and user. Online art projects like Marc Horowitz and Peter Baldes’s *Google Maps Road Trip*, Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July’s *LearningtoLoveYouMore.com*, and Marisa Olson’s *Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog*, to name just three, represent only a fraction of contemporary artworks that employ the
Internet as material to create such new works of art. Other projects that will be evaluated in this context include *Net VS Net Collective, Pseudo.com, The Silo, Steve Museum*, Parker Ito’s *JstChillin, Silophone*, and The Museum of Modern Art Flickr collection of photographs from the exhibition *The Artist is Present*, among several others.

While COAPs are dependent on the Internet and are viewable on computers and mobile devices, they also rely on an extensive level of engagement or participation of active networked collaborators. It is through these Internet projects that new media art is being redefined, because they investigate the uses of new technologies. Instead of defining digital programmability and computation as the basis for new media, COAPs demonstrate how Internet artists examine the technological and social system created by the use of the Internet, uncovering the properties of that system as a basis for a new creative practice.

By looking at the Internet via the handful of COAPs described here, this dissertation seeks to evaluate how artists use Internet technology in order to stimulate participation or collaboration within technologically connected users. In this regard the “use” of Internet technology, as it was with previous technologies by artists like Cage, is both an extension of its functions and presents possibilities for repurposing. While radio technology existed as a fully developed communication system, Cage disorganized or rearranged its collected sound from radio transmissions for use as material in the production of art. Until that moment the technology existed as a communicating tool built out of AM, FM, and Short Wave transmissions, broadcast stations, and listeners with radio receivers and antennas. After Cage’s appropriation of the radio signal, the radio’s apparatus and/or parts could be utilized in the production and practice for new art making.
It is in this space of investigation and re-use that COAPs exist. COAPs take Internet technology - the networks and connections enabled by digital data transfers, code, and programmability, and re-present that technology. It is for this reason that the use of Internet technology gives artists the ability to manipulate an individual project, presenting it as something new within the framework of art. By scrutinizing Internet use for art production, where artists use blogs, emails, networks, programs, and data we may become more aware of the artistic potential of such a technology. Additionally, the new creative uses of technologies, the Internet for our current moment, highlight how many artists engage and collaborate with their valued communities. As media theorists Marshall McLuhan writes, “The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.”

**Manovich's New Media: Code and Film**

Influential media theorist Lev Manovich posits that new media directly emerge from the programmability of coded computation and that all new media works are in fact products of the computer: “New media is concerned with cultural objects and paradigms enabled by all forms of computing not just by networking…which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition.” This understanding extends from the historical development of the computer as a coding machine. In part, the inventor of one of the first working computers, Konrad Zuse, utilized and remediated a roll of film in order to create the code the machine could recognize and run applications from. As Manovich writes, “One of the surviving pieces of this film shows

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binary code punched over the original frames of an interior shot. A typical movie scene—two people in a room involved in some action—becomes a support for a set of computer commands.\(^9\) Manovich’s example of previous media becoming the code for the computer suggests that the computer takes all media and transforms them into binary 1s and 0s, which are then used to command computation and computer applications: “All existing media are translated in numerical data accessible for the computer. The result: graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts become computable, that is, simple sets of computer data. In short, media become new media.”\(^10\)

Media theorist Mark Hansen views new media much differently. While it is important to note that Hansen’s New Philosophy for New Media centers on the issue of embodiment and technology, he suggests in his entry on “New Media” in Critical Terms for Media Studies that new media are in fact two things: “a qualitatively new kind of media and a quality of all media.”\(^11\) Unlike Manovich, Hansen’s theory allows photographic and filmed images, recorded sounds, and textual remediation to be as new media because they were technological advancement in their own time but also, because they have been remediated onto the computer, that these old media are now new products of computation and are once again new media. In fact, Hanson’s theory seems play it safe with defining media because they are looked at in terms of the computer but also have room to exist on their own and dependent on their period. But since the computer now appropriates and redefines all media, because all previous media forms have been remediated by computation, the computer has more of a hold over how we define the

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\(^10\) Ibid., 25.

new media object. On the other hand, Hansen’s new media suggests that the development of
new technologies, along with how these new technologies are used, determine how new media is
defined:

So, perhaps ‘new media’…should be thought of as an expression from this newness, which is to say, an expression that indexes the changing vocation of media itself. Not simply the direct, technical consequences of digital computation, new media nonetheless concerns what is new about the widespread role of computation in our world…from this standpoint, the sheer breadth of what falls under the term ‘new media’ might begin to make sense…for if ‘new media’ today names a range of contemporary technical, aesthetic, and social developments, what holds them all together is not a common technical basis so much as an effort to interface the technicist logic of computation with human experience. [my emphasis]

Hansen’s theory permits media theorists more flexibility in order to analyze media as they relate
to a particular time, function, or situation instead of seeing them divided between what is
computer—new, and non-computer—old.

Unlike Manovich, who argues that new media began with the creation of the computer,
Hansen’s definition of new media allows further analysis of media as it relates to its own time
and use. This dual nature of media is important for artists as they incorporate new technologies
into the production of new art. Instead of continuing to describe new media according to how it
utilizes the computer critics and historians need to also investigate how a technology, itself, is
used and the reasons why artists may attempt to produce with the particular technology. Where
Manovich proposes new media as old media introduced into the computer, Paik’s conception of
media art allows further examination into all included technologies that may appear in a
particular art work.

12 Ibid., 172.

13 Mitchell and Hansen, Critical Terms for Media Studies, 183-184.

14 Manovich. The Language of New Media, 47.
Participatory artists who collaborate online with their audience pull from social activities in which they “mix” or “weave” their work together as the interaction unfolds in virtual time. Much like the disc jockey that creates as the work progresses, online participatory artists seek to create out of the virtual and/or physical engagement with their audience as well as remediating from Internet programs and software. This participatory remediation is different than what Lev Manovich proposes in his chapter “Generation Flash.” In this work Manovich describes a new type of artist who constructs new digital work using computer code instead of mixing out of the digital remediation. I do not agree with Manovich’s assertion that “software artists” create all new code when they create with computer program languages because a numerous amount of coders copy from others in order to produce a specific outcome. One example of artists mixing and matching would be the artist coding community and language called “Processing,” where code is often shared between users to produce computer functions and/or robotic movements. On the other hand, one way that COAP artists may examine and create code is for mobile applications that are used on smartphones and tablets.

**Amending New Media’s Past**

If it is possible to conceive of new media in terms of its social application, where a technology is defined and put to use by a community which engages with it. By looking at how a technology was utilized in the production of art, and how artists interpreted the technology in relationship with its social use, it is more likely that a wide range of art that was never considered new media because they were not made on the computer can find new meaning in new media. To illustrate, if an artist used the printing press to investigate the nature of that

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particular technology, then a case could be made that he or she was examining and manipulating the technology in the exact same way Cage did by accessing the transmission to collect radio sounds in order to produce music. Wendy Chun points to the difficulties in defining new media but adds that considering the distinction between old and new media may allow new insights into of all media. For Chun, it is through a closer examination of the use of technology that media become transparent: “In light of digital programmability, seemingly forgotten moments in the history of the media we glibly call ‘old’ can be rediscovered and transformed.”

Chun objects to how new media critics and theorists draw distinct lines between old and new media in order to connect new media to the digital functions of the computer. She, too, suggests that there is a problem with new media whose sole production takes shape in relation to computation because it leads theorists to merely consider the computer’s function merely as a processing machine and a device employed to remediate non-digital images, sounds, or text into digital code. Chun explains that this consideration for new media has worked its way into many prominent articles and books:

[Manovich’s] *The Language of New Media* emphasized the importance of programmability rather than computer display and distribution, while at the same time viewing new media as the product of the merging of computation with media storage (most importantly film). Following Manovich, Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort have compiled the comprehensive and definitively titled *The New Media Reader*, documenting and indeed creating new media history as the progressive marriage of computation and art, a marriage that produced the computer as an expressive medium.

Through Chun’s summary it is possible to comprehend potential problems relating to current and future works of art that use the computer in different ways and through varying


practices. Guy Debord, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Michael Fried have all reexamined the roles of artists and audiences as shared creators, collaborators, and spectators. Art historian Claire Bishop also examines audience participation and spectatorship in *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* as does Steve Dixon’s book *Digital Performance*. Dixon, who comes to digital performance from a background in theater, looks at the digital adaptation of technology in relation to stage settings and video interfaces. Bishop, on the other hand, examines the social and political transformations of participation through the social engagements that are arranged by artists in order to activate a physical group and community.

While Bishop is critical of socially produced works of art because they are often not democratic or social enough, and she specifically criticized the Relational Aesthetic movement for such reasons, Bishop focuses only on those projects that exist in the physical environment and does not fully examine the potential for community creative interaction online or through digital technology.\(^\text{18}\) The shared interactions between engaged collaborators is an important concept for Dixon, as it is for Bishop, which is why Bishop suggests that more investigation needs to be done on participation in the visual arts.\(^\text{19}\) For Bishop participatory art requires a new set of guidelines because the socially active projects that are produced as complex interactions between artists, participants, community, and environments do not conform to traditional models of viewership. As Bishop writes, “Participatory art demands that we find new ways of analyzing art that are no longer linked solely to visuality, even though form remains a crucial vessel for

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communicating meaning.” In order to construct a theoretically and historically rooted survey of Internet art collaborations, the present dissertation will mirror Steven Dixon’s method in *Digital Performance*.

At the heart of community online art projects are their intrinsically collaborative nature and their reliance on access to digital communication that comprises the Internet. By isolating COAPs as a unique art form and the contemporary representation of Paik’s “new media,” accomplish two objectives. First, I place COAPs in a historical context with previous art practice, as COAPs extend from a long line of creative performance and participation through technology. Second, I will evaluate the shared systems of technology that are available to artists and how they are used in current artistic collaborations on the Internet. COAP artists highlight how collaborations online increasingly rely on digital technology and their application of participation, interconnection and remediation within a group or community of users.

**Chapter Summaries**

Chapter 1 surveys participation in the arts historically, detailing how current creative online participation and collaboration extends from previous concepts of aesthetics, creativity, and production that emerged from the theater arts in the early twentieth century. Based on this historical overview, this chapter will show that COAPs, for all their dependence on twenty-first century technology, are not new. Yet the ability of users to combine efforts and “attack” the web in order to retrieve and activate information may itself be new and distinctive. The ease of access and the increasing speed of networked connectivity may indicate that the online

community is an entirely new phenomenon, given that participants may uniquely access multiple programs at once and may exist in many places at any time.

One way users may participate is by clicking on a link or by creating links for others to view and share. They may also access an immense amount of information at one time, add to that information or to their online identities, and create digital representations of their physical and emotional identities. Unlike traditional participants who relied on physical space for an interaction, the Internet does not need one to meet in a city square, to show up at a picket line, appear in front of a city commission or to travel to an art gallery. Tracing the rise of participation and collaboration in performance art and theater, especially during the Dada and Futurists movement in the early twentieth century, I will show how theatrical Dada and Futurist productions sought direct action and reaction from the audience and how the traditional function of the artist changed when the audience participated in the creation of the work.

In the same spirit the performance art movement of the 1960s, known as Fluxus, continued to emphasize creative collaboration between the artist and the audience. While John Cage and Nam June Paik are recognized as significant artists during the Fluxus movement, artist Yoko Ono, for another, exemplified participatory collaboration and chance encounters when she allowed her audience to cut her clothes away as she sat motionless on an auditorium stage. In the same way that The Futurist Theater encouraged its audience to get up out of their seats and engage with the cast of characters on stage, the Fluxus artist welcomed collaboration and the element of chance into the performance. This chance often produced an unintentional and new encounter that was not arranged by the artist or the participant.

While much of Chapter 1 examines one particular COAP, Google Maps Road Trip, the chapter also considers additional twentieth and twenty-first century works of art and artists who
similarly challenged traditional methods of audience participation and engagement. Issues of authorship and ownership, which relate to collaboration, are also discussed. Other COAPs examine the relationships between digital space and the traditional exhibition venue where works of art are chosen by experts in the field of art. The Internet threatens this traditional gatekeeping as digitally minded independent curators, and their participants use the Internet to curate and exhibit contemporary works of art instead of following the traditional curatorial method. One collaborative art group, JstChillin highlights these aspects of Internet art exhibitions and art production. The curators and artists of JstChillin and Serial Chillers In Paradise suggest how artists may connect online for the purpose of curating art shows that exist online as well as in physical and traditional gallery settings and other physical spaces. In this case the exhibitions develop as shared experiences that are constructed out of the digital connections made between communities of engaged artists.

Artists are not the only ones investigating new relationships between the contemporary art object, the material used to create that object, and the location for the exhibition of new art. Museums, too, are starting to recognize how shared participation creates new types of engagement for visitors. For instance, a recent attempt at community building by the Bronx River Art Center shows how a museum can build awareness of its exhibition online as artists created participatory work in the West Farms neighborhood of Bronx, New York. The Virtual/Monumental artists sought to engage their audience through the use of smart technologies and Internet-capable devices that could be accessed not only in the physical locales of a neighborhood but could also be viewed as online digital engagements. This duality of spaces in Virtual/Monumental offered each art installation and artwork the ability to be present virtually
and physically. The duality is mirrored in the art center’s attempt to be an active community institution and a place for further participation and research online.

Chapter 2 describes interconnection, the networks that exist between users and their technologically developed communities. Internet users connect with others through a variety of means, like daily posts or comments on a friend’s pages and blogs, or by sharing information through email and comments sections, or again by communicating directly with a friend in a chat room or through a web camera. Users may also connect to others through web links, tagging software and file sharing programs, or by sending signals from a computer that then appear on a smart phone. Internet interconnectivity to digitally networked and mobile devices is a significant quality in technology’s recent development. Doug Easterly and Matt Kenyon’s web streaming sculpture, IED, as well as Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher’s web community, Learning to Love You More, are two examples where artists employ online communities via interconnected technologies.

Chapter 2 reexamines earlier interconnected technologies like the telegraph, radio, telephone, satellites, and even the postal service. Ray Johnson, and the collaborative art group Experiments in Art and Technology (known simply as EAT) as well as John Cage and Nam June Paik all examined art that included the newest forms of technology in order to investigate the technological conventions of the time. While this chapter looks at previous movements in art and technology, it showcases current investigations of connectivity, collaboration, and community. One COAP highlighted in this chapter is the digital sound installation Silophone. This multi-platform and multi-location exists as a sound installation in Montréal, Canada, but is controlled and played online.
The success of the Internet relies on connecting one computer to another and one user to
others, or creating a “network”. How we call people on Facebook “friends” or how we
understand collaborative projects like Wikipedia determines the way we interpret the term
“network.” Online participants are now blanketed with interconnected networks in the form of
email chains, online communities, Ethernet and wireless connections and text messages on Smart
phones. Dr. Wendy Chun’s *Imagined Networks*, which extends from Benedict Anderson’s
*Imagined Communities*, suggests that the idea of everyone connected by a network has caused
users to view themselves as local as well as global with the power to exist in multiple realities
with varying identities. Chun asks for more consideration of networks because all computers
are, by nature, programmed to read everything from the larger network dataflow in order to
determine what is specific to one computer.

Art projects by Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinovitz, Bill Wasik, Andrea Zapp, and *Net
Vs Net Collective* all exploit network applications that are developed via a host of new
technological devices and engaged participants. One example occurs when images can exist in
multiples places, virtually and in physical form, as artists and performers add web cameras and
projectors to installations and performance art pieces. In these situations viewers can engage
with the presented work through projection from synchronized cameras and devices, all of which
are interconnected. Like the satellite transmission of video and television, or the installations of
data linked sculptures, our possible Internet networks are emphatic realizations of the immensity
of our interconnection.

Chapter 3 analyzes the relationships between COAPs and remediation, drawing on Jay
David Bolter and Richard Grusin’s *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Bolter and

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Grusin interpret remediation using two characteristics, immediacy and hypermediacy. Immediacy allows newer technologies a sense of control over past remediation because it is available in a more immediate fashion while hypermediacy allows users the ability to transfer between technologies because they are treating many forms of media similarly and at the same time. The more quickly a participant is able to transition between media the more present he or she feels, which is why newer remediation relies on better, and more immediate, transformations between the user and the media being presented. Remediation, like those kinds that presently exist between networks and technologies, allows participants the ability to engage with each other more freely and at a faster rate of speed. Hypermediacy sees media as functioning across a range of technologies and appearing in various forms at any given time. The hypermediated art project SosoLimited, for example, exploits changing media through the collection and collage of digital image, text, sound, and video.

While some artists, like SosoLimited, use the Internet in order to isolate or remediate the streaming record of information that can be accessed by the computer, other artists may utilize ongoing events, happenings, and conversations, which take place as they transpire in real time online. One such online project, Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog, reveals how one artist successfully tapped into an online community by engaging with an ongoing blog conversation around a television show, which was then used to create awareness of the physical act of voting in an election. Marisa Olson collaborates by capitalizing on the existing community of fans who watch the popular television show, American Idol. While the project exists as a blog, Olson utilizes text, images, video, sounds, hyperlinks, and public comments to elicit a response from her followers and fans. The use of hypermediacy in Olson’s project gives the
artist unique access to multiple communities, including the community who watch television and the community who blog. Once the connection with a participating audience is made, Olson redirects the project into an attempt to educate her audience on the American political voting process, especially during the 2008 presidential election.

Chapter 3 argues that COAPs are not simple transferences between media but are complex mediated deviations, which exist in relation to each other and, at the same time, independently. In fact, many of the works discussed in this dissertation exist online and also are potential material for community projects and exhibition performances that take place in the physical environment while also being presented on the Internet and via digital devices. Chapter 3 offers a reconsideration of the conceptions of remediation and suggests how complex and varied remediation may appear when working online and offline at the same time. In this chapter I propose a model where media, and remediation, act more fluid and where a medium may exist in multiple mediated forms and may be free to change at any moment. This means that the media forms appropriated by COAPs are not distinct and are free to develop as the work, or the participation, unfolds. This chapter explores how COAPs are remediation between the physical world and the virtual world, transferring their creations between media and across technology. For this reason it is critical to evaluate new works of art, especially COAPs, according to the implementation and the application of their remediation; equally important is for a COAP remediation to be evaluated according to its multiplicity and variety in form. COAPs utilize remediation not simply as a means for transference but as a symptom of participation and interconnection, exposing the existing technological, social, political, and aesthetic structures that are already established and operational through the Internet.
Not everyone is enthusiastic about the collaborative creativity of online communities that desire shared user interaction. In fact, there are critics like Jaron Lanier and Sherry Turkle warn against the Internet community, citing concerns that people will lose their individual voices when placed within a larger community structure. Other critics, like Lawrence Lessig, worry about the control over online material, which is uploaded by anyone who has access to a connection and not validated or managed by experts. Chapter 4 examines these critiques closely, looking at the range of issues that arise as more artists turn to the Internet for the production of new art. Issues of access, control, and identity occur most prominently.

Sometimes the vastness and velocity of the Internet keeps users from engaging or creates barriers to participation online. System and information overload develops when users are overcome by the enormity of information and possibilities on the Internet, and become apathetic to things that they normally would not be if they were engaged with them in physical form. The same situation happens online through community collaboration. Internet critic Jaron Lanier warns about this when he writes of the removal of individuality as users engaged with shared online communities and the commons. Lanier critiques this loss of validity and individuality by turning his focus to Wikipedia’s communal format where an anonymous group of users create and control the message other users have freely uploaded to the site. In this case a selected and possible self-appointed group of managers, or system operators (SYOPS), control entries into the online encyclopedia. In this specific case individuality is lost and replaced with group consensus. In the same vein Sherry Turkle, MIT professor who specializes in the social studies of technology, sees technology and the Internet as destroying the physical interaction that is created when people engage with each other in physical space. Turkle suggests that technology

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like the Internet displaces private relationships because it does not allow for the same physical interaction as does face-to-face conversation: “‘Online you become the self you want to be.’ But the downside? We lose the ‘raw human part’ of being with each other.”

This is not the case for self-proclaimed “kindness worker” Patience Salgado. In fact, Salgado hopes to make serious connections with those she bonds with online. The artist’s multimedia mural and collaboration for the RVA Street Art Festival in September of 2013, located on the wall of the abandoned 80 foot long transit authority administration building, existed as much as a place for community engagement in Richmond as it did online. This project, titled *The Light of Human Kindness*, occurred as three main parts and included several technologies. First, guests were given the chance to anonymously share stories that detailed acts of kindness through a website dedicated to the project. Anyone could add stories to this site as long as it described an act of kindness. Kindness has been a running theme in Salgado’s work and her various projects online exhibit how Salgado continues to engage the public by seeking participation in doing small deeds that may touch others. For example in her project called “The Mother of All Journals,” Salgado sought to create a community journal where she would collect comments and emails from anonymous people, make them into a journal, which would be left in a specific public location. While Salgado’s journal project asked people to engage with her through emails and comments, another project asked her online readers to activate a community directly and report back to her. In *Love Wins* Salgado wanted to have the community show

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support for the recent Supreme Court decision concerning marriage equality by fastening a red heart onto random doors and then share the image with her using a hashtag.

Figure 0.2: (Left) “Hands in Front of Wall,” The Light of Human Kindness RVA Street Art Festival September 11-15, 2013 Courtesy Patience Salgado, Photo by Phil Riggan. (Right) Segment from Online Entries The Light of Human Kindness RVA Street Art Festival September 11-15, 2013 Courtesy Patience Salgado.

In all of Salgado’s guerilla kindness projects the artists attempts to connect people to each other through the creates of a shared space online as well as the physical environment. It is through these spaces that Salgado also creates her own space, a space where she can be in control of the content, which is why she has single handedly taken on the topic of kindness. However, her definition of kindness has changed due to the transformation of her older work to the new Richmond installation. Salgado took the stories she collected online and created a mural out of them by enlisting Richmond street artists Hamilton Glass, known as Ham. Selecting the main parts from a large sampling of collected online comments the artists covered the building with
hand painted texts which were then transformed by Ham into shapes for the mural. To
enliven the wall even further, Salgado worked with a Richmond advertising agency to install
newly created LED lights, which turned on when website visitors entered their story online. The
advertising agency also created an electrical current that could be initiated when visitors to the
wall held hands. With all these components the wall could be activated in a number of ways. As
the Salgado noted: “I guess the one thing I learned in this piece was that everyone had a place on
that wall. You just had to figure out what your place was. If for you it was technology that was
awesome. If for you it was the art that drew you in. Or if for you it was the fact that you shared
your story online. Everybody had an entry point.”25 This particular art project engaged the
urban environment as much as it did the online world. By contributing to any part of the project,
participation allowed users the freedom to alter the wall’s appearance. As Salgado states, “So
when those stories flooded in and we put them on the wall Hamilton turned to me and said,
‘Patience, this is not a mural anymore, this is a movement. When the people themselves felt
ownership over the wall it became the people’s wall. People were drawn to it because they could
find a part of themselves on that wall.”26

Figure 0.3: (Left) “Fierce and Kind,” The Light of
Human Kindness RVA Street Art Festival September
11-15, 2013 Courtesy Patience Salgado,
Photo by John Murden.

25 Salgado, Patience, Interview by the author. Personal interview. Richmond, VA September 28, 2013

26 Idem..
The Internet presents hypermediated remediation in high-speed multiple-party networks and permits users the ability to participate with others through complex interconnected relationships. It is the new media artist who explores and responds to and recasts new understandings on evolving technology. Simply saying that a work of art belongs to new media because it was created on the computer fails to acknowledge that more and more artists turn to the computer as a tool for construction and that the computer may only be a small part of the resources used during studio production. Like turning on the radio to access the transmissions, our current artists are plugging into the Internet. The Internet offers artists the ability to investigate how participants interpret and utilize the interconnected digital devices and software. In fact, as the Internet continues to develop and redefine itself according to the engagements developed by its participants it is plausible that artists will find experiences and artistic expressions that are new realities in spectatorship, collaboration, and community.

It is also possible to conceive of a new media artist not as one who merely turns to the computer or to digital code during the creative process but one that evaluates the ways in which a society uses any shared technology. For example, contemporary critics call filmmakers new media artists because they use a digital camera and programmability in their craft. The filmmaker, in this case, should still be considered a filmmaker no matter if he or she uses film or memory sticks. By placing an emphasis on a technology’s social use and its development as a social construction, instead of relying on a simple classification if it belongs to a new technology or not, we may better ascertain how a technology aids in the creation of new art work, practices, and theories. While I will interrogate some of the critical ideas around the formation of new media art as it relates to technology many of the ideas that surface in the subsequent chapters may also aide in reevaluating the technological art works of the past.
COAPs are the most recent examples of new media art because they utilize existing communication technologies which access the Internet, which are enabled and shared through readable multi-media digital devices and computer hardware and software. Much like John Cage’s exploitation of radio transmissions, COAP artists engage an already existing structure created by active participants. By delineating the principal character of Internet use, participation, interconnection, and remediation, we may begin to recognize how new Internet artists “disorganize,” as Paik seems to suggest of Cage’s appropriation of the radio, the newer forms of online applications for the creative and collaborative production of new art. For this reason it is the Community Online Art Project that allows us to start talking about an art that appears out of technological applications and use. The following chapters seek to examine new online artworks in order to reposition the nature of new media art as it relates to a community’s use of Internet technology.
Chapter 1

“Move Your Screen Up to The Left As I Do”

A Virtual Road Trip

In the video they called her Menj and she seems excited that it is her wedding day. Compared to the groom, Menj seems really young and a little confused by all the commotion. Most of the wedding video is shaky and the person holding the camera never shows his face. The random questions the cameraman asks Menj are relatively simple: “Are you ready?” and “Where are you going for your honeymoon?” There are laughs and snide remarks between the cameraman and the groom; at several points in the video, the cameraman yells to the groom, “git-R-done.” The event comes into focus when the groom approaches the camera to inform us why they were there. Like the figures in the background video that had just happened upon the scene, we, too, had just found this service by accident. But we found Meng and her groom in a very different way; we were online watching a YouTube video filmed at the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo, Texas. At first the video seemed to be a great idea; however, as the haphazard ceremony continued, it was evident that some viewers in the chat room felt that Marc and Pete should get back on the virtual road. Someone in the back of the car kept informing the rest of us that we needed to be in Saint Louis at the end of the day. It was true: Marc and Pete had said they wanted to make it that far and we were wasting time scrolling through YouTube videos. Yet the experience was addictive—like watching soap operas over the course of three days. Once you start in with the characters, it is hard to get out. Finally, Marc got bored and we jumped back on the road.
What are we going to see today? Are we going to find something new? Are we going to break down beside the interstate like we did on the last trip across the country? I know Pete and Marc are frustrated with each other—and with the rest of us—but Marc appears to get distracted easily. Pete, not so much. It is true that the people in the back seat were a little pushy, but today is a new day. We were all excited because Marc told us that we might make it to Kansas City today. I knew this stretch of road because I had traveled it before. This nine day trip, however, was a little different. Unlike those times where mom and dad had to stop the car to make the rest of us calm down a little, Pete and Marc did not have the luxury of telling all of us to get out. In fact, we didn’t even have a car for this trip. The only people I knew who were experiencing the online artwork *Google Maps Road Trip* were Pete and Marc, and they were each sitting at their own computers on opposite sides of the county.
In 2009, artists Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz set up a video web stream, with an adjoining chat room, and links to Google Map service, all to document a unique cross-country trip. Over the course of nine days, the two artists virtually “drove” from Los Angeles, California, where Marc lived, to Richmond, Virginia, where Pete lived. They accomplished this by clicking through the street-view images on Google’s online mapping system. Participants could join the trip in real time by logging into an online video service where Marc and Pete presented their trip. Passengers could also join in by participating in a chat room set up by the artists.

Figure 1.2: (Left) Image from ustream.tv performance by Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz Google Maps Road Trip August 10 through August 18, 2009 Courtesy by Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz. Screen capture by Marc Horowitz. (Right) Sketch of Google Maps Road Trip, Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz Google Maps Road Trip August 10-18, 2009. Drawing by Marc Horowitz, courtesy of the artists.

Each morning, Pete and Marc would turn on their computer cameras and link up by connecting online through an internet website. They would then connect to a community chat group, where the rest of us were waiting to hit the virtual “road.” Every day, someone needed to “drive” the car. Driving meant that someone would be in charge of clicking through the street view in the Google mapping system. In much the same way passengers scroll through radio

station dial to locate the soundtrack for a car ride, virtual passengers on the *Google Maps Road Trip* searched the Internet for interesting things to see and do online as the trip progressed. The passengers looked for YouTube clips, collections of photos, information about various places and roadside attractions, or created digital mixed tapes by searching streaming radio stations and iTunes. When a passenger found information from the Internet about a specific US city or attraction, the driver would stop the virtual car to watch a video, research some fact of a place, or just scroll through the digital images of that location. Throughout the trip Marc or Pete would decide what town they would aim for in order to “stay the night” and the rest of the participants/passengers would find out what to do between starting point and ending points for the day. Sometimes we would end the day by either camping out inside the car or reserving a room in a hotel. In many instances the artists, along with the help from participants, would decide on the town and then start calling hotels in that town to get room rates, accommodation information, and even types of breakfast plans.

Like stopping at every other rest area along the road, getting off the road to check out a city or location happened frequently. This is one reason why it took so long to get across the country. But because Marc and Pete encouraged participation with virtual passengers, stopping frequently felt more real, more like a true cross-country expedition, which is evident in the sidetrack trip to Cadillac Ranch, where the project’s attendees met Menj and her groom. Almost at every stop the group spent several minutes collectively critiquing, organizing, and showing off their own personal findings from computer searches on the Internet. By the end of the trip all of us, especially Pete and Marc, were exhausted, irritated with each other, cramped, and feeling strangely *claustrophobic*. More participation, and more passengers in the car, meant more information to manage and filter. One person would be searching radio stations while another
searched Wikipedia for information about towns, tourist sites, hotels, and people to stop and see as we drove across the United States. Another participant might be planning what roads to take by blazing the trail ahead of the virtual car in Google’s mapping service with the satellite view. Not only were Marc and Pete driving the car through Google’s mapped images of the road, passengers had equal weight in the progress of the trip. Eventually members of the local and national press found out about the trip and joined in as collaborators and viewers.

Near the beginning of the trip, Marc and Pete realized they could also incorporate the phone system by calling out from their office/studio desks. The addition of the phone meant that the artists could include participants not “logged” into the trip or the even the Internet during the time of the performance/production. Throughout the trip Marc and Pete made phone calls into local radio stations along the way, just attempting to encourage listeners to “log in” and see and hear what was happening with the trip. While multiple radio stations turned down interviews with the artists, the artists could also get their name out to the wider public through the assistance of their riding collaborators; some participants also contacted press centers, like local radio shows and even NPR to bring more attention to the project. The artists would give interviews

![Figure 1.3: Image from ustream.tv performance with chat comments, Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz Google Maps Road Trip August 10-18, 2009. Courtesy of the artists, screen capture by Peter Baldes.](image)

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through the chat room, the UStream service, or by phone. Because of the addition of the phone, the artists had found a way to get the trip’s progress followed online and offline, they were creating a document of their trip on the computer and the radio.

By including phone, radio, and the Internet, Marc and Pete built an extensive collaborative group on and offline, pushing at the boundaries of participation and collaborative art production online. In much the same fashion as Cage’s capturing of the radio transmissions, Google Maps Road Trip tapped into an existing system of digital computation, navigation, and online connectivity that existed as a vibrant usable technology through the Internet and through multimedia programs. By utilizing Google Maps “Street View” service along with communication technologies like chat rooms, digital networks, and radio, the artists revealed a new approach to art making. According to the New York Times writer Matt Gross, the newness of Google Maps Road Trip was significant. “To produce a real virtual vacation (and there is, I admit, something very wrong with the phrase ‘real virtual vacation’) you have to think bigger and combine existing Web services in new ways, which is what Marc Horowitz and Peter Baldes

Figure 1.4: Image from ustream.tv performance with chat comments, Peter Baldes and Marc Horowitz Google Maps Road Trip August 10-18, 2009. Courtesy of the artists, screen capture by Marc Horowitz.
By the time this virtual trip ended, *Google Maps Road Trip* had been on the radio, plastered all over the Internet and in print.

*Google Maps Road Trip* is just one example of contemporary artists investigating new technologies to produce art. Marc and Pete were especially interested in the ways in which the Internet and other new digital technologies can investigate older questions about the nature of the art object, along with the relationship of the object to an audience, and how the barriers between objects, makers, and collaborators can be dismantled due to the networks and communities produced by the Internet. The same inquiry involved in the *Google Maps Road Trip* is on display throughout many new media projects. Because *Google Maps Road Trip* appeared as both a performance art project and an online installation the importance of it as an art project can be understood in several ways. This is very much the realization about similar projects, that they can be located to a wide range of art productions and disciplines. For this reason COAPs are, by nature, interdisciplinary and should be critically evaluated according to a host of new definitions.

While the majority of the projects discussed and termed as COAPs are located online, they explore the Internet as a usable system for creativity through social action and performance. It is these online collaborations that represent how artists examine how users engage with each other using the newest forms of technology. It is an attachment to performance art, where the ability to engage art happens via technologically-aided collaborative participation, that COAPs may fully be studied. Where Nam June Paik’s description of media art reveals how John Cage manipulated the technological apparatus of radio it is through a deeper evaluation of

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participation, interconnection, and remediation of the existing shared Internet technologies that COAPs demonstrate online collaboration as new media art.

Unique to community online art projects are the complex relationships made available by creative collaboration, where participants use multiple means for engagement. Unlike previous participatory art works that extend from site specific performance art, these online collaboration projects possess the unique ability to engage a range of participants, because of the digital connections and networks that are enabled by the technology’s application or the artist’s managing of the work online. The history of participation in art practice begins, for us, in the first part of the twentieth century where theatrical producers engaged their audience in order to get them out of their seats. Even though Claire Bishop tends to criticize participation art for not being democratic enough, she traces the lineage of participatory art in her well-known book Artificial Hells, by heavily focusing on the social engagements displayed by an artist working not as an originator of a work of art but as a manager of a project. As Bishop writes:

> The hallmark of an artistic orientation towards the social in the 1990s has been a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience. To put is simply: the artists is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations: the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term project with a unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.  

It is the ongoing project, not a specific art object, that encourages participation because users can engage with others in the formation of new art, granting artistic production more validity than a unique singular object that once defined the creative process. Now, production amongst social publics represents potential apparatuses for new work and new engagements. The main

3 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 2.
instigator for this type of socially conscious work is the belief that the audience feels that they are allowed to participate, that they have a say or an action that the development of the work being proposed by the artist/leader/manager. Bishop notes, “Today’s participatory art is often at pains to emphasis process over a definitive images, concept or object. It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness. As a result, it is an art dependent on firsthand experience and preferable over a long duration.”

What makes participatory art works unique is the attempt to turn traditional associations with authorship, ownership, originality, and artistic production upside down. This type of social production restrains the traditional practices of collection, exhibition, and representation. Since the work exists as public engagement, the public shares in its ownership and handling. This means that the traditional critiques of object-based artwork need to be reformed to properly examine participatory artwork. Bishop argues for further investigation of new participatory works of art: “Participatory art demands that we find new ways of analyzing art that are no longer linked solely to visuality, even though form remains a crucial vessel for communicating meaning.” Bishop argues even further that these new socially engaged artists are the current reincarnation of the old avant-garde because they are challenging the system of production in an attempt to bring art back out of commodity and the market and return it to the citizens. Bishop writes:

Instead of supplying the market with commodities participatory art is perceived to channel art’s symbolic capital towards constructive social change. Given these avowed politics, and the commitment that mobilises this work, it is tempting to suggest that this art arguable forms what avant-garde we have today; artists devising social situations as a

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4 Ibid., 6.

5 Ibid., 7.
dematerialised, anti-market, politically engaged project to carry on the avant-garde call to make art a more vital part of life.

Artist Tino Sehgal seems to want to dispense with the art object entirely in order to construct places for participation and social actions. In his 2010 site-specific sculptural performance at New York’s Guggenheim Museum, titled The Progress, Sehgal refused to give his audience an art object to look at. Instead, Sehgal focused on the visitor experience through participation with others in the gallery. Sehgal treated the space as a blank page and encouraged a group of hired guides to engage the audience by asking a series of questions as they walked through the museum. Art critic Jerry Saltz notes, “An adorable kid greets you at the bottom of the ramp, says, ‘This is a work by Tino Sehgal,’ asks, ‘What is progress?,’ and bids you to follow. Soon, you’re passed off to a teenager who walks and talks with you, who hands you off to an adult, who does the same thing until you’re handed over to an older person who takes you to the top ramp, says, ‘Good-bye,’ and disappears into a stairwell.” In Sehgal’s exhibition the work being displayed are the relationships made by the visitors who interact and engage with the guides. Simply, the work revolves around conversation. Similar to Sehgal’s Guggenheim exhibition new methods and considerations of the relationships between viewer and interaction need to be made in order to fully investigate and examine the various social formations, structures, systems, and applications deployed by a socially engaged and active group. This means that the activity made available through the group’s interaction calls for equal consideration to its form and/or context.

What is left out of Bishop’s investigation of participatory art, and what my research seeks to examine, are the technological applications that are created through the social formation of

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communities and how those technological devices enhance the art work. It is through an evaluation of the applications developed by participants utilizing new technology in order to form communities that in turn will be able to offer a critique and explanation of the current social character. Using new technologies, and because these technologies are linked to each other through networks and the Internet, artists may encourage more participation. Artists do not need to physically meet their participants as they may have done so in the past in the street, in cafeterias, and in theaters. The contemporary artist can seek participation and engagement though new technologies. As Bishop writes, “Today, participation also included social networking sites and any number of communication technologies relying on user-generated content. Any discussion of participation in contemporary art needs to take on board these broader cultural connotations and their implementation by cultural policy, in order to ascertain its meaning.”

For the project *Google Maps Road Trip* the artists relied on the online video service *Ustream* to collect and present the video stream, and a chat room to allow participants to communicate with the project in real time. Even though passengers on the trip could pull from outside Internet resources, participants had to be members of the online service to interact with the artists. This meant that participants could add content to this project as it happened as long as they were members and logged into the *Ustream* application online. Membership was free and once the *Google Maps Road Trip* project had ended, *Ustream* members retained their membership and could continue to interact with the service in other ways and with other projects.

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Defining Community Projects

Online art generally refers to works of art that exist in some way as online data; what makes the Community Online Art Project different is first its relationship between artists and Internet users as participants, and second, presenting artwork as interaction or engagement. The artwork under evaluation in the next chapters appears online as an interaction, engagement, and art object as much as it is a managed project, performance, and digital multi-media installation. What is important in these works of art is that they exist online but also as a product of the engagement of a community, one that fosters an ongoing production that I will refer to as project. The concepts of community and projects are both described at length by Claire Bishop in *Artificial Hells*. Bishop traces the development of the artist project from Great Britain with the Community Arts Movement in the 1970s to the United States in 1989 with an exhibition of socially engaged art in Chicago. While not elaborating on collaborative community-engaged and artist-led works of art that appear online, the works described by Bishop are geared more to socially engaged and site specific installations in and around urban settings or centers of communities. Yet, as we see with Bishop’s idea of community, the relationships between the previous physical realities of the engagement of a group in the production of an art work has not changed that much when the work is moved into the virtual world for exhibition and presentation.

Bishop argues that a significant moment in the establishment of community art production occurred in the United Kingdom during the 1970s. Known as the *Community Arts Movement*, it sought to incorporate a physical community of interested citizens into the production of unique works of art and performances. What was central to the movement, instituted by The Arts Council of Great Britain, was that artists engaged citizens who would not
normally have the social or political power to experience art and the production of art: “[I]t [the Community Arts Movement] aimed to give shape to the creativity of all sectors of society, but especially to people living in areas of social, cultural and financial deprivation; for some, it was also a powerful medium for social and political change, providing the blueprint for a participatory democracy.”

Community art projects predated The Arts Council’s appropriation and can be found, according to Bishop, early as the 1960s. During this time artists initiated a collaborative model for the production of new art that included joint co-creative production with citizens and participants. Due to the interest in community creative collaboration The Arts Council, in 1974, attempted to define community art engagement as well as community artists. These definitions continue to carry meaning in the arts which I will renegotiate in my investigation with community online art production:

‘Community artists’ are distinguishable not by the techniques they use…but by their attitude towards the place of their activities in the life of society. Their primary concern is their impact on a community and their relationship with it: by assisting those with whom they make contact to become more aware of their situation and of their own creative power, and by providing them with the facilities they need to make use of their abilities, they hope to widen and deepen the sensibilities of the community in which they work and so to enrich its existence…They seek to bring about this increased awareness and creativity by involving the community in the activities they promote…they therefore differ from practisers of the more established arts in that they are chiefly concerned with a process rather than a finished product.

According to Bishop, The Arts Council’s attempt to define community art backfired because it still relied on drawing a line between the engaged community and the object being

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8 Ibid., 177.
9 Ibid., 178.
10 Ibid., 178.
produced. Instead of creating out of the community, and producing an artifact that was the property of the community, many community artworks still sought to train the citizens of a group to look at a work of art as a high art, even if that group produced this work. Also, these projects were produced out of the money from the state and nation and also passed onto artists from a highly educated and cultured board of directors and commissioners who were trying to convert its citizens into becoming more cultured. Bishop writes:

Community arts was no longer about democratizing cultural production, but a means to introduce people to elite art, by letting them find out through first-hand participation in a creative project- what they had been missing by not attending operas and museums. In short, community arts was rebranded as a educational programme, a civilizing path leading people toward high culture. For the community arts movement, this has always been a possible side-effect of their activities, by never its main goal, which was more accurately premised on undoing such cultural hierarchies. ¹¹

Central to the engagements made through community co-production is ease of access and the longevity of engagement, so that artists sought an established group and worked with them over a period of time to complete the engagement or task. These collaborations often took time, and, since, community engagement needed to be fostered, the work fundamentally changed into the managed “project” with the artist as owner and provocateur and participant as worker. For The Community Arts Movement, the project could be an interaction that caused an artist to engage with a community in an effort to create a work of art through collaboration. In this case the work of art is not entirely embodied in the production of an object or a completed task but in the establishment and display of a working relationship between artist and participant. Bishop proposes this new configuration as the defining character of the community art project. She writes, “A project in the sense I am identifying as crucial to art after 1989 aspires to replace the

¹¹ Ibid., 188.
work of art as a finite object with an open-ended, post-studio, research-based, social process, extending over time and mutable in form.”

It is this definition of a project, as described by Bishop, which I will rely on in order to define the interaction between artist and online participant. Because many of the artworks examined in the chapters ahead take time to unfold, as it did for *Google Maps Road Trip*, the idea of an ongoing project becomes an essential identifier for the community engaged work. While COAPs exist as possible virtual performances, community collaborations, and digital documents it is the technology that both encourages and heightens participation. On the other hand, the possible collaboration between users motivates the application and development of technology.

The participatory, socially-engaged art projects discussed by Claire Bishop encourage collaboration and co-production, so to say that the *Google Maps Road Trip* is entirely distinct from participatory works of art that appeared in city streets or in physical public environments and installation is not exactly honest. Yet, as mentioned, the ability for users to combine efforts and engaged with other through their devises and due to the Internet is a uniquely new reality for creative participation. Not only can users engage with each other through chat rooms, emails, gaming networks, or blogs they also have the ability of concealing their identity from others who might participate. This, then, makes community hard to define because the users have agreed to remain faceless online. For example, the shadowy online group known as *Anonymous* exists as a defined community but its users are completely unidentified. Through combining efforts of participation, and by relying on computer programmability and connectivity, this organization has hacked into corporate, government, and personal files. They have stopped banking industries

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12 Ibid., 188.
for small periods of time, shut down government websites, and even threatened to take down the Internet entirely. They are successful because they act as a collaborative group with computers linked together as an army marching against its opponents. What is also unique about the structure that binds Anonymous together is that its users unite in order to cause disruption and at the same time reveal the hidden facts of authority and governance that are not presented to the general public. Interestingly enough, while trying to retain their own hidden identities the people behind Anonymous seek to reveal what others are hiding.

How the group works centers around the potential effects achieved by users coming together online in order to participate in one action. Members are given an order from an unidentified leader that compels a distinct action around a desired online victim. Users engage with this victim by coming together as a group and the more users or computers participate in the actions, the more powerful the victimization. This is how websites and online services are overrun, or shut down. The sheer numbers of “attacks” hitting their victim causes the site to become overwhelmed, as if they were drowning in too much attention at one time and is forced to lock up. For Anonymous, collaborative participation could cause a website to shut down or the provocation of digital data. Whatever the outcome the community has acted together to disrupt an accepted social norm.

**Futurism, and DaDa**

Collaborative participation has changed dramatically throughout much of the twentieth century. In fact, several art movements from the start of the twentieth century rethought interactions between artist, viewer, and object. These advances, and new theories on the collaborative participation to create works of art, came from Futurism and DaDa art movements of the early twentieth century. Though both movements centered on experimental philosophies
and new manifestos about the conditions of art and art making, what became important was the position of the audience in viewing and creating the artwork along with a direct break from or censure of the past. Artists started to invite participants into the construction of new art, and thus, sharing meaning and context with those who contributed. Beginning in 1909 the Italian Futurists started to question the judgments of earlier classical structures and to push a “new” type of art. The Futurists searched for a new art, a statement that could reveal the true changes happening in the world at the start of the twentieth century. This bold call for a new art, with its radical new theoretical underpinnings, produced what could be considered the first twentieth century group of avant-garde artists. Much of this futurist rebellion came in the form of highly charged dogma statements called manifestos. The first Futurist manifesto proposing a new type of artwork and art theory appeared in 1909 in the Italian newspaper Le Figaro and was written by F.T. Marinetti. Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism urged artists to stand up for an art that reflected the current political and social environments. The new charge called for a total reworking of future conceptions of art as Herbert Gershman explains:

Futurism was opposed to smug, self-satisfied respectability, to the existing literary traditions which were stifling all attempts at anything new. Marinetti and his group repudiated these traditions, attacked the contemporary complacency in art, letters and politics. This call to action was in the name of greater liberty and the rich, full life. Italy was to discard her past, a worthless burden, and to look to the future, to the machine for her salvation. The machine, speed, action, love of danger and war, nationalism these were to be the guiding principles of the movement, as Marinetti saw it.

American Futurism started to take shape within a couple of years after Marinetti wrote his first article and by 1911 American newspapers started documenting the movement. Futurist artist Andre Tridon wrote an article for the New York Herald in 1911 which reiterated

Marinetti’s argument and proclaimed that artists needed to look to the future, “Futurism is defined as ‘Looking to the future, and forgetting the Worship of the Past—knocking the Past, in fact.’” Similar to the act of delivering their manifestos as public statements the Futurist was asked to be as passionate in renouncing the past. As Hand notes, “The author [Tridon] suggests that a Futurist is anyone who discarded the past in his search of a new means of expression, and Marinetti in coining the term Futurism is the person who observed in the disparate group of rebels that ‘all were characterized by the happy faculty of a contempt for tradition.’

Furthermore, Tridon wanted to distinguish Futurism from the other movements happening in American art circles. Tridon saw Cubism and Post-Impressionism as still relying on traditional aesthetics focused in composition and form. For Tridon, the futurists were completely new. He states as much at the end of his article “It [futurist painting] has nothing in common with Post-Impressionism or cubism. These two schools are merely trying to interpret static motionless life. Futurism only wishes to see and to reproduce living life, everlastingly changing, and to watch today the growth of the germ from which tomorrow will spring up.” Even though Futurism may be said to have initiated a complex discourse between art practice, participation, and object, I will argue later in this chapter that Tridon’s statement is not fully realized until the Relational Aesthetics movement of the 1990s.

Through its manifestos on theater, Futurism redefined participation and art production. The first futurist manifesto, titled “The Variety Theater,” appeared in 1913 and sought to destroy the space between actor and audience. Steve Dixon explains how collaboration played an important role for the Futurists, especially so in Enrico Prampolini’s 1915 manifesto Futurists

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15 Hand, “Futurism in America,” 237.

16 Idem.
Scenography: “Prampolini’s 1915 manifesto also addresses the Futurist theater’s concern with what has since become a central tenet of digital culture, interactivity. He suggests that ‘the audience will perhaps become the actor as well,’”17 Dixon suggests that Prampolini’s philosophy extends from a 1913 manifesto written by Marinetti on the collaboration of theater audience with actors. Marinetti saw Futurist Theater as a unique new group that seeks collaboration between the artists and the audience and “doesn’t remain static like a stupid voyeur, but joins noisily in the action.”18 These audience engagements, called “Serate” and “Sintesi,” happened through the production of political “action theaters” and sometimes ended with an audience yelling at the actors or vice versa.19 Gunter Berghaus described these performances as volatile engagements, causing the audience to be moved out of their seats by the performers. “The transformation of art into politics also affected the performances given in the more traditional theatrical format. In fact, the whole genre of sintesi, which they [Futurists] developed from 1915 onwards, became geared towards propagating the Italian war effort.”20

At the same time as the Futurists challenged the space between and actor and his viewer, they also questioned ownership and production. In many instances the Futurist’s theater directors added un-trained theatrical players, like circus performers, to their productions. These circus performers would participate as much, or maybe even more, than their educated theater peers. At the same time the Futurists production took former works and turned them on their


18 Idem.

19 Idem.

heads, often times disregarding prescribed meanings in order to prompt new contexts. As Marinetti wrote in his manifesto:

The Variety Theatre offers the healthiest of all spectacles in its dynamism of form and color (simultaneous movement of jugglers, ballerinas, gymnasts, colorful riding masters, spiral cyclones of dancers spinning off the points of their feet)...the Variety Theatre destroys the Solemn, the Sacred, the Serious, and the Sublime in Art with a capital A. It cooperates in the Futurist destruction of immortal master-works, plagiarizing them, parodying them, making them look commonplace by stripping them of their solemn apparatus as if they were mere attractions.²¹

Not only did Futurist theater turn approved structures on their heads, it also challenged the role of the audience to the viewer by addressing the physical locales of the audience to the theater. Where the play often takes place on a stage, roped off or separated by some sort of barrier to the audience, the futurist theater used both stage space and audience space to conduct production. Often times the theater production joined the audience as the play took place. Actors would step off the theater’s stage and move about in the audience. This move between action and audience is often times referred to as “breaking the fourth wall.” František Deák describes such an event when Futurist painter, writer, and stage director Yuir Annenkov used Marinetti’s principles in an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's The First Distiller. As Deák explains about the production, not only did Annenkov challenge the reach of the action, or the traditional roles filled by actors, he also introduced new types of “noise music:”

In his production, Annenkov eliminated the curtain and footlights and connected the stage with the auditorium so that the action could occur simultaneously on both levels...The staging of The First Distiller made unusual demands on performers. Annenkov had to use circus artists (acrobats, trapeze artists, and clowns) as well as actors. … The music for the performance consisted of a combination of accordion playing and Futurist noise music.²²

²¹ František Deák, "Two Manifestos: The Influence of Italian Futurism in Russia," The Drama Review 19.4 (December 1975): 89.
²² František Deák, "Two Manifestos: The Influence of Italian Futurism in Russia," The Drama Review 19.4 (December 1975): 89.
This principal of encouraging active audience participation in order to create art extended into the DaDa movement where the demand for viewer’s participation developed completely, becoming a recognizable characteristic of the group. While there are various groups of DaDaists appearing in cities around the world, each with varying focuses and manifestos, the Berlin DaDaists took what they had seen in the action theater of the Futurists in order to get closer to audience participation for the creation of new artwork. Tristan Tzara wrote a second DaDa manifesto in 1918 in which he declared that life was much more interesting than art:

We have had enough of the intelligent movements that have stretched beyond measure our credulity in the benefits of science. What we want now is spontaneity. Not because it is better or more beautiful than anything else. But because everything that issues freely from ourselves, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us. We must intensify this quantity of life that readily spends itself in every quarter. Art is not the most precious manifestation of life. Art has not the celestial and universal value that people like to attribute to it. Life is far more interesting. Dada knows the correct measure that should be given to art: with subtle, perfidious methods, Dada introduces it into daily life. And vice versa. In art, Dada reduces everything to an initial simplicity, growing always more relative.23

While there are earlier experiments in the DaDa movement in Bucharest, where Tristan Tzara started, Munich, New York, Paris and other cities, the official Berlin DaDa movement stated on February 18, 1918 with “The First DaDa Speech in Berlin.”24 The speech by Richard Huelsenbeck recalled the experimental events of Futurists Theater and the Futurists meeting in Zürich, Switzerland at Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, Switzerland. By reinstating what was once essential to the Futurists Huelsenbeck once again pushed for more new ideas and artworks but did so by praising DaDa. In a rousing speech, Huelsenbeck set off intense reaction from his

spectators when he criticized the Futurists and Cubists in order to acclaim DADA as the only art movement to move art forward. Mel Gordon writes:

Only when he [Huelsenbeck] began to recite examples of his imitative African, lautgedichte (sound-poems), the Phantastische Gebete (Fantastic Prayers), did the audience and gallery owner stir. In fact, Neumann, the proprietor, was already at the telephone, threatening to call the police…Huelsenbeck shouted out that the DaDas were in favor of war and that even the last one was not bloody enough…Huelsenbeck continued his speech, which grew more and more vociferous-at-tacking the Cubists and Futurists, describing the man of the future, the new, brave, chance-accepting DaDa-man.25

Seeing an immediate reaction from his speech, Huelsenbeck began a series of action events where he would taunt his audience into reaction through political statement, or incendiary statements about other artists and art groups. Huelsenbeck would often times pronounce the originality of DaDa—many times suggesting that this movement was in contrast to, and thus better, than other art philosophies like Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism. Gordon documents one of Huelsenbeck’s proclamations, “The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life.”26 Many DaDa artists proclaimed their art as better than other forms of art; some DaDas even saw themselves as a sort of infantry in a battle—a true avant-garde group. Like Futurism, DaDa relied on manifestos and proclamations and turned to collaboration and encouragement of audience participation. The artists pushed their audiences out into street in protests in order to proclaim their artistic and cultural beliefs. Herbert Gershman writes, “Futurism was noisy, clownish, and full of self-advertising manifestoes. And this is exactly what DaDa was…demonstration followed demonstration, manifesto followed manifesto for a period of two years.”27


26 Idem.

27 Gershman, “Futurism and the Origins of Surrealism,” 120.
Participation in the action and the event meant that members of the movement could display his or her beliefs and that through action could develop a more significant presence. For the audience to participate in an artist-led mob meant that the artwork was successful because it had caused direct physical engagement with its viewers.

**Moving Through a Web**

In 1942 Marcel Duchamp installed several hundred feet of twine throughout the Whitelaw Reid Mansion exhibition space. In this exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism*, Duchamp created a maze out of twine that extended throughout the entire gallery, keeping visitors from viewing and appreciating the paintings displayed on the gallery walls. In order to view the displayed artworks, the gallery audiences had to maneuver through the space by physically working around the twine. On top of this twine barrier Duchamp also persuaded children to play catch in front of visitors as they passed through the gallery installation. Because of the distraction and physical obstructions the audience had to duck and move their bodies through the twine in order to get to their next destination and to see the work hanging on the wall. This meant that the participants started to create their own atmosphere within the space, not following the movements of others but having to find their “own way” to get through. John Vick, the curatorial fellow in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, describes the exhibition as follows: “Duchamp’s twine created an intriguing environment through an economy of means…This approach to the exhibition sets into motion a series of conflicts—installation versus paintings, paintings versus viewers, viewers versus installation.” Asking his audience to navigate between the taut twine and the children throwing and chasing balls around the exhibition Duchamp wants the viewer to decide what they need to do in order to go on, to continue playing his/her own game. The game Duchamp used
for this exhibition was one of movement, dance, and physical skill. The goal was to both complete the course and to see as much work as possible. Most important was to beat the artist, to finish the game by getting to the end of the exhibition. The audience must be smarter than the artist and the distractions in order to participate within the space.

This dramatic repositioning between artist, audience, and object is, in my opinion, best exemplified with Duchamp’s final works. Installed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Duchamp’s *Étant donnés* is the zenith of Duchamp’s game with art. The work consists of two large doors in the wall of the museum, which seems to be constructed of wood and are fashioned in much the same way as medieval castle doors. On the surface of the doors frontage Duchamp left a small hole in the wooden planks, exposing a ray of light coming from the other side of the door. Once the audience noticed the light Duchamp managed to catch the attention of passers-by, beckoning them to examine the slit in the door. By coming closer to look through the door the museumgoer has now made an active choice to participate with his work, extending past the standard movement where viewers leaves space between the work and their own body. His audience must now make some decisions to acquire a full examination of the artists, and they must move their body to do so. The viewer must slightly bend down in order to peer through the hole to investigate what lies beyond the physical barrier. Similar to the way the audience had to bend and move through the twine, they must once again change their body to find out what’s on the other side and to look through the hole and to see the artwork hanging beyond the obstacle. The image does not totally come into view all at one time. In fact, because the hole is so small it takes some time to move the eye around in order to see what lies inside. Toward the back of the pictorial space Duchamp placed a traditional romantic landscape with what seems to be a set of rocks with waterfall. The style of the painting seems to mimic Leonardo da Vinci’s mysterious
background in the Mona Lisa. At the front of the pictorial space lies a distorted female figure with legs spread. A straight line glance through the hole in the door forces Duchamp’s viewer into looking directly at the female’s vagina. The viewer is then stuck with what they are looking at. Are they voyeurs to a woman in a private moment? Do they stop looking? Stop means they have to leave the physical space and reflect on their interaction. The participant is struck with the fact that they have put themselves in this position, they are peeping through the hole and what they see is both beautiful and grotesque. Duchamp leads the spectator of Étant donnés through a series of emotions, one as a guilty peeping Tom, one as an admirer and student of beauty, and one as an active participant. What is so important and evident in an examination of Étant donnés is Duchamp’s understanding of the participant’s potential movement through an exhibition space. He knew that in building this scene he had documented exactly how we were going to act with a work of art, as spectator, historian, and participant. Here, the audience learns about itself and becomes aware of their own movements within the act of participating.

These same considerations about how to interrupt the art object’s standard appearance in exhibition spaces emerge similarly in COAPs. As community online artists build new projects they question how viewers approach an art object in much the same way as Duchamp. Where Duchamp manipulated the exhibition space of the gallery new artists are manipulating the technological platforms like smart phones, blogs, and many other application devices to reposition how viewers approach new art.

Duchamp may have seen his work as a comment on audience participation. But the challenge of how objects are installed reveals a growing concern in the art world: what are object, practice, and participation? Digital artists employ an ever-expanding awareness between what they are seeing and what they are showing in order to create new work or new approaches
to exhibition. New artists working online have the unique opportunity to not only challenge the viewer but also to manipulate the technological complexities. These enhance how the new art viewer interprets a work of art with the potential to live in multiple areas and in varying forms. Viewers, who have at their fingertip a range of technological approaches, may now engage with a work of art through more than one method or one viewing device.

**Fluxus, Neo DADA, and Relational Aesthetics**

Continuing the structure of Futurist’s Theater and DaDa performances, where artists lead the audience into participating with the work as collaborators, Neo DaDa and Fluxus artists sought to rouse their audience out of their seats and into action during the collaborative participatory performances, or happenings, of the 1960s. In these performances, Fluxus artists constructed and managed situations where participants engaged in the creation of a work of art through theatrical performances. “Happenings” also stemmed, in part, from the political action of the protest movement where protesters came together as advocates of social rebellion crowds to protest the Vietnam War and civil rights/liberties. Dixon writes:

> The late 1960s marked a period of intense political and cultural changes that converged from many sides. The women’s liberation and gay rights movements blossomed, and the politics of the anti-establishment left reached a peak in Europe with the student revolts of May 1968 and in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements in the United States….The performance of the sixties reflected, embodied, and arguably provided some direct impetus for these movements…Performance art blossomed as a significant and influential form…The Fluxus group of artists, performers, and musicians began creating quasi-algorithmic work reliant on the execution of tasks based on predetermined models and instructions, and made audience participation a key theme.²⁸

A highly recognizable Fluxus performance was Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece*. In this art performance Ono sat on a theater stage and invited the audience to cut off pieces of her dress.

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The first presentation of this performance took place in Japan in 1964. Ono later presented the work in several other locales, including Carnegie Recital Hall in New York in 1965, and London’s *Destruction in Art Symposium* in 1966. In each performance Ono sat motionless in the middle of a theater stage and in front of a viewing audience with a pair of scissors by her side. During the performance viewers ascended onto the stage, grabbed the scissors, and cut away Ono’s clothing. One by one, the participants leapt up onto the platform and cut small scraps from Ono’s attire. These performances only lasted a couple minutes and were first halted by Ono once her bra was cut, potentially revealing her breasts. In Ono’s performance the artist’s body becomes the object under view but it was also the group’s interaction that became the focus. This meant that the audience was responsible for encouraging and initiating the action. Here, the audience had control over the artist as the artist sat motionless. Kathy O’Dell explains the work as follows: “She [Ono] takes on the look of a creature in the process of being skinned…By ironically replicating stereotypically male practices of voyeurism, as well as stereotypically female states of passivity, she competed with traditions of voyeurism and demonstrated another form of mastery over visual space.”

When Ono stopped the cutting of her clothes, she made a statement to the viewers that she wanted control of her body back, that the “audience” had taken from her too much. Once she stopped the event Ono retreated into the director role and resumed ownership of the artwork and her own figure. Furthermore, she chose to position herself on a stage. Participants had to remove themselves from the audience to physically climb up on stage to become the viewable object. However, Ono left the stage as the artist in charge of the event and the audience left their seats in the same way they entered into the theater. While Ono’s placement of her body on a

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stage, and her marketing of the event as an art performance recall the traditional role of artist as creator, or artist as engineer, the work produced by Ono and the Audience was collaborative. By not giving instructions to the audience Ono allowed the participants to choose what they were going to do with her body. This gave the audience creative power over the artists if only for a few minutes.

Conceptual artist Chris Burden examined the limits of audience participation with his seminal work “Shoot” in 1971. As a comment on the war in Vietnam, and the passive nature of the TV viewing public, Burden arranged to be shot with a .22 gauge rifle. While he, the artist, reversed the roles in this performance and received the act instead of pulling the trigger himself, the “shooter” led the performance as the chief participant. Others who were watching from the gallery space as the performance took place also played a role in the work by becoming active witnesses of the event. Much like how the American TV audience watched as solders fought in Vietnam, the gallery audience had as much weight on them. They participated by waiting and watching the event unfold, they did not step in to stop it. They, then, left the gallery as witnesses to a “crime.” As Peter Schjeldahl writes, “Shoot was one of a number of perfectly repellent performance pieces of the early nineteen-seventies in which Burden subjected himself to danger, thereby creating a double bind, for viewers, between the citizenly injunction to intervene in crises and the institutional taboo against touching art works.”

Michael Fried, Guy Debord, and Nicolas Bourriaud have looked at the direct interaction a viewer had with the work, not as a passive viewer but as an active participant. For these critics the transference between the art object and the art viewer called into question the creation of the work of art. While Debord and Bourriaud take this participation as a positive exchange, Fried railed against the notion that art could or should be engaged with the public. His strongest
criticism was directed at Minimalism. In “Art and Objecthood” Fried discounts any physical interaction between object and viewer by saying that the minimal works of the 1960s were only a theatrical structure for viewers to relate. While Minimalism could be understood as a final point of ending for Clement Greenberg’s Formalism, where the object becomes so determined by its material and form. Fried saw Minimalism as a theatrical engagement between the body and the work of art and a spectacle that transformed the object on the wall or floor into which the artist would direct viewers to place themselves in relation to the work. This caused a shift in the importance and autonomy of the work of art, that now included the viewer as a participant. By trying to reject the transference between audience and object Fried argued that there is, in fact, a point of difference between the object and the viewer. Additionally, Fried has made clear that the audience can associate their engagement, and their bodies, as a valid apparatus to define the object in front of them. By calling the work theatrical Fried stresses that the entire work is, in part, a source of shared experiences. He sets up the notion that the experience between object and body is what Debord would soon after call, “the spectacle.”

Debord argues for an art that reflects the social activity of creative and artistic production, not the commoditized object that remains an image of the work committed during the process of making. Instead, for Debord, the real art was the action. Claire Bishop writes,

Debord’s critique strikes to the heart of why participation is important as a project; it rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production. Given the market’s near total saturation of our image repertoire, so the argument goes, artistic practice can no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander. Instead, there must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps—however small—to repair the social bond.  

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By engaging in the viewing—Fried criticizes Debord for being too theatrical and too participatory with the Modernist “total” work—Debord’s viewer becomes actor because the engagement between the work and the audience produces a unique interaction that depicts the social conditions which brought them together. This causes the “spectacle” of production and, as Jacques Ranciere calls it, the “inversion of life.” Debord’s philosophy extended from the Situationist International (SI), of which he was a leading member. Emerging in the 1950s and 1960s SI stressed that action, above all production, was the goal of art and that the “situation,” as Debord terms, was “a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events.” Bishop writes, for this group (whose average age in 1952 was 23), the purpose of art was “not to produce objects but to critique the commodification of existence.” According to Bishop SI sought to denounce the art object and replace it with the interactions with the real: “art is to be renounced, but for the sake of making everyday life as rich and thrilling as art.” For Debord, the way to critique art was to live it, to be inside the system, and to turn the capitalists system of production in on itself. Debord calls this type of criticism *d’etournement*, which is a way for the viewer to fight back or “turn around” in order to act from within a system.

In order to address works of art that employed social participation between artist and participants, by sharing experiences in order to make a work of art, French critic and museum

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33 Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 81.

34 Ibid., 83.

curator Nicolas Bourriaud found a shared connection between the art object, the artists, the viewer, and the social situation with a group of artists in the 1990s. This type of art asked for direct participation between all people involved and was generally performed or completed in its natural social setting and shared communal space. Bourriaud termed the participatory social interaction in art as *Relational Aesthetics*. This new movement of socially conscious artwork, including creations by Félix Gonzalez-Torres, Rikrit Tiravanija, Pierre Huyghe, and Liam Gillick, addresses a radical transformation of the relationships between artist and artwork by either locating their work in the social communal spaces outside the gallery or by asking the audience inside the gallery to participate with the creation of the artwork. For Bourriaud, *Relational Art* is artwork that relies on the social context that highlights the intersection of social situations in which art can be made. In his book Bourriaud describes Relational Art as “an art taking at its theoretical horizon the realm of human interaction and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.”

In many relational art performances, the artist instigates participants to perform a mundane act in order to comment on the social situation in which all art is created. The simplicity of cooking food for others, like the 1992 exhibition where Rikrit Tiravanij prepares Thai food for the exhibition’s visitors, initiates an evaluation of the social engagement between participants and removes the stress that was once applied to a produced art object that represented a completed one of a kind. Exhibitions by Gonzalez-Torres suggest the same concern for participation because the artists ask viewers to participate by easily dismantling the work and walking out of the gallery with its parts. In “Untitled” (Placebo) and “Untitled” (Portrait of Ross in L.A.), the artist piles thousands of pieces of candy or large stacks of papers

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with clouds printed on them on the floor waiting to be consumed by the audience. In both of the candy or cloud piles, the viewing public fulfills the art object’s life cycle by taking and dispersing the multiple copies out into the world where they are usually seen shared in the public space, either as trash or treasure. This act binds Gonzalez-Torres’ work to daily life because the audience shares in the responsibility of taking what was given to them into their own shared spaces and for others to see.

While Relational Aesthetics artworks seem too ordinary to be an artistic experience, Bourriaud’s arguments make room for an art that references the social environment and the process from which all art becomes a commodity. Furthermore, it reveals the fact that art can be represented within the social engagement that exists between participants that come together in order to construct a social interaction. Even though the work of David Hammons is not labeled as Relational Art, his early performances may, in fact, be an example of Relational Aesthetics.

In 1983 Hammons stationed himself on the Manhattan sidewalk in the middle of a blizzard and sold various sized snowballs to people walking by. While not intentionally considered a work of Relational Aesthetics, Hammons’s *Bliz-aard Ball Sale*, exposes the communal and shared structure of commodity where the object becomes a product of participation between receivers, those who bought a frozen ball of snow from the artist. According to Steven Stern who wrote a review on Hammons work, *Bliz-aard Ball Sale* was an assault on the business of art. As Stern argues, “Mr. Hammons’ notion of an artist includes a constant flirtation with notions of the illicit and the fraudulent – the ever-present suggestion that
the whole business might be a scam. What, after all, could be more of a scam than selling snowballs in winter?"  

Bourriaud expanded his theory on artist/group participation with the 2007 article “Postproduction.” Here, Bourriaud suggests that not only are the artists of the 1990s appropriating Guy Debord, but also they “contribute to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creating and copy, readymade and original work.” In this article Bourriaud posits that new art is a creation of production and the adoption of material already in use, especially that information which can be found online and is easy to download and appropriate. While relational aesthetics dealt with the physical social situation, “Postproduction” is the appropriation of material from the public sphere that is absent from commodity, which is why the Internet plays an important part of this creative attitude:

Postproduction apprehends the forms of knowledge generated by the appearance of the Net (how to find one’s bearings in the cultural chaos and how to extract new modes of production from it). Indeed, it is striking that the tools most often used by artists today in order to produce these relational models are preexisting works for formal structures, as if the world of cultural products and artworks constituted an autonomous strata that could provide tools of connection between individuals; as if the establishment of new forms of sociality and a true critique of contemporary forms of life involved a different attitude in relation to artistic patrimony, through the production of new relationships to culture in general and to the artwork in particular.  

On the other hand, Claire Bishop does not see Relational Aesthetics going as far as it should in order to cause social transformation and change. For Bishop, Relational Aesthetics only attempts to define the social situations of participation that established community, stopping


39 Bourriaud, Postproduction, 14.
short of creating a radical critique of the social order. Bishop writes, “Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience...Rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer, relational art sets up situations in which viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community.”

The criticism of Relational Art is that it does not attempt to transform the social situation as Debord would wish, but only re-presents the real life goings-on of social interaction. Bishop writes,

When Bourriaud argues that ‘encounters are more important than the individual who compose them,’ I sense that this question is (for him) unnecessary; all relations that permit ‘dialogue’ are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does ‘democracy’ really mean in this context? If relation art produced human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom and why?

Where Bishop criticized Relational Aesthetics’ level of participation in order to become a “politicized mode of artistic practice,” Liam Gillick, an artist examined in Bourriaud’s book, viciously chastised Bishop for misinterpreting Relational Art. What Gillick calls to attention is Bishop’s misunderstanding of Relational Art as social engagement and her unhistorical and hastily written argument for October magazine. In much of Gillick’s response he criticizes Bishop for not being scholarly in her critic and even goes as far to chastise October Magazine for publishing the work; “a text has been produced that undermines the usually high standards of October in relation to its checking of sources, reference points, and the application of critical methods to contemporary cultural discourse. These standards have been replaced by sallow

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41 Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," 65.

techniques more familiar in a right-wing tabloid newspaper.”\(^{43}\) Going even further Gillick suggests that he was compelled to write a retort because Bishop’s criticism has gone too far: “A text so full of contentious statements and willful omissions requires a detailed response, exposing its false dichotomies, which have depressing consequences for anyone who might believe in the potential of a radical reconsideration of the conditions of production of art.”\(^{44}\) One of Gillick’s criticisms of Bishop is her accepting of Relational Aesthetics artists, Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, while she downplayed the social interactions created by Gillick as well as Rirkrit Tiravanija. Bishop stresses the work of Hirshhorn and Sierra because their work revolved around projects that would seek participation out of groups that would not normally have a chance to participate. Gillick suggests that this reading of Relational art is misleading at best:

For Bishop proudly reports Hirschhorn and Sierra’s feeling of hopelessness in the face of the dominant culture and turns their words into a populist assertion that ‘art can’t change anything.’ In this case they are being used—as they have often used working-class people; they are employed to bulldoze the houses of their relatives, because Bishop can’t make sense of the prime suspect’s (Bourriaud’s) testimony….Bishop’s evident pleasure in seeing poor people set to work by lazy artists was reinforced in a recent issue of Artforum, where it was revealed that she is also a fan of a work by Francis Alÿs involving the use of a large number of people to move a mountain.\(^{45}\)

While Bishop and Gillick are both right to bring up concerns about RA, especially when Bishop exclaims that Relational Aesthetic art often times was not democratic, what is uncovered through these critiques is a larger consideration of the significance of participation and access. How we define participation and access are important next steps for COAPs because at the center of each work are spectators that rely on a level of invitation between artists and art experience, and completed by the technology’s ability to connect the two.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 95.
\(^{44}\) Ibid., 98.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 99-100.
For the Bronx River Art Center exhibition *Virtual/Monumental* Stephanie Rothenberg, or REV, presented a virtual account around the physical changes planned for a community by attaching digital plans and announcements made viewable on mobile phones and tablets in a work tilted *Coming Soon*. The online and offline exhibition of new artwork took place between April and September 2012 and was an effort by the Bronx River Art Center to engage more participants within their own community. Not only did the Center want to exhibit new work it also wanted to engage with its community more, to have the community to become an active and activated participant in the institution’s exhibition. As explained on their website. “Through the use of art and technology, we hope to allow citizens to play an active role in foreseeing their community’s future.” In the case of *Virtual/Monumental*, at the Bronx River Art Center hoped to build better representations of its purpose and place by mimicking the way its patrons and visitors engage with their community.

What was unique about *Virtual/Monumental* was a consideration for engaging a community through new technologies where they are linked to the Center digitally as well as the changing realities viewable from the street. Here, the museum is able to approach the audience in a much more effective way because it sought engagement from the artists as much as the participating community. According to the exhibition website this show integrated Internet technology, mobile devices, and the physical landscape at the same time: “The first installment of *Virtual/Monumental* weaves a visual narrative around the evolving resources and untapped histories of the center, community and river, to overlay the historic past with future designs through Augmented Reality and QR codes, to be experienced in the present, on iPads and mobile
devices.” This show is designed to engage the viewing public by asking them to continue to participate with the exhibition as they would with the landscape outside the museum’s walls.

The first installment of projects by Virtual/Monumental shows the close commitment between artists, audience, and community by combining the physical community of the West Farms neighborhood in the Bronx, NY with the community and art project completely digital in representation. David Abecassis’s “Fiction/Non-Fiction” is a prime example of an artwork existing online and for a physical group of collaborators/participants. Abecassis installed a series of school desks with digital monitors affixed to them, which revealed moving text taken from narratives written by students at New York City’s Public School PS 214. While the sculptural desk forms are created by the artists, other participants start to form the content of the work by attaching personal stories though texts and written digital accounts. In fact, the content of the text streams seen on the desk come from the New York PS 214 students. These students participate by making the project special for them, by writing on the desk. In the same way students scratch into their school stations and seats the student’s texts, stories, appear as digital font on the installed desks. Writing a story that later appears on the desk gives the student ownership over that object. But as the scrolling digital texts transition from one story into another, the desks exemplify something greater than one person’s story or experience. Because each desk hosts a range of narratives and reveal them one at a time Abecassis’s installation depicts the unique quality of community where a multitude of lived experiences are formed in the same setting. The digital desks are both physical stations and a shared experience because the people they hold are both transitory and ever-passing. Revealed by the narratives of


47 Ibid..
temporary owners/students who found security and an identity in the classroom, what is present in the changing digital text is a realization that there will always be future owners who will one day sit in this same setting. In this case community revolved around the object, the desk, as much as the neighborhood. For this work participation was two-fold. On the one hand, the scrolling texts document the stories that were provided by community members while, on the other hand, viewers participate by placing themselves into the seat and adding to the ongoing community of users.

Other Virtual/Monumental projects ask for participants to engage in more than one place at a time. REV’s Coming Soon and Katherin McInnis’s Future Farms seek to invite participants out into the landscape in order to activate the communal spaces. REV’s Coming Soon is a set of digital billboards users view through their mobile devices. The digital signs appear above various spaces throughout the community but are only accessed by the mobile device. The audience participates by activating their technology in order to see the artwork virtually on the screen as they stand in the physical environment. The digital image asks the viewer to imagine
this space with something not seen in the physical environment. On the other hand, McInnis’s *Future Farms* finds more stability in the physical engagement with the landscape. This project invites participants to take a walking tour of community gardens where they are encouraged to engage with the public space by physically being present in the communal setting and to propose or think of future garden sites. According to the exhibition website, “This walking tour will feature current community gardens and will identify sites for potential future gardens to celebrate both the culture and future of urban farming in the West Farms neighborhood.” Participants may find the path of the walking tour and information on the technology they carry with them, asking viewers to convert between physical and digital realities at the same time.

The Bronx River Art Center exhibition of *Virtual/Monumental* is a significant step in museum-based participatory art. *Virtual/Monument* is both reflected in an online world and stationed in the physical landscape of the visitor and public. Yet, this type of exhibition is currently very rare and often times very difficult for supporting institutions to initiate and keep going.

What is exceptional in *Virtual/Monumental*, and what might make it more successful in the end, is that it looks to build the community at the same time as it engages with new technology. The community has the ability to get behind this show because they can engage with it outside the museum. Visitors may able be more engaged with the work because these artists have presented a landscape that the audience understands, their own streets and experiences that are reflected in the chosen exhibited locals. For a visitor who enters into a museum or gallery space armed to the teeth with technology, new exhibitions should provide and simulate the new ways patrons interacts with new media, which means that museums should take

48 Ibid..
significant steps to include the tools visitors bring with them into the gallery space. The visitor who walks through the front door is more and more someone who can juggle between many different realities all at the same time. The complex multiplicity of technology presents a problem for museums which have, until now, only thought about the traditional interaction of a visitor walking through a collection and interacting with the objects in front of them. But, finding ways to link between objects, information, and online identities should be at a top priority for the future museum.

What REV hoped for in *Coming Soon* was a public discussion and shared knowledge about the future developments that were planned for this neighborhood. The main attention in this installation took place around a large housing complex that will take ten years and $350 million to complete. Visitors could stand on a specific section of the street and see a proposed building’s architectural renderings via their mobile devices and converse with others who may be interested in the neighbor’s future.
REV’s project took place on the streets. But, the people who participated with the work by opening the images on their devices were instructed because of the connection to the museum and show: the general public would have not known that the installation existed without direction or invitation from the museum or artist. Curcially, unlike the experience when one walks down a city street and happens upon a public sculpture, this public work had to be accessed by the attachment with the technology. When asked about the level of participation from the public, Rothenberg acknowledged that the spectator had to have access through invitation and that this public experience was different from traditional public art installations where the objects wait to be discovered in a physical location. “Participation was mostly enabled through the context of how it was promoted. For example, an AR [Augmented Reality] piece is basically invisible in the sense that people only know about it's promoted unlike a physical sculpture that you see in a public square. So depending on how it was utilized or promoted resulted in the outcome of who participated.”49 In this case participation is as much an important act for the promoter of the work as the spectator because the general public would have never known that the digital remediation existed without someone telling them to access the technology in order to discover the work. Likewise, those without the ability to access the technology at that given moment would have been left out of the experience.

Properties of Participation

Because we can now participate in various ways and with a host of technological devices, the way participation functions online has come under scrutiny, especially from Internet theorist Clay Shirky. Shirky proposes that participation happens in four stages. The first of these stages is called “sharing.” In this stage users of technology enter into a situation where they “share”

49 Stephanie Rothenberg, e-mail message to author, October 7, 2013
information with each other in a direct relationship between the user and members of a community. Internet communities like Flickr are examples of how users share information with others as they share photographs into the community by uploading them to their account. This stage does not require that users form correspondence with other community members, because all that is required is the uploaded material. The second stage, termed as “cooperation,” involves a more responsive set of actions where the act is countered by other members and users. Shirky writes, “One simple form of cooperation…is conversation…as with e-mail, IM, or text messaging.” Here, participants are asked to enter into the event in much the same way, usually in relationship to the type of technology needed for the cooperation. The third stage, “collaborative production,” is an extension of the second but requires that engaged members act as collaborators in the creation of communally developed data. Through collaborative production the individual is replaced with group consensus as the community comes together to decide how it functions and what it supports. Because the group made decisions the final product is the property of the group and is the most polished, and sometimes insipid, outcome for the group as a whole. This is where we find much of the criticism of sites like Wikipedia, Internet critic Jaron Lanier is one of the most recognized opponents of the online collective. Lanier argues against this collaborative production, which he terms “the cloud,” for the reason that an online community working through consensus removes all individuality. Shirky’s fourth stage, “collective action,” is the toughest because it assumes that once collaborative production triumphs, a group possess enough momentum to transform the group’s ruling and identity into action. As Shirky writes, “It [collective action] requires a group of people to commit themselves

to undertaking a particular effort together, and to do so in a way that makes the decision of the group binding on the individual members.”

In order for collaborative action to take place, a community must be fueled with passion around a cause and, at the same time, must decide that their passion is great enough to move forward. In order for collaborative action to become successful, a community must find strength in its collaborating members and share in the passion to present the group as an engaged entity. This is even harder when the action is transferred offline to become a physical engagement or movement. Yet, in order for activists to engage their responsibilities to participate there must be a reasonable and accepted approach to the action. The level of engagement asked of the community would define the accepted approach. As Shirky writes, “Engagement refers to subjective states, that is, a mobilized, focused attention on some object. It is in a sense a prerequisite for participation: To ‘participate’ in politics, presuppose some degree of engagement. For engagement to become embodied in participation and thereby give rise to civic agency there must be some connection to practical, do-able activities, where citizens can feel empowered.”

In order for artists to utilize the Internet group they must understand how to engage their participants. This means that artists need to comprehend community cooperation along with the technological application, which fosters successful collaboration. Unique to Internet artists is the ability to utilize multiple technologies that both define and manipulate a community for the production of a collaborative act. But, the traditional notion of an artist separated from the viewer is disrupted when a community of collaborators produces new content through participation. Henry Jenkins suggests that these new positions of Internet creative

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51 Ibid., 51.

activism are yet to be understood. As he argues, “The term “participatory culture” contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media produces and consumer as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us full understands.”53

Steve Dixon interprets participation as the second of four categories that make up Interactivity, the engagements of a work of digital art that enables users and spectators the ability to approach the work as a navigator, participant, or collaborator. As Dixon writes, “all art is an interaction between the viewer and the artwork, and thus all artwork are interactive in the sense that a negotiation of confrontation takes place between the beholder and the beheld…Where digital interactive artworks and performances differ is in the ability of the user or audience to activate, affect, play with, input into, build, or entirely change it.”54 Interaction determines how users engage with others or technology. From the simple act of navigating through computer prompts to full collaborative production, where participants engage with one other through the technology in order to accomplish the desired task, users interact according to the constructed requirements that set the limits of the engagement. Dixon lists the four categories in order of responsibility needed for spectators and participants to engage with the digital work: navigation, participation, conversation, and collaboration. He suggests that while categories share characteristics one may not produce better art but all may be successful at creating good works depending on use.55


54 Dixon and Smith, Digital Performance, 559.

55 Ibid., 564-65.
The first category, Navigation, is defined as the construction of the engagement where users click on and through prompts which appear on the computer’s screen. These prompts could appear as texts, images, sounds, websites, or games and are used as a directional tool that motivated the user to continue with the program or the appearing digital content. Dixon uses CD-ROMs as an example of navigation because users engage with the content by “choosing (or guessing) a path through the material or virtual environment.”56 This construction only requires a response from the user to follow instructions or to follow the path that is defined by the program. Dixon suggests that this type of interaction and engagement is the simplest of the four, “Navigation, the ‘simplest’ form of interaction, is epitomized by the single click of a mouse to answer ‘Yes of No’ to a screen prompt, or to indicate ‘Right, Left, Up, or Down.’”57

Dixon’s second category, Participation, is not as clear a category as the other three. Dixon fails to give a well-defined explanation of participation, suggesting it is an interaction where participants engage because they understand that they are part of a larger audience and that the interaction will produce an effect because the audience comes together. What is missing is a consideration of how participation may occur without the knowledge of others and that users may engage because they are participating with the technology as much as they are with other participants. Additionally, Dixon does not make clear the degree of participation utilized in a specific work, which would reflect how users approach the engagement. Dixon explains participation by describing several contemporary works of art and performance that seek audience cooperation and reaction, and he uses these examples to reveal the nature of participation in theater, and thus in digital technologies.

56 Ibid., 565.
57 Ibid., 566.
One illustration used by Dixon to describe participation is a theatrical artwork that included digital technology and audience participation by activating the cell phones of participating audience members. Dixon explains, “Audience members for Golan Levin’s *Telesymphony (2001)* preregistered cell phone number and theater seat number. New ringtones were downloaded onto the phones by Levin and his nine collaborators, who used custom-software to dial the phones in different prearranged sequences during the performance to choreograph and create a complex symphony, which as many as two hundred phones ringing simultaneously.”  

In the case of this work of art the artist, or the performance producer, uses the potential of both digital technologies and the theater environment for the creation of art. But, the final product remains a relationship between the actor on stage and the actor with technology. In much the same way as the Futurists challenged their audience to get up out of their seats this work seeks the same outcome, but relies on the technology to move the viewer up and away. The audience still remains in their places, the actors remains in theirs. The technology’s “signal” is what leave the room and then reenters.

On the other hand Golan Levin’s *Telesymphony (2001)* fails to show how a participant chooses to participate past allowing their production to use personal cell phones. In this situation the artists did most of the work, asking the audience to continue to have the action done for them. Instead of participating with the artwork the audience sat back and watched or heard their phones ring. They did not produce this action and therefore cannot be viewed as participants. It is the technology that engages the actors. This means that the technology participates, not the viewer. In fact, it could be said that the cell companies and the technologies are the participants with this artwork. Dixon fails to define participation accurately because it is participation, not

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58 Ibid., 582.
interactivity, that these characteristics belong to. All of these characteristics seek audience cooperation and engagement, which are both attributed to participation, not interactivity.

Dixon’s final categories “conversation” and “collaboration” rely on a direct relationship between artwork and audience. Conversation is the level of communication between users and exists as a simple transference either between the audience and technology or between audience members. Dixon clearly states that communication relies on the “dialog that is reciprocated and is subject to real interchange and exchange.”\(^59\) An example of this would be digital conversations held over networked web cameras or audio links between performers. Dixon uses several interactive digital performances by Paul Sermon as examples because he creates theatrical interactions between performers who are engaged in conversation virtually. Similar to Shirky’s explanation of collaborate production, Dixon defines collaboration as works that are produced through two or more participants acting together or a participant acting along with a technology. As Dixon explains, “Interactive collaboration comes about when the participant becomes a major author or coauthor of the artwork, experience, performance or narrative. The collaboration may be between a single user and the computer/virtual environment, but more usually occurs when user work together with other to create new works by means of computer technologies or within a virtual environment.”\(^60\) Even the very act of navigation means that a participant engages with the technology in order to complete an act that is both collaborative and conversational. It would seem better to discuss all of Dixon’s examples as digital objects, which possess all of these categories equally. By observing the common relationship that exists between these digital interactions and performance art works one could make a compelling case for a new type of participation that is both technologically complex and manifold.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 584.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 595.
The Growth of a Smart Mob

For many, the flash mob movement works in much the same way as Anonymous. While Anonymous remains an entirely online configuration and movement, flash mobs disrupt by bringing community action together in physical public spaces. In this case the disruption of a social norm happens when members are given directions to do a task in mass. In many flash mob events, participants disrupt the norm by showing up in a designated location and under the auspice of taking over the natural situation of a place and changing the fundamental function of a that particular place. These participants then leave the designated space suddenly before anyone had a chance to take names. This group is successful for the same reason other mob actions are successful: the mob is built out of both numbers and faceless identities. The Anonymous community may or may not know the true identities of collaborators. This lack of identity in the community encourages the group to be less likely to point fingers at its members if the action causes legal issues. In much the same way that flash mobs require participation from a horde of strangers to initiate and complete a task, it does not matter who the members of Anonymous are as long as they come together to participate. Even more important than who is acting is the number of members that show up to participate.

Howard Rheingold terms technologically-led actions like Anonymous, or social media movements, “smart mobs.” These actions are “smart” because participants in the event or movement choose technology to assist in expanding the movement, which opens the action up to be a part of the larger systems of technological communication and exhibitions. Rheingold suggests that group led events like flash mobs, revolutions that take place with the assistance of social media, and movements like the Occupy Wall Street are a small part of the growing smart-mob structure. In his book *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* Rheingold defines what happens when groups of people convene to undertake a task with the help of networked
environments, social media technologies, and technological tools. Rheingold states that the Smart Mob movements “behave intelligently or efficiently because of its exponentially increasing network links… an indication of the evolving communication technologies that will empower the people.”\(^6\) Rheingold believes that Smart Mobs are social engagements that may be created and organized by interacting with the technology’s shared networks. For example, having the ability to text message from your cell phone is, in effect, a type of smart action. But multiply that same act among thousands of participants who use the same reference topic and that act appears to have a larger presence from the outside, from those who may be following friends whom are texting from the event. For proponents of social media, like Clay Shirky, the power that users may harness in order to cause change is great. The Arab Spring revolution that took place in Egypt during 2011 may be a perfect example and is used often by Shirky to explain the technological and social change taking place between a physical action and online participatory movement. As Shirky states:

Certainly the fact that Egypt and Tunisia fell quickly, Libya descended into a civil war, that Syria has just turned into a kind of bloodbath, Bahrain is becoming effectively an anti-Shi’ite apartheid state means that there isn’t a single dial labeled real-time that when you dial it up you get one coherent set of effects. That having been said, what we do see with the social media tools, what we do see with tools that allow for both amateur access to public speech and for group coordination is that it allows a committed group of citizens a way of taking on the state in a way that at least so far the states have a hard time responding to in completely coherent ways. There is what’s called the dictator’s dilemma that these tools force onto autocratic regimes and when I think about the effect of these tools on these regimes what I think I’m seeing can be broken down, just as a model, along three axes. These tools have done a better job of allowing citizens to synchronize their opinions. …The second effect is to coordinate action…And then the

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third thing, which I underestimated but has turned out to be one of the few universals of this wave of protest movement, is documenting the results.⁶²

While social media and the Smart Mob did not give the people of Egypt a reason to become better engaged, as advocates of social media argue, it may be true that technology created more awareness more quickly and over a wider area. Text messages, Twitter posts, and social media interactions did not cause protestors to engage with their collaborators, as Shirky suggests; instead, they came together because they communicated with each other using many means. In this case social media was not the underlying cause of the engagement. The reason people came together to participate stems from their social situations. Social media only allowed the event to become recognized by supporters outside the area where the action took place. Social media does not give people the tools to participate with an action; those tools have already been implemented because social media is a construction of the communication system that is already in place. But, one could argue that social media does help disseminate messages throughout social movements because of the viral nature of messaging using these communication devices.

Participants have formed successful engagements with each other and with their community without the presence of digital devices and social media tools. But, the growing capacity of digital online communication technologies may enhance these engagements in very exciting and constructive ways. Additionally, the increasing speed of technology to document worldwide events as they happen enable users of digital online technologies a better understanding of what is happening at that moment of engagement. Because social media may be produced by a wide range of technical applications and include a large amount of participants.

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social media’s material is easily disseminated, producing the “viral” nature of some shared online responses.

According to Rheingold the Internet, too, exists as a smart mob because users may choose to interact, engage, organize and even create networks through participating by logging onto that technological platform. Not only do users participate by logging on, they also find common ways of interacting with each other. On the image sharing site Flickr, for example, community members are free to upload personal images and connect those images to other members or users who have identities online. Yet, according to Internet critic Lev Manovich, even these services produced minimal amounts of participation from their own members: “According to 2007 statistics, only between 0.5 percent and 1.5 percent of users of the most popular social media sites (Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia) contributed their own content.”

The lack of participation and the problems that surround the ways users participate will be further discussed in Chapter 2. For now, what is of importance is that from Rheingold’s point of view, a smart mob may be both the technology and the use of that technology. Like Flickr, where users choose to engage online by uploading photos through their use of computers or mobile devices, participants are engaging on multiple levels. The same system works with the audio file sharing website Soundcloud. Here, users log into the site with passwords and user IDs and are able to upload content, notify others of changes they have made in their accounts, publicly comment on the content of others, or communicate through private “in-house” emails or posts. However, these smart mobs rely upon cooperation with and participation by the network’s users.

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Ultimately, online participation implies that the work be completed through cooperation, collaboration, and community building among a network or active users. Cooperation is a crucial form of permission granting because it allows for the establishment of relationships with the group’s uses. On the other hand, where collaboration tends to suggest that users work closely together in order to complete a task, cooperation may mean that users are knowledgeable about the endeavor, and give support, but may be less likely to fully engage in the creative act of collaboration. While cooperation may empower the participant to be a part of engaged community collaboration enables the user to participate fully in the benefit of the act.

Since Flash Mobs benefit from cooperation and collaboration and include the use of digital technologies, they are considered Smart Mobs. Even though Flash Mobs encourage participants to act together through physical engagements, by showing up somewhere to complete a task with the aid of others, these mobs, ultimately, rely on the social use of digital devices as a mediator between the participant and the targeted location. What distinguishes Flash Mob from Smart Mobs are the type social engagement that is used, the interactions between the participants, and the intent of the originator or developer of the network.

The creator of the Flash Mob movement, Bill Wasik, set out to show how digitally connected like-minded people with a cause could accomplish a task. What is important to remember about the Flash Mob movement is that the examination of the interaction was not entirely about the performance as people come together to accomplish a task but the digital traces of the network that created the community in the first place. It is in the digital network of emails that spurred potential participants to engage with the performance. Therefore, these flash mobs were less about what took place when participants got together and more about how they came together through the forwarding of an email chain and relied on the digital connection.
While intimidation by *Anonymous* may be a reminder of the possibility of group activism online, this organization has been successful in collaboratively joining forces in order to disrupt the function of the net because it acts as a Smart Mob. *Anonymous* is successful because it targets the same system most rely on for their daily activities. That is what it is so frightening to many. Anonymous, or other hacking smart mobs, reveal how easy it is to infiltrate the Internet’s security platforms and penetrate seemingly safe online databases that store personal and secure information. As NPR reporter Tom Gjelten writes, “Data breaches by Verizon the telecommunications company, reported that Anonymous and other hacktivist groups in 2011 accounted for 58 percent of all compromised records reported to investigators that year, a big increase over earlier years.”  

*Anonymous’s* system of participation is both profound and simply logical in terms of group activity. By having many computers directed at one obstacle *Anonymous* is able to attack its victim by overpowering any defenses a selected target may hold. The model is simple, the more participation by the group’s membership, the better the chances that their act and goal is accomplished. The tools used to achieve the task are highly complex, displaying the possible ways new artists may engage with others in order to produce new multi-media and multi-technological works of art.

Online users like *Anonymous* may access an immense amount of information at one time, add content to that information or to their online identities, and even create new digital representations of their personalities. The complexities available to Internet participants who may access the wealth of online information and networks through new digital devices asks that users become better at moving from one platform to another. Participants are learning to engage with the world around them through the multiplicity of technological devices and programs,

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which encourages new ways for collaboration and participation. As users seek newer technologies artists have the potential to create new collaborative projects out of the relationships made between users and their interconnected devices. Media critic and journalist Josephine Bosma explains that this new complex cross-transference of media is, in fact, new for the participant because that individual is faced with the complexities of multiple positions the work inhabits. Bosma recognizes that this new multi-mediated space for creative collaboration and participating forces us to seek further answers to problems that were once thought resolved:

The role of both artist and the audience is changing. We have entered a new situation (and “new” is no value judgment), in which our perception and experience of the world is increasingly mediated, for better or worse, through the fast evolution of media environments. We find ourselves surrounded by echoes of technology in our public and private lives. On a material level we seem to be engaged in endless struggles to keep our exchanges with computers, telephones, and palmtops, but also with wireless networks and the older electronic media television and radio, in balance with our needs (or what we think are our needs). Less visible, but no less intrusive, are the immaterial echoes of our social encounters. As our interactions with other people change, our relationship to information and knowledge is changing as well. We are forced to deal with a new materiality, that of copyrighted information, an abstraction we do not experience as object. The convergence of personal and mass media through new media technologies has caused changes in legislative politics and in the intimate sphere of personal relationships. We see evolving a completely new landscape of shared spaces of culture.65

**Just Chillin in a Virtual World**

For many digital artists the Internet is becoming a place to come together, communicate, create, and exhibit, but it is also a virtual environment that tried to represent what is available in physical form. While some artists see the virtual world as just as real as a physical museum, gallery, studio or coffee shop, the traditional gallery space still retains importance for the exhibition of new digital and virtual art, especially when that art attempts to construct a dialog between what is online and what is not. This is why some artists choose to travel between virtual

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space and physical environments and seek a new type of viewing experience that can reside
online as much as in galleries, museums, or public settings. Creative artwork can now succeed
virtually and physically, as seen in the growing amount of COAPs that utilize the online
technology but are productions of actual physical collaborations and communities. As future
online community art projects expand notions of public exhibition/gallery space, the curatorial
process, artist communities, and concepts of physical space and digital space become blurred.
Two projects that both support an online community and the physical “local” exhibition of
objects are examples of a virtual creative collaboration incorporating the physical gallery and
museum experience. The first project is an online community of artists, Serial Chillers in
Paradise, who curate and exhibit in digital spaces as well as the physical exhibition.

 JstChillin’s Serial Chillers in Paradise is one example of the blurred line between
traditional notions of gallery and museum ownership over exhibition and the collective nature of
the Internet. Serial Chillers in Paradise is a collaborative group exhibition of digital media
artists led by Caitlin Denny and Parker Ito. It features a collaborative group of digital artists,
curators, and participants who use the online platform to select and exhibit contemporary works
of art. Serial Chillers in Paradise’s structure relies on the connections between artists, where
Denny and Ito invites artists to “take over” the community exhibition website to use as their own
art space for a short amount of time. How the website looks changes as one exhibition ends and
another begins. As different artists acquire permission from the project managers they are
encouraged to change the site’s content and aesthetic, which mimics the way artists attempt to
transform the shared gallery space into an exhibition in order to show their own new creations.
When an artist is given the online space, here or she is expected to alter and manipulate the
website’s code in order to reconstruct the empty web page.
For two weeks, between November 28 and December 18, 2009, new media artist Jon Ralfman installed *The Loneliness of an Arcade Hustler* as his exhibition in *Serial Chillers in Paradise*. For his own work Ralfman used various images he found from the popular online public community called *Second Life*. In this online community participating users are allowed to create an alternate reality where they can interact with others, walk around, have social engagements, create seemingly imaginary world for themselves. In fact, players in this world can do pretty much anything they want. It is not unusual to see people walk by your avatar, your alternate character, wearing strange costumes or even look like non-human beings. *Second Life* was, and still is, a community that encouraged users to think outside the box, to create their own reality. Ralfman uses this alternate position to uncover the beauty in the user’s creations of a new world. Viewers of his work find themselves roaming through a new world where they can uncover new realities that seem so natural. As if watching a film of someone roam through a wooded park or a busy street, Ralfman takes this same approach to second life. Ralfman’s *Serial Chillers in Paradise* page loads with an image of a beach. The user finds an avatar, digital alternative, being led down this beach as the waves in the images crash to their left. A strange mix of sounds, resembling video game sounds are helping build a climax. All of a sudden the image changes to a burned out structure, maybe symbolic of a war-torn setting. The scene quickly changes as viewers realize they are about to get vital information concerning the scene’s selection. Next, the viewer is located on a computer-generated bridge that appears to have Asian influence. Once again, the scenery changes as the temple’s identity is about to be fully realized.
What is additionally noteworthy is that Ralfman’s installation includes a PDF download, which is available from the website’s entry page. The PDF, referred to on the site as a “Press Release,” tells the story of a well-known arcade gamer, Eddie Lee, who after years at winning high scores, loses one of his battles and goes missing.\(^66\) Ralfman explains Eddie’s predicament in a PDF segment:

Eddie Lee was the legendary pro-gamer who pioneered the New York style of combat and was the first to defeat the Japanese Street Fighter champion. And who can forget that day when he faced off against Johnny “The Monk” at the Chuck E. Cheese Arcade, that split-second that it had all come down to, the final round, with both Eddie and the Monk with on pixel of life remaining, eight grand and the respect of the community on the line? But now Eddie Lee himself has been defeated and has disappeared. Refusing, however, to allow a defeat to be “Game Over” with no continues, he finds The Kid that had beaten his oldest score, the score that had stood on the leader board for so long it was burnt into the screen, *The Loneliness of an Arcade Hustler*, a biography of a gamer seeking redemption, is a journey through virtual worlds and an exploration of the universal dream of being a hero.\(^67\)

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\(^67\) Ralfman, “The Loneliness of a Arcade Hustler.”
Ralfman’s story starts off as if he has now been given the duty to find Eddie, by jumping into the complex maze that is Second Life. What is revealing about this installation is that the artist chose to work in multiple stages, including giving viewers the ability to open and print a PDF file that they can take with them once they leave the site.


In much the same way users interact with digital media, by transferring from one set of languages and software understanding to another, viewers of Ralfman’s work have to be ready to move and uncover multiple realities in order to continue to participate. Similar to the way Duchamp asked his viewers to be aware of the exhibition terrain by ducking and weaving through twine, Ralfman’s viewers are also asked to maneuver through an exhibition by understanding what is needed to accomplish a task online through digital expertise. In Ralfman’s case the viewer does not physically have to move their body to see the work but they must possess a certain amount of knowledge about digital programs, like Second Life, navigation and PDF files, in order to decode the work in its entirety. It is through this complex environment of gaming tasks that Ralfman seems to form a critique on the unique position of an audience that
appears online and offline, possibly simulating the representations of the gamer who plays and
the game hero who is built out of code.

**Experiments in Art and Technology**

Over nine days in October 1966, engineer Johan Wilhelm “Billy” Kluver collaborated
with artists Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, David Tudor and scientists from Bell Laboratories
to produce a series of performance events at New York’s 69th Regiment Armory. The event in
the Armory included installation and performance projects and paired artists with engineers in a
working environment that rooted art with technology. *EAT* artists upheld the collaborative
nature of creativity by joining participants together through technology. Instead of relying on
specific media to determine the validity of art, or *Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT)*
believed that art could be multi-media and be a collaboration of various factors working together.
One example of this confluence between art and technology developed during the event as a
 collaborative sounds piece by John Cage, David Tudor, and several Bell engineers. Cage pre-
arranged for several open phone lines to be connected from the performance stage to various
phones throughout New York City, which would then be redirected over the performance
speaker system. Even though the phone lines were disconnected right before the show happened
Cage had hoped to use the sounds he collected from other participating places to create the work
inside the space. This technological connectivity continued to run through Cage’s work and
started with his remediation of the earlier radio transmissions. Additionally, on the second night
Cage invited the audience, which had remained in their seat away from the performance stage the
night earlier down onto the main armory floor where they could participate by changing the
visual focus of the performance. During *Nine Evenings* artists relied on the technological
knowledge of their Bell Laboratories experts in order to make the system work while the
performing scientists relied on the artists to re-present the technological discoveries in a new way.

The technologies employed by EAT and by the artists involved with Nine Evenings presented possible models for participation where artists, engineers, and scientists came together in order to show what was possible for creative collaboration. The cinteraction between art production, participation, and collaboration may be fully realized by Internet devices that connect users with other members of a network or with potential places and times.

The recent artwork by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller is a principal example of the possible connections made by the use of technology in order to reach people, places, and diverging times. Constructed for documenta 13 exhibition, Alter Bahnhof Video Walk; 2012 appears as a participatory installation, history, performance, and digital art all at the same time. 68 Visitors to the piece, which is located in the Kassel train station in Germany, are given an Ipod when they enter the space. They are asked to turn on the device at a particular place in the station. Once the device is running a pre-recorded video of the space appears with Cardiff talking to the visitor through the recording. In one location viewers are faced with several layers of history, they are engaging in the work in real time but also looking at the work recorded by the artist. At one point in the experience, two musicians emerge from a far corner of the video reproduction and walk through the video space. As the musicians continue the artists ask for the person who holds the iPod to follow them through the station. In fact, through the hand held device screen, the participant follows the video recording and not an actual duo of musicians. As Cardiff states in the video, “This video will be an experiment, like those prisoners stuck in

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Plato’s Cave. We watch the flickering shadows on the screen. Try to align your movements with mine. Move your screen up to the left as I do.” Where Cardiff directs viewer by leading them through environments this piece incorporates technology in much the same fashion as the artist’s previous guided tours. Cardiff continues to uncover information about space and presents that information as both performance and guide. In this case, the viewer is absorbed into action by becoming part receiver of information, part viewer to the performance, and part director. This multiplicity is accomplished with a mobile device displaying a pre-recorded video.

In her installation, Cardiff manages to create a new type of work by directly attacking both the multiplicity of space and the creative endeavor to reveal that space. Either way, assessments of online art and digital collaborations are changing how people see current technology. Less and less is technology a threat. Because people are finding ways to include new forms of technology into daily life, what we use to log on has become not so foreign to us. Furthermore, the way we view, and sometimes critique, these multiple realities have become more personal, directed at the way the individual confronts the work on their own. These private connections, in the midst of the vastness of the digital webbing, have turned into important self-identifying links. Now, more than ever before, can art truly bridge the personal? We don’t need an expert to tell us how to act in front of the work, we know how because we use the same tools every day. As Bosma suggests, “The judgment of art quality has moved away from the semi-objective realm of professional art criticism (the domain of the authentic, approved art object with its linear discourses) to that of the present day—decentralized, ultra-local spaces of engagement, which often support intimate experiences.”

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69 Bosma, “Art as Experience: Meet the Active Audience,” 4.
What happens to the spectator’s own placement when he or she shares in the creation of the artwork with a technological device that re-presents data like the looping video installation of Cardiff? Does Cardiff’s installation spectator have an authentic connection to the artist or is the connection removed once the artist introduces us to a program contained in a device? Is Cardiff really allowing participation to happen or is she guiding the viewer who still acts in a passive way? These questions need further evaluation and consideration, which brings us to one of the largest statements on online communities and the use of technology as a potential apparatus to access new art. In this case, technology means freedom. Some believe that once the lines between the artists, the participant, the environment, and technology have been thwarted spectators engage a level of freedom of the work they would normally not have. I would argue that online art is equally more and less free, depending on how we evaluate their representation and use. Sometimes, in order to activate the use of the work artists must make it evident that they are using material that they are also critiquing. This is best illustrated by Cardiff and Miller’s, Alter Bahnhof Video Walk. The work uses multiplicity to talk about the levels that are represented by the system. What is freed within the work is that the viewer understands they are in the same place but able to move quite easily between multiple realities.

Jacques Ranciere refers to this freedom as “The Emancipated Spectator.” For Ranciere the act of emancipation is a type of recognition of the system, or knowledge used for the d’etournement. As Rancier writes, “Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or
transforms this distribution of positions.”\textsuperscript{70} Once the participant understands that they are interacting with a production, that they are participants to an ongoing situation, the product becomes an engagement or an experience. Objects, in this place, are not needed. Additionally, the participant becomes the producer of the work, not a passive receiver.

The emancipated spectacle leads a viewer away from submissive, passive viewing and makes them active contributor because they are already engaged with the technologies. Yet, because users carry the technology with them they, too, are confined to the responsibilities a technology requires of them. A spectator’s technological emancipation also clouds the situations used to define the transition between action and inaction because it is defined by the technology before the exchange even takes place. This transference and confusion is similar to what Rancier explains regarding on the blurred relationships between action and reception. As Ranciere argues, “That is what the word ‘emancipation’ means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body.”\textsuperscript{71} In much the same way when the passenger in \textit{Google Maps Road Trip} realized that they were participating with the project’s creation they started to add to Marc and Pete’s own experience. By understanding that we were all part of the system, using the same technology to cross the country, we started to find new things to add to the trip. A revelation that technology aids us in uncovering information that may or may not appear in a physical environment is also central to the Cardiff and Miller’s, \textit{Alter Bahnhof Video Walk; 2012}. In this work the artists not only employs technology to bridge time and space but also to reveal further information about objects that reside in that initial environment and setting. An example of this would be where the artist walked over to a glass container that houses historical objects and books. In the hand held video

\textsuperscript{70} Ranciere, \textit{The Emancipated Spectator}, 13.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 19.
the artists explains more about what is in the glass container and even show someone flipping through the pages of the book that is normally removed from the viewer’s grasp. In this work the artists/narrator becomes a guide to what is both hidden and revealed in the physical world as well as the virtual. But, as participants and viewers approach the work through the same technology as the artist, as in the case the hand held phone and video camera, each viewer then engages with the environment in both the same way and anew.

In *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk; 2012* participation means that viewers must engage with the physical space through a unique window defined by the artistic manipulation of virtual space. It is within the virtual space that the participant, the one who starts the engagement by getting off his/her seat in order to follow the artist and engage with the world around them, that they fully becomes aware of their emancipation, they are seeing the virtual in real life and real life in the virtual. In almost perfect mimicry to Futurist Theater, this artist rallies viewers out of their inactive place in order to become the one that engages. Cardiff and Miller also provoke us to leave our place and become true participants in the social space. Once the participant acts he or she holds the possibility of leading other and in that instance they become emancipated from their passive past. Once the viewers are free to move and free to uncover through the addition of technology and possibly a connection to the Internet they can become translators themselves, redefining what happens in the same local. As Rancier asserts, “An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.”

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72 Ibid., 22.
Chapter 2

A City That Never Sleeps: Interconnectivity as Creativity

Command and Control

From its birth as a military communication tool in the space age, the Internet was developed to connect users in a web-like networks. This collaborative interconnectivity forms a communication system in which users remain present at all time, engaging with a larger group even when one connection may fail. It is the ability to be connected to a group, and to send and receive signals to and from others logged into the digital system that drove the development of the Internet. As these government bodies lobbied for the power to use this new technology for military purposes, the scientists behind the creation of the Internet saw a much more powerful public utility. These inventors saw a new communication tool, one that could bring the world together where all could engage because they could access a computer. It is in this first hyperconnectivity that we start to see the underlying notions that interconnectivity equals participation. This chapter will raise questions about how users connect to each other over the Internet and how artists examine and explore this powerful technological system.

In 1957 the United States military complex witnessed the Soviet Union launch its first rocket propelled satellite, Sputnik, into space. At that, nuclear weapons and their threat of total destruction in a war between the Soviet Union and the U.S. dominated international political thinking. It was determined that a government which could communicate with a complex of military institutions at a moment’s notice would have the upper hand if missiles were launched. This power to communicate to a widespread connected group was called “Command and
Control.”¹ The U.S. government recognized that other forms of communication, like radio and telephone service, would not survive a larger nuclear strike. For this reason the military sought a newer, better connected, form of communication where they could reach across the nation in order to ready a launch of their own. At this moment the only way to reach others who might need to react to a nuclear threat was through the radio or phone service. A highly connected communication service was needed. “Command and control was so vulnerable to collateral damage that each missile base commander would face the dilemma of either doing nothing in the event of a physical attack or taking action that could lead to an all-out irrevocable war.”² In short, the military needed a way to stay in contact with its nuclear strike force, even though it would be dispersed across the country as a tactical deterrent to enemy attack.³

At the same time, and, in response to a military concern for better communication, a new think tank in the United States called RAND (or Research and Development) started to work on the logistics of such a service. RAND researcher Paul Baran proposed that a deeply interconnected and digital system needed to be made. In 1960 Baran began to argue that this was untenable in the age of ballistic missiles. The alternative he began to conceive of was a centrifugal distribution of control points: a distributed network that had no vulnerable central point and could rely on redundancy.”⁴ Baran and others proposed these connections would act as “Nodes” where one connection could receive data and send it quickly on to the closest next connection.⁵ This meant that data would be multiplied over the system and that one signal could

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² Ibid., 14.
³ Ibid., 14.
⁴ Ibid., 14.
⁵ Ibid., 14.
then become multiple as the nodes dispersed each request. While RAND remained funded by the U.S. government, the group of scientists behind its research believed that they were not only working to connect military bases but that they were also building the groundwork for a larger communication tool. In fact, in an effort for continued financial support RAND took on various projects include civilian ones, which further developed a notion that the connections they were creating could be a similar to a “public utility.”

Also in response to the 1957 Sputnik launch, the United States realized that they also needed to think about a presence in space, and in 1958 the first research group to study outer space, Advanced Research Projects Agency or (ARPA), was born. Similar to the needs of the military complex, a communication system would also be needed to link rockets and satellites to control centers. Moreover, what was desired was a system where research labs could access the data being analyzed and produced by others. It was out of this need that ARPA’s director, Jack Ruina, hired J.C.R. Licklider. Licklider, with the help of Bob Taylor then head of the Information Processing Techniques Office or IPOT, emphasized collaboration as a part of computer research in hopes that a larger databank of connected computers could be created as a complex link that gave researchers the ability to exchange data as it was formulated. This network would be called “ARPANET.” In 1968 the new director of ARPS, Eberhardt Rechtin, instigated a project in which four computers would be joined between the Stanford Research Institute, UC Santa Barbara, UCLA and the University of Utah. This interconnectivity between the four labs would demonstrate how the APRANET could bring a group together over one line.

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6 Ibid., 22.
7 Ibid., 25.
8 Ibid., 29.
Due to the nature of interconnectivity online, and to the immense technological capabilities for users to come together, select data, and share with others, computational networks have come to define place, distance, and relationships in the virtual world. It was the connectivity of a network, in fact, that spawned the first attempts to transmit Internet signals through satellites. The first multi-node Internet transmission occurred in 1969 and, while unrealized at that time, the full potential of the Internet was that it could be cast to several places at the same time. This advancement came in 1977 when a satellite signal was sent from San Francisco to Norway and then back to California. This three-way network meant that the signal could “web” out from the original transmission and not remain a two-way connection. From this point on it was proven that the Internet could be used to reach more than one user at a time, forming multiple network access points for a large number of consumers. According to Cade Metz:

The date was November 22, 1977, and no one seems to remember what message was sent — or even who was in the van. But they do remember how it was sent. This marked the first time the TCP/IP protocol — the same protocol that underpins today’s internet — was used to send information across not one, not two, but three independent computer networks.

“It wasn’t just a transmission,” says Bob Kahn, one of the key figures behind that moment. “It was a whole system of network protocols being demonstrated over three different networks.”… Even still, some believe the bigger event came more than a year later when the van sent a message across a third network as well. With two networks, you’ve merely built a bridge. With three, you have an Internet. “It was true inter-networking,”

It is the varying networks of users, who employ Internet technology through countless platforms that have changed the ways we see interconnectivity and society. In fact, the Internet allows participants to engage in ways that were not realized during earlier communication

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 mediums. The idea of an integrated and interconnected network has given power, and possibly identity, to many new social and artistic projects. In many ways the formulation of a network defined what digital means. Because computers are not, now, just tied to a physical location as they may have been in the past, but function as structures to reach out to other technological devices, the computer is equipped to engage the linked signal of other computers. In a presentation at the University of Hawaii and Manoa, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun defined the network as a key characteristic of digital culture and a central symbol of our time. As Chun stated, “networks have become the defining concept of our epoch…networks allegedly encapsulate the new.”

During her presentation Chun described a computer system that is constantly plugged into an immense web of devices that work analogously and in collaboration, even when users are not present. Chun detailed a feature of the computer that collects, downloads, and filters data at all times and that the computer is constantly hooked into public data that it either disregards or sends through to the user. In this case the computer becomes a doorway to the network that guards what is important to its function at the time and the data appears in the computer system as a “packet.” Chun explained that some of these packets are simple acknowledgments and do not carry much weight but that the Internet is constantly sending data to our computer without the user’s knowledge. She explained further that, “Some may think your computer only sends and receives data at your request […] your computer constantly sends and receives—stores, writes, and receives, packets. Many of these packets are really innocuous and, in fact, only say,

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“can you read me” […] the internet circulates our reproductions without our consent or knowledge in order to give us access to others traces.”

Chun called the feature that is constructed to run through data and analyze local network traffic as a “packet sniffer.” Packet sniffers, also known as network analyzers, are software components that filter through collected data, pull important responses, flag them, and then discard or overwrite unneeded information and information that is not supposed to be pointed to the computer’s receiving address. The problem with this network system, and the reason why the computer is constantly hooked into the Internet Network, is that sometimes the packet sniffer runs in promiscuous mode, which means that your computer is downloading all of the material on a network because it reads through everyone’s packets. Having the computer placed in this mode forces the computer to search through all the traffic that is being sent through a network at a given time. The computer then takes that “public” information and determines what is supposed to be a “private” transmission to a single computer. Chun notes:

Promiscuous mode does not change your Ethernet usual reading habits...What this means is that your Ethernet card, have intentional or not, already downloaded all sorts of illegal material, as long as you’ve been part of a network you have probably downloaded all sorts of things which are considered to be illegal or pirated […] this necessary promiscuous reading quite nicely demonstrates the fact that a personal networked computer seems to be an oxymoron [...] produced through a massive screening operation.

Chun describes the personal computer as forever examining the line between what is public and private by analyzing what it receives from networks. This means that a computer is not only a similar entity that filters out the interconnected larger grouping of similarly active devices within a network but also a potential technology that could be utilized to work as part of

\[1\] Idem..

\[2\] Idem..
a group. The perceived interconnectivity to others and other things is what makes the network seem so powerful and so new. It is by being a member of the network that users feel that they can connect to other easily and quickly. As Chun writes, “The power of networks seems to stem from their ability to resolve […] it seems to offer us is the ability to conceptualize the relationship between the individual and larger global forces, to link the authentic to the true—to resolve a postmodern uncertainty.”

By creating a feeling that networks enable and form connections to the realities of present day, they produce a perception of relationships with others through the digital coding language and technology:

Networks […] enabling a certain relationship between individual to the whole […] seem to offer us the promise of connection, a traceable connection from the point to the globe, the zoom to the overview. Networks maps mediate between the local and the global, the detail and the overview…what is important about the sort of affective explanatory power of the network is that promise to move from the zoom to the larger scale.

In her work on networks as imagined systems, Chun sees the network not as a physical object, with wires running from one computer to another. Chun views the network as both abstract and tied to the user’s identity and language. This is why when we refer to other digital users of a social media platform like Facebook as “friends,” we are suggesting that, in part, we share our friendship because we share our connection through the Facebook community. We can also see the plurality of connection online in places like YouTube, where users have individual pages but also are part of a larger system of like-minded users. Where the network allows users to feel individual, in fact, users are acting in a similar manner as other members and their feeling of being anonymous and unique is misjudged. Users of a network recognize that they are both unique and part of a shared community of active participants. As Chun writes, “networks are not

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13 Idem..

14 Idem..
facilitated through an anonymous we but rather an individuated plural you.”¹⁵ This shared and “imagined” network connection is even shared not only by individual users, but whole communities, groups, and disciplines that seemingly work together or have some common interests:

Networks are both actually existing realities and theoretical abstractions […] the phrase ‘it’s a network’ is both a description and a prescription, or a description and explanation […] they also make porous the boundaries between the many different disciplines that employ networks […] every discipline it seems have found networks and by finding networks have found each other. So the study of networks seems to oddly mirror its subject, the examination of networks seems to lead to formation of more networks.¹⁶

Chun draws conceptually on imagined networks Benedict Anderson described in his 1983 book titled *Imagined Communities*. Anderson argues that communities who come together to create joined identity, accomplish a task, or form national interests do so because they believe they are part of a larger system of like-minded activists in a cause. Even though much of Anderson’s work focuses on concepts of national identities and social formations with nations states, he sees these connections as imagined because they are formed, in part, by a need for citizens to act and think as a group as a nation. As Anderson explains:

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion […]. In face, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined particularistically – as indefinitely stretchable nets of kinship and clientship.¹⁷

In Anderson’s analogy of a group that reads the newspaper, they engage in the act in similar fashion, and, thus, fulfill the requirements needed to accomplish their membership. The

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¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Idem.

connectivity to others doing the same task is why this connection is imagined. Chun states, “Imagined, here, links the individual to the anonymous collective, it makes possible an imagined WE through the creative act of reading.” In this case, by reading the newspaper we turn into a collective because those who view themselves as regular newspaper readers see themselves as part of a community who, may wake each day, have their coffee, and sit and read the paper before they go to work. The collective is imagined because the members see themselves as acting like others, and, thus, are responsible to keep up that notion and engagement. Chun interprets networks in the same way: users “dial” up others members who have shown common ground through their engagement online. Chun refers to these states as “glocal” because members see themselves inclusive and not separated from others (they connect the local with the global). Networks, in this case are not mechanical systems that connect people but appearances that are shared by membership. Additionally, networks are the modes users rely on as a community in order to construct interconnectivity. As Chun asserts, “By focusing networks as imagined I’m not arguing that networks are the fanciful objects that exist but, rather, that the forces that networks elicit stem in part from the ways in which they configure connections and breaches, flows and links and gaps, between the personal and social, the political and the technological, the biological and the machinic.”

“Hi Mom. Hi Dad. I Miss You”

Probably the most recognized, and likeliest, ancestor of the Internet was the telegraph. This earlier technologically connected web, as described by Tom Standage, allowed people to communicate with each other in rapid speeds and over long distances. “During Queen Victoria’s

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18 “Imagined Networks, Glocal Connections.”
reign,” Standage notes, “a new communications technology was developed that allowed people to communicate almost instantly across great distances [...]. Today the Internet is often described as an information superhighway: its nineteenth-century precursor, the electric telegraph, was dubbed the ‘highway of thought’.”

Telegraphy was an advanced system of lines and electrical impulses that followed the same premise as an earlier system of signal communication called Semaphore. Semaphore was a cross-country signaling system of towers with moving arms and painted signs that were used to send coded messages. On each end of the signal, within the tower walls, one person would collect the signal, decode it, and send it on if necessary. This same system of decoding and sharing continued with the telegraph and many telegraphers were trained to understand the electrical impulses that ran across the country and across the bottom of the ocean from America to Europe. While anyone with access to a telegraph and telegraph office had the ability to have messages sent, the people who knew how to decode the signal were well trained in Morse code. Those who wanted to engage the telegraph system had to first go through the telegrapher in order to have their messages coded in the technology’s language.

Yet the telegraph technology rapidly grew in popularity because it enabled those who wanted access to connect with others over far distances. What is must have been for the new world at that time was the fact that communication could happen very quickly and across great distances, that the world was plugged in and users were reachable and “on-line.” Yet, this new technology remained foreign for those who could not comprehend the webbing lines, electrical impulses, and translations. For some, who were used to connecting with one another through

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face-to-face contact, the idea that reaching another person through a wire appeared confusing.

As Steve Dixon summarizes:

He [Standage] details extraordinary cons where even bookmakers were deceived, disbelieving that news could travel so fast; love affairs developing between lonely bored operators that ended in either marriage or disaster; apocryphal tales of caring wives pouring warm soup into their telephones to feed their chilly spouses; people watching the overhead wires to see the tightrope walker run along them convinced that that must be how it worked; and promises of business fortunes to be made by the alert overnight.20

Not only did the world have new access to a new way of spreading information but participants could see that they were part of a larger system, that they were connected to the world outside their own lives. More and more across the country people could look up and be reminded that the lines led away from and back to them, the electrical pulses could take an individual somewhere very different and bring that place to them in relatively quick speed. The wires appearing over streets, buildings, and across the landscape informed a community that they were then equipped with the tools necessary to participate with the others in a way that was both new and incredibly interactive.

Figure 2.1: (Left) “Telex In the Street at New York City Terminal.” TELEX Q&A 1971. Photo by Julie Martin, Image Courtesy of Julie Martin. (Right) Questions asked of participants in Telex Q&A, TELEX Q&A 1971. Photo by Julie Martin, Image Courtesy of Julie Martin.

20 Dixon and Smith, Digital Performance, 459.
In 1971 artists Pontus Hulten, Fujiko Nakaya, and Billy Klüver connected Telex machines in New York to Stockholm, Ahmedabad, and Tokyo. Hulten, Nakaya, and Klüver asked their audience, who received the transmission of the broadcasted message in *Utopia: Q&A*, to predict the future by answering pre-arranged questions about the year 1981. Through the telex machine the artists communicated with their audience and the audience participated back with each other by replying to the statements from their collaborators. Even though the audience remained separated in different countries the telex machine gave them the ability to conduct an exchange. The questions asked of the audience included the following:

1. What will the rents be like?
2. Will pot replace alcohol?
3. What will replace pot?
4. What will the ratio be between liquid & dry foods?
6. Will food be more natural (raw meat and vegetables) or more artificial (pills)?
20. Will men wear neckties?
24. What nature will bureaucracy have?
29. Where will solutions to problems lie--technology, sociology, politics?
49. Will there be a difference between work and leisure?

The Telex work demonstrated that connectivity could happen using multiple channels and in multiple locations simultaneously. *Utopia: Q&A* also showed that the audience could engage with the technology in the same fashion as the artists and that the participant helped produce the performance in so much as they were given a channel back into the conversation. Furthermore, this project indicated that distance could be disregarded and that connectivity could produce a level of freedom through the collapsing of space due to networked links. Participants could engage with each other, could come together to create new art just by turning on a technology.

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Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinovitz’s satellite video connection between the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and a department store in Los Angeles is yet another example of art experimenting with the connectivity of networks, people, and technology. In their satellite video connection, *Hole-in-Space*, the artists installed large screen displays and cameras to a satellite feed that would stream “real time” video images of the two public spaces. Spectators could communicate with others on opposite sides of the United States in an installation that included a video camera, microphone, and satellite linked projections. At one point an onlooker of the installation asks, “Who are we talking to, are they actors?” A woman answers him by saying, “They are just people like you and me.” Another spectator, upon seeing the live video is asked if she understands what is happening. She responds confusingly, “They are in New York? I am in Los Angeles, right?” During one point in the video documentation one passerby seems to get excited when she is able to watch her family appear over the satellite link. She seems overwhelmed with excitement when she realizes that she is able to connect to her family through the satellite video projection. At the time, to be connected in a public space to another public space through live video transmission prompted new and exciting relationships between participants. Steve Dixon summarizes the performance by saying; “During the threeday period that the *Hole-in-Space* (1980) linked installation was active, relationships were struck up and developed between some of the remote participants who would return each day; and

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25 Ibid..
relatives and friends in the two cities arranged times to meet, using the artwork ‘as a medium to re-establish contact.’”

A third project is Troika Ranch’s and Critical Art Ensemble’s (CAE) *The Electronic Disturbance* of 1996. According to Dixon, telematic performances, or live performances lined by telecommunications, hit their high point in the late 1990s. In *The Electronic Disturbance* Ranch connected The Kitchen in New York to The Electronic Café in San Francisco and Studio X in Santa Fe. While the performance between the ensemble members in the three venues could be described as theatrical, and took place as a production solely by company members on the World Wide Web, viewers could communicate in real time with the company as the show progressed. Viewers could also communicate with the performers through text. By exchanging lines of text in real time, along with the telematics performance, the artists were able to build multiple scenarios for connectivity. This meant that the audience had more than one choice for their connection and could engage with each other or with the performers in numerous ways, leading to a more interconnected experience.

**Good Morning, Mr. Orwell**

In response to George Orwell’s novel *1984*, new media and video artist Nam June Paik produced an international art experience that connected New York City to the Pompidou Centre in Paris, France via real-time satellite transmissions. Paik’s 1984 work, titled *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, allowed artists from three different locals, spread across the world, to create a live, immediate, new work of art through the use of the satellite connection. The former “real-world” problems of distance, space, and time where actors needed to be confined within the same local

26 Dixon and Smith, *Digital Performance*, 420.

27 Ibid., 420.
did not matter in Paik’s performance. Paik’s satellite art project, *Bright Star*, allowed participants to experience real-time through the transmission of a signal in much the same way as Kit Galloway and Sherrie Rabinovitz’s *Hole-in-Space*. The work featured several productions and performances that would take place at the end of one satellite link and show up on a TV or projection on the other side of the Link. The work could be described, now, as an early television station where invited participants acted out scenarios in front of the camera and in real time with their spectators across the satellite connection. As Tom Morton writes:

> Nam June Paik broadcast his telethon-like work *Good Morning Mr. Orwell* from a series of satellite-linked television studios in New York, West Germany, South Korea and Paris’ Pompidou Centre, to an estimated audience of some 25 million people. Comprising live and pre-recorded material, its highlights included Merce Cunningham dancing with his own delayed image, John Cage producing music by trilling a feather across the needles of a cactus, and British synth-pop trio the Thompson Twins performing their drive-time classic ‘Hold Me Now’ (1983).28

Even though the screen flickers, connections are lost, and the content of the work appears disparate, Paik’s performance may be considered truer to the nature of interconnection because it had its problems. At the beginning of the work George Plimpton welcomes his Parisian friend with a toast to the New Year, but Plimpton and the gentleman from the Pompidou stumble over each other’s words and salutes. Due to what might have been a mistranslation, or a sporadic satellite connection one speaks over the other and the two awkwardly revert to speaking to their own camera audiences when they realize that their attempt to converse does not work. This type of verbal disorder fills Paik’s airways between New York and Paris as users fumble with the proper use of the technology and their communication with each other.

At one point in *Good Morning Mr. Orwell*, two performers, who are separated by physical space and brought together through the satellite connection, begin a critique of the “The

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Insidious Destruction of Human Intimacy by Television Technology.” About a minute into their discussion they suggest to each other that they are not being publicly transmitted out to the world and, so, start a personal conversation between each other. The male character seems to want the female to become more human than she appeared to be on the television by telling him of her affections for their physical relationship. Quickly, the mood intensifies and the male becomes threatening, telling the female that he can’t go on without her personal admiration and will, thusly, kill himself. Finally the male character pulls out a jar of MSG, which he is allergic to, and tells the woman that he will do it. He cries, “I don’t care! I don’t care about this show! I don’t care about the Avant-garde! All I care about is you!”29 Once their personal moment is gone, and once the connection to the outside world is reestablished the two characters return to their former detached roles, disregarding the human relationship they had just experienced.

The network of interconnectivity ran as a theme throughout Paik’s performances and art works. While Paik’s 1984 Satellite installation connected the art world of New York to the art world of Paris, the artist’s second satellite installation, which he performed in 1986, was an attempt to connect the East to the West. Possibly in an attempt to detail his own nationality as a Korean immigrant to the United States, Paik established a digital satellite connection to Japan and Korea where he could directly juxtapose the traditions of his past with the technology of the present. Even the title of the show reflected the assumed representation of space, alluding to the Rudyard Kipling’s statement that the east and west will never intersect. "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet."30 Paik’s work displayed that with the aid of current


technology, especially with satellite connectivity, it was possible to bring two different settings together. Similar to Paik’s physical connection to the east he remembered while located in the west he was able to find a way to display that connection in one installation without having to decide where his body belonged at the moment. For Paik, the exhibition allowed him the ability to move through space and time and become connected in ways that were not physically possible without the satellite connection.

The choice of the medium is also important for Paik’s installation between continents. It not only illustrated the possibility of the technology but also commented on the growing presence of television and satellite communication. While the artist used the technology to draw comparisons between separated bodies, he was, at the same time, offering a critique of the growing consciousness of globalization. According to O’Conner, Paik seems wary of the medium: “He worries about how people perceive each other in a world that television is constantly reducing to the long-promised (or threatened) “global village.”31 The possibility of being connected to the entire world was a promotion point for satellite technology, and so, the presence of the technology meant that anyone could turn on the TV and find an entirely different life outside their living rooms. As long as viewers connected to a satellite dish they could watch world events at any given moment and without doing anything other than flipping through the TV Channel guide. By the time Paik had started his satellite transmissions, the medium was already defined with what was distinctive to the medium. This meant that Paik, when designing his transmission, needed to consider what the medium meant to the viewer. As Paik states, “It is a big risk to create a live television show in such a large scale with high art only. [...] I am not

31 O’Connor, “Bye Bye Kipling.”
saying that we are not creating high art, but that we are creating a new high art with new materials.”\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{Familiar and Strange: New Media Art Through Networks}

\textit{Silophone} is a digital sound and Internet installation located in an abandoned grain storage facility in the port of Montréal, Canada. What is unique about this instrument is that it is activated or “played” by online users logged into a website or through phone access. \textit{Silophone}’s instrument functions both in digital and the real space. Because the control of the instrument’s sound is located online, the player of the instrument, the performer, is never in the physical presence of the instrument. The performer, the online controller and listener, may never hear the full tone of the installation because the sound is not able to travel back to the listener in the same way as it would be if the listener stood inside the instrument’s exhibiting structure. The physical instrument originates from the Montréal-based artistic collaboration called “[The User],”\textsuperscript{33} comprised of architect Thomas McIntosh and composer Emmanuel Madan, and is located in what the artists call the “Sonic Observatory.”\textsuperscript{34} Website users may engage the instrument through the manipulation of pre-recorded sound files that are triggered by composition and selection through its website. Not only is the installation activated by its website but users may phone up the installation and reach others within the physical environments where the work appears. According to its website:

The sonic observatory acts as the physical manifestation of the Silophone and is immediately and permanently accessible to the general public. The sonic observatory is

\textsuperscript{32} Eduardo Kac, “Satellite Art: An Interview with Nam June Paik,” Ekac.org, 2005, accessed October 18, 2013, \url{http://ekac.org/paik.interview.html}.

\textsuperscript{33} McIntosh, Thomas and Emmanuel Madan, “Silophone,” a sound exhibition started in November, 2000 and activated online, accessed June 3, 2013, \url{http://www.silophone.net/}.

\textsuperscript{34} Idem.
equipped with a microphone allowing people to contribute sounds to the Silophone, and two loudspeakers allowing them to hear the echo of their voice. The installation has been open and accessible day and night, winter and summer since November 2000.\textsuperscript{35}

Participants in the project’s sonic collaboration are able to select from a list of files on the instrument’s website or are encouraged to upload their own files to the site that will be added to the growing reference of sounds. This means that the instrument’s capability and sonic production grows as sounds are added online. To load a sound for play on the instruments, participants select from the online library. Once selected, the user is notified that the sound will play within a couple of seconds. The problem with this installation is that if the connection, or the “Real Audio” stream, is deactivated, the sound might not work, or may function incorrectly. Furthermore, the project presence may not be fully realized because the participant remains disconnected from the physical environment due to the connection to an internet street, a digital network. This may be the reason why the project incorporates the use of a telephone system, which links the sound from within the installation’s exhibit back to the online calling listener. The telephone allows users to participate in the realization of the final project by listening and adding to the sonic production through the phone connection. As stated on the project website, the phone has its advantages because users can hear the performance as it happens and at the same time add to the installation in ways that are introduced by the website connection: “Using your telephone, you can enter into — and participate in — the acoustic world of the Silo. More than one person can use the telephone system at once, so when you telephone you may find somebody else already in the Silo.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Idem.

\textsuperscript{36} Idem.
Users are interconnected through the physical environment and the digital platform. But the identities of others who may be engaged with the instrument are not revealed. This means that online users are not aware of the selections other participants are making at the time. The only time participant’s identities are revealed happens when performers of the instrument are given the option to add their own sound into the playable track list. The names of users appear with the uploaded personal sound samples that are logged and left in the instrument’s pre-recorded data set. Once a sound has been uploaded to the instrument it is stored there for others to choose from after. The sounds that are pre-recorded cannot be altered or manipulated by the online user. This means that the instrument does not have advanced user capabilities like volume or tone outside the prescribed, and fixed, data. While *Silophone* presents the possibility for users to control actions and create artworks across the web, the absence of advanced user capabilities shows that more creative innovations could make this project even more exciting. Unique to *Silophone* are the multiple platforms from which to observe the work. While the mainframe, or control booth, resides online, open to anyone who has Internet access, the body is found in a physical form where interested parties must travel to in order to participate.

While the *Silophone* may bring people together in order to create sound in a physical environment, another community online art project forms sounds and music through collaborative creativity by engaging with each other over the net at the same time. *Net Vs. Net Collective* enables the engagement of musicians in different places and gives them the ability to perform together because they are connected to each other through the Internet. As explained on the project’s website, Net vs. Net is a collective of musicians exploring the potential of high-speed networks as a real-time performance medium. Founded in 2007 by Juan-Pablo Cáceres and Alain Renaud, it takes its inspiration from the comic strip *Spy vs. Spy* as a metaphor of the delay
battle that happens on the network between two or more geographically displaced musicians.”

What is distinctive about *Net Vs. Net Collective* performances are that artists, and their instruments, are connected via the Internet and can communicate with their collaborators through the streaming video or audio from the computer. During these performances artists appear on a projected screen alongside their collaborators and are able to engage with the sounds of their collaborators in real-time due to their high-speed Internet connectivity.

Because of the notion that performers act in conjunction with their peers, *Net Vs. Net Collective* produces a more “real” representation of traditional music composition than *Silophone*, where the digital system and mixing of pre-arranged digital data, creates the sound file. These performances rely on the presence and interaction between artists at the moment of creativity but, instead of being in the same place, the artists are separated by the Internet connection. This means, that even though the technology is important to accomplish the task, it must essentially be forgotten, or removed in a way as to be hidden, in the creative process. Yet, while the collaborative musicians rely entirely on the transmission as their collaborators’ sound appears over the projection and audio speakers the technology poses a threat to the accomplishment of the project because it has the possibility of network and connection failure. If the transmission falters, which may happen from time to time due to connectivity speed, the performance is interrupted or affected. This means that participants do not have full control over their performance and are left inhibited, even just a little bit, by the advancements and capabilities of the technology.

In one performance some *Net Vs. Net Collective* artists found a way to combat the possibility of the disconnection by designing a visual guide or digital musical score. During

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Pauline Oliveros’s production of *One Hundred Meeting Places for Mixed Ensembles*, performers relied on a black and white image that appeared along with the streaming video of connected performers on the installation screen during the performance. The screen displayed a coded message for the musicians. At the top of the projected screen, which appeared in front of the performers, there was a black bar. Throughout the collaborative composition the bar changed length according to the length of the note a performer was required to play; when the bar stopped moving the performer was supposed to stop playing the instrument. Performers were asked to keep an eye on two more projected markings on the screen in order to determine who played an instrument as the black bar appeared and disappeared. Below the black bar, arranged vertically, were two additional numbers. One of these numbers seemed to be a counter that counts the note played while the other seemed to suggest what kind of note was played during this time. All musicians relied on this digitally produce and projected code as their score to the work.

Not only are interrelated and intersecting sounds produced through these performances but the projected screen allows the performers to visually communicate their works. At some times during these performances, artists project their computer desktop screens into the installation in order to display a visual element into the work. During Robert Hamilton’s *Jorg og Himmel* performers include architecturally designed landscapes into the work that represent the visualization of the sound taking place between the artists. This projected architectural drawing gives the audience the ability to span even more space as they make their way through the video’s halls and rooms and at the same time be confronted by the sound coming across the connection. As described online:

*Jord og Himmel* explores the use of virtual space as both communal instrument and dynamic meeting space, bringing together musical performers from around the globe who interact with the environment as well as themselves as the piece unfolds. Worlds collide and become one as motion and gesture in the virtual world are realized as audible sound and music in the physical world. The audience itself teeters on the edge, positioned between two worlds, as a multi-channel sound system surrounds and envelops the concert hall, placing virtual performers and their musical gestures around and directly within the listening space.  

The differences between *Silophone* and *Net vs. Net Collective* are significant even though they are both productions of sound through online collaboration. *Net Vs. Net Collective* is a real-time collaborative engagement between users and relies on other artists to create as a group. *Silophone* users do not need to know that they are part of a larger system and can come to the instrument independent of any other influences from other users. This means that the *Silophone* players are alone and the *Net Vs. Net Collective* player is part of a community engaged and willing to work together. Furthermore, the *Net vs. Net Collective* performer plays according to a designated score or through communication with his/her collaborator, where the *Silophone* participant decides what to do with the data set presented through the playlist. This relationship between performer and data positions the *Silophone* controller as a DJ, sampling music tones from a list instead of producing the tone on his/her own accord as a performing musician would. The ability to sample digital code is, for Lev Manovich, a unique characteristic of computation and new media. As Manovich writes, “The new media object is something that can exist in numerous versions and numerous incarnations.” This multiplicity of media is what Manovich attributes to new technologies and new media because it is scattered across varying platforms, sometimes dislodged from the original, which is why the DJ is critical. The DJ, for Manovich, is

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40 Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 134.
a person who can easily select, or sample, from the pieces in order to create, or bring together, a new type of work.

The ability to select from different types of data with long sets of lists and information is made easier by the computer, and especially by digital code. Therefore, in order to navigate the large files and datasets, which are housed on the computer, Manovich calls on the DJ to become the new creative practitioner for digital creativity. This sampler, whose whole job is to select and reposition data, exhibits how fluid the data is as it passes from varied technological apparatuses and interconnected coded material. Manovich writes:

I would like to invoke a particular cultural figure, a new kind of author for whom this operation is key—the DJ who creates music in real-time by mixing existing music tracts and who is dependent on various electron hardware devices….The rise of this figure can be directly correlated to the rise of the computer culture. The DJ best demonstrates it new logic: selection and combination of preexistent elements […] The essence of the DJ’s art is the ability to mix selected elements in rich and sophisticated ways. In contrast to the “cut and Paste” metaphor of modern GUI that suggests that selected elements can be simply, almost mechanically, combined, the practice of live electronic music demonstrates that true art lies in the “mix.”

Remixing Networks

In two of Andrea Zapp’s installations, the artist encouraged her audience to “become” subjects within the creation of the work because they position themselves inside the sculptural installation within a gallery space. They also “become” digital subjects because they are captured by cameras in the installation, remediated as digital projections and then sent across connected networks where they are received by other digital users and spaces as satellite installations. In Zapp’s 2005 Unheimlich: Telematic Theatre Performance, the artist collaborated with Steve Dixon, Mathias Fuchs and Paul Sermon in a virtual performance that placed real time interaction as participants perform over an online connection between the

41 Ibid., 134-35.
University of Salford in Manchester, England and Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Described in the documentation of the work, the artists not only shifted positions within their own stage but relied on the projection of their fellow actors in order to define the scenarios unfolding for the audience. According to the video announcer:

This dram titled *Unheimlich* taken from the Freudian term meaning familiar yet strange uses broadband Internet video conferencing to connect audiences and performers in geographic remote locations […] the distant actors are composited in the same tele-present image and share the same stage. Computer generated background and virtual environments are determined live and initiate imaginative dialog and improvisation between the participant and actors. Spanning a six-hour time zone audience participants in Providence USA are invited into the virtual world of two actors in Manchester England. Once they have set onto this blue stage they are visually merged with the actors on screen in Salford where they can talk to them and perform with them as if they are in the same room.42

Zapp’s group of performers interacted not with the physical bodies of other performers but with the projection of their bodies that were carried across the Internet network. While the installation’s exhibition takes place in the two locales, the networked projection allows a bonding of the two environments. In this case, space does not matter because the actors are engaged with each other as if they would be if they were on the same stage and in the same place. The connection through the network gives way and the performers come alive through their projections.

Zapp’s sculptural and digital environments challenge assumptions about virtual and physical participation and employ the varying kinds of network connectivity also developed in *Silophone* and Net VS Net Collective. Zapp’s art installations are constructed to intertwine viewers in multiple media, including digital copies, as they engage with actual objects in the space. The use of technological and social networks permit Zapp to recreate and project live

video from one position in the space out and into other locales, sometimes in other parts of the space or even outside the gallery setting. According to Zapp, her interests lie in the networks that connect participants with place and presence. She accomplishes the multi-presences either by separating the viewer’s identity through various digital channels from within the installed local of the exhibition, by using technology and network connection from the installed sculptural parts, or by linking to others in other situations across online connections and networks. Zapp makes the passive interaction with the work active by “projecting” the audience right in the middle of the work as it happens. The artist produced a networked scenario where users finds themselves engaged because their image is digitally captured and then projected back onto the work in front on them. It is the networks and the interconnectivity of the system to technology and to the remediation that allows the artists to not only mirror the viewer through the work but do so in different spaces and at different times. In her artist statement Zapp focuses on the network environments as a way to create an “active audience” and is interested in the relationships between the real and the projected, the “human” and the “data.” As Zapp writes, “I question human presence and identity as increasingly subject to a constant flow of online contributions, data and non-physical body representation.”

A second installation work places multiples within the same room, asking the audience to see themselves in multiple places at the same time. In Human Avatars, Zapp installed two scenarios in two different locations that were connected to each other by overlapping video transmissions. The artist installed a life-size room, or “shed” as she calls it, on one side of the exhibition and in the other she placed a model version of that room. The audience was able to enter into this life size room, where they could choose to sit in a chair that overlooks a window.

On the window the artist projected collected and real-time images of other gallerygoers that were looking into the window of the model shed. A camera from the shed takes an image of the seated participant and transfers it to the window on the model house on the other side of the exhibition plan. A camera then captures the image of the viewer looking into the model house as they watch the projection of the person in the life size room. The image captured by the camera inside the model house, which captures the viewer peering through the window, is then transferred back into the life-sized room where the first viewer sits. This image is then projected on the life-sized window of that room, activating a real-time video loop that connects each space.

According to Zapp’s website:

The stage is in the form of a wooden hut. One’s first encounter is with his tiny model hut, which seemingly has miniature figures seated inside. Visitors in another part of the exhibition space can also enter a full-sized wooden hut. The miniature figures are in fact their live image, which is remotely projected into the model version of the hut, where other visitors can see the tiny moving figures by peeping through a small window, unaware that a small surveillance camera in the model itself is conversely displaying their peering faces back on the window of the big hut, with their huge eyes now terrifying the participants inside.44

Instead of isolating space across areas, as seen in her collaborative performance of Unheimlich, Zapp’s Human Avatars accomplished the same technological networking but did so from within the same locale, inside the gallery walls. What is critical, outside the network connections, for both projects is the projection of the other-- the projections become a digital copy ready for delivery and remediation across the network. Participation in Unheimlich, and Human Avatars means that those who act with the work trust in the network and the projections that appear in front of them. Like the female figure in Hole-in-Space, who trusted that her mother and father stood in front of her, Zapp’s participants must put aside the fact that they are engaging with a digital object in order to reach out to those who are seeking connection. The

44 Idem..
participant must understand that they can exist as equals between the bodily and the digital. The audience seeks the recognition from others because they know that on the other side sits a living body wanting to wave back to them.

**The Artist Is Present**

When performance artist Marina Abramović sat face to face with visitors of her New York Museum of Modern Art exhibition she gave full responsibility of participation to her audience. In this exhibition, titled *The Artist Is Present* audience members were invited to sit in front of her, one at a time. This interaction, even though the artist never exchanged words with her collaborators, positioned her as a human object ready to engage with community members. As described on MoMA’s exhibition website, “Visitors were encouraged to sit silently across from the artist for a duration of their choosing, becoming participants in the artwork.”

Abramović seemed completely open to her collaborators’ engagement as she welcomed her viewers to join her on the exhibition floor and stage. By setting up a scenario where visitors leave their passive role and become active participants, by having them justify the presence in front of them as they examined the artist’s motionless face, the spectators become the subject under examination by those who are watching from outside. Interconnectivity in the community of “witnesses” materialized through the realization that each participant acted in the same manner and membership meant that members saw the artist’s true identity; they had seen the artist’s presence. Therefore, membership in this community required the shared experience of observation through performance.

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For many the experience of examining the artist’s presence intensified emotions. Some participants burst out in tears as they sat in front of the artists. Others, like performance artist Amir Baradarab, launched into tearful meditation, chants, and song. One of the reasons for these passionate reactions to the exhibition was, in part, the fact that the artist’s position challenged the audience as each viewer ascended onto the stage and became part of the experience. The transference between artist and participants caused the viewer to accept the power of the artist while he or she, not the artist, decided how long the encounter would last. When Barbadarab left from his time in front of the artist, for instance, during which he performed an emotional meditative chant, Abramović seemed to break down. After Barbadarab left, Abramović placed her head in her hands and cried. Barbadarab’s experience with Abramović displays how the viewer, or the participant, holds power of the interaction because he or she can decide how deep the human interaction goes.

At the same time some viewers walked away from the experience not feeling anything for the work or the artist. In her own experience with the work, art historian Amelia Jones had a different take. In fact, for Jones, the situation she participated in took away from the experience of seeing the artist as present. Shuffling participants who were waiting for their turn filled the exhibition with their camera flashes, and exhibition guards scooting visitors along in the crowded lines pushed visitors like Jones to feel that they were not really part of the one to one relationship, that they were only part of a larger group of witnesses:

Abramovic’s recent practice, in its desire to manifest presence, points to the very fact that the live act itself destroys presence (or makes the impossibility of its being secured evident). The live act marks the body, understood as an expression of the self, as representational. Thus, as someone who sat across from Abramovic; in the atrium of MoMA, surrounded by a barrier like a boxing ring, itself surrounded by dozens of staring

visitors, cameras, and lit by klieg lights, I can say personally I found the exchange to be anything but energizing, personal, or transformative. Though I felt aware that the person I have met and whom I respect as an artist and cultural force was sitting there before me, I primarily felt myself the object of myriad individual and photographic gazes (including hers), and the experience overall was very strongly one of participating in a spectacle—not an emotionally or energetically charged interpersonal relation, but a simulation of relational exchange with others (not just the artist, but the other spectators, the guards, the “managers” of the event). 47

Jones here describes her experience as a spectator who participated as a collaborator in a larger performance spectacle. For Jones her presence in front of others did not reflect inward. Instead, this spectacle and performance seemed to be a stage for the production of the larger collaboration. This meant that Jones realized that she was not alone with the artist in the work, and thus, the artist’s presence could never be fully realized: “‘Presence’ as commonly understood is a state that entails the unmediated co-extensivity in time and place of what I perceive and myself; it promises a transparency to an observer of what ‘is’ at the very moment at which it takes place. But the event, the performance, by combining materiality and durationality (its enacting of the body as always already escaping into the past) points to the fact that there is no ‘presence’ as such.” 48

*The Artists is Present* never included an online component that affected the engagement between artist and participant. On the other hand, a potential work may have unfolded, incidentally, when the museum placed a large collection of photographed portraits of participants who sat in front of the artist during the exhibition. These photographs, taken in the museum space, place the various persons, or members of the witnessing community, into the event. What the MoMa Flickr collection reveals is not a revelation into the artist’s presence but the networks between a community of online spectators who both relive the experience with the artists and


48 Ibid., 18.
then create their own experience with the documented information by linking to friends and making comments about the original installation. The online collection does something different to the exhibit but, somehow, makes it even more real because we now see how interconnected the work is to the community of those who engaged. This means that the artist’s presence, while felt during the exhibit by those who went to sit in front of her, has now taken a larger identity with the addition of the collection online.

The exhibition housed in the Flickr collection describes, with the use of images, an intense interplay of human relationships between the artist and her audience. But, it also depicts a complex interconnection to identities that extend past the exhibition. The images are used to build a continued presence of the exhibition by documenting the exchange between the participants but, due to the use of the Flickr account instead of a personal databank of images from the MoMA website, the online collections allows users to connect with others through the community of service members. Flickr members are allowed to comment on each portrait by tagging text, names, descriptions of the situation from which the photograph happened, or links to other webpages or personal pages where the identity of the portrait’s sitter is revealed. By comment or tagging the image members, and even friends who recognize the person in the image, could reveal the true identity of the portrait’s sitter, thus, building more recognition of the community of members who engaged the project in real life.

Take, for example, the portrait of Amir Baradarab, photographed by Marco Anelli, which is present on Flickr as an image from Abramović’s performance exhibition. While connected to the exhibition through the Flickr photo file, other users of Flickr start to comment
on and seek the person behind this powerful image. Through their comments the sitter’s name is uncovered by Flickr users who have come across the portrait and a link is made to the artist’s website where his identity is detailed. The action taken by the community to draw connections between these online documents, the photographed images from the exhibition, and the physical experience of being in the community of participants who saw the exchange happen, and then back to the digital placeholder where the identity of the photographed participants becomes known, at least through their online presence, displays a complex array of human relationships that are enabled by the Internet. What is most important is that the artist’s presence allows for that multiplicity to take shape.

Not only are Flickr users posting content on these images, they are also making work out of the images and the experience, pushing that work back out through the online collection. Take for example Baradarab’s own attempt to use Abramović’s for his own performance. Baradarab captures his exchange, his chant and song, with Abramović through video and places that video on his own website. In this case Baradarab suggests that he has completed his own performance work of art and is now using his website to display his performance that appropriates his experience with Abramović.

Visitors to the MoMA Flickr image can quickly find their way to Baradarab’s performance piece by following the links in the comments. Another example comes from Marco Anelli’s “Day 1, Portrait 14.” This example is not only intriguing because the image is remediated into a drawing and then placed back on a different members Flickr account, but also because members seem to title the work through their comments. The image depicts a young woman who has a spike in her left ear, which becomes the identity of the work; a comment on

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the Flickr page refers to the portrait as, “girl with a spike earring.” This identity follows the portrait as another Flickr member used the original photograph to make a line drawing of the woman. This member, Daniel Lie, then places the line drawing copy back on his own Flickr page with the title of the image as “Girl with a spike earring.”

This title has not moved from the comment box of the original image and became the identifier of a second image that was never meant to appear with the MoMA original. In the linking of all these documents together by the community participants, the original exhibition is repeated over and over. Due to the complex interconnectivity that forms through the multiplicity of the original event Abramović’s presence takes on additional weight, as an exhibition of work that will never go away because it has been placed online. MoMa’s online exhibition collection of Abramović’s performance, intentional to the point of the work or not, has made the experience more livable because we can return and see those who were affected by the artist as she sat in her chair. Abramović presence lives because we are connected to the digital images and will return to them over and over. Furthermore, as long as the links stay connected to the users these images will always link us back to those who participated.

The Network of a Mob

Early Flash Mobs organized by Bill Wasik, then editor of Harper’s Magazine, exhibited how users interconnected through a network both in a physical way but also through the connections made with others online. For the first Flash Mob, Wasik anonymously instructed acquaintances, through email correspondence, to meet at a retail store in New York City at a specific time. Unfortunately, the first mob failed to transpire even though many participants made their way to Wassik’s designated location. The reason why it failed had to do with the fact that by the time his mob had assembled on its target location the Manhattan police were waiting.
They, too, had been forwarded the anonymous email and worried about what might happen if the event took place. In this instance telling the group to go to a specific place at a specific time gave too much information out to the group. This tactic was changed for Wasik’s second and later attempts. Wasik’s first email was very simple but effective. It read as follows: “You are invited to take part in MOB, the project that creates an inexplicable mob of people in New York City for ten minutes or less. Please forward this to other people you know who might like to join.”\(^{50}\) Wasik made sure to send this email to himself through an unidentified obscure email address so the origin of the email could not be traced back to him. Receiving this email meant being on a kind of special guest list; those who were cool enough to be linked up to other cool people were “invited.” This network thus resembled a data map of the persons who were the official self-proclaimed “scenesters.”

In the second mob, Bill’s instructions were very short, exact and specific. Recipients of Wasik’s email notification were told to meet at one of four local bars, where they were then to be given further directions. Once participants had reached their locations they were handed pieces of paper telling them of their next step. Wasik’s instructions announced that at precisely 7:27 pm the group should assemble around one particular rug on the 9th floor of Macy’s department store in the home furnishings area. The directions also instructed the mob to stand near this particular Oriental rug and contemplate its beauty.

Further instructions suggested that if any salesperson asked what the group was doing, any member of the mob would answer that they all lived in a warehouse together in Long Island City, Queens, and needed a “Love Rug,” which the group could only purchase together. Exactly

10 minutes later, at 7:37, the group left through the front doors and dispersed out into the street and back into their daily lives. The event was over.

For Wasik, art was a key component of the project. In fact, according to Wasik, he was looking at this as one large art project, commenting on the growing community of young, urban, socialites who referred to themselves as “scenesters.” As Wasik explains his early flash mobs performance art: “To me, flash mobs were a kind of performance art and […] they were a social experiment, they were a demonstration of what the technology of internet chain emails could do and text messaging can do and a demonstration of social networks in the way in which people can just through you know one person forwards it to ten people and they forward it to 10 people and before you know it you can gather really tremendous crowds.”

Important to the project as an artwork were the connections made through the network of email exchanges, forwards, and the fact that anyone in the network of emails and digital messages could have been the leader and instructor. Not only was Wasik an invisible participant, but also anyone who played along had the chance to show up and leave without anyone saying anything to them or even know them. The mob was all about the herd instinct—about the desire not to be left out of the latest fad; logically, then, it would grow as quickly as possible and then—this seemed obvious—buckle under the weight of its own popularity. Yet, by forwarding the emails and commenting on social media sites, even virtual identities could participate in the mob. By being part of the email chain or the blog repost/comment, the online self was essential to the project’s success. So you have a group of people, at the beginning and the end, connected only by a social

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52 Wasik, “My Crowd,” 58.
media network and connected only for a short time by a random event. The event is coordinated through a network of anonymous online identities and takes the form of “in-the-know,” strangers being compelled to descend on a particular place at a particular time.

Wasik’s Flash Mob project revealed a new phenomenon, which positioned users as constantly linked to the newest forms of technology. In this case Wasik saw a particular group of impressionable young adults who relied on connectivity to others through their continuous access to technology. The emails and the texts messages were the documents of the connections between participants but what allowed the full realization of the project was the ease with which the connection to others and the network happened. By proposing the events through the digital chain of communication and connection, Wasik’s mobs grew as community reactions that appeared as physical exhibitions but also the documentation of the more powerful cultural and social condition, the identity of a digital network. By focusing on this social component, Wasik surveys that this group of young adults who were increasingly connected to each other through technology relied on as well as propelled how the technology developed.

This is why Wasik’s Flash Mobs worked so well at first: he knew that his subjects possessed a higher ability, and were more knowledgeable about technology and that it was this technological connectivity that gave him the resources to hook into that group. Wasik’s subjects found identity with each other and to other members partly because they all shared in the technologically connected and networked practice. Because they knew how this new system of email exchange and interconnectivity worked, they could benefit both the online community and the physical event.

Wasik’s Flash Mob project resided in both the virtual and the physical world as performance art, which brought anonymous members of a community together and, at the same
time, a digital letter trail of the email exchanges that were shared through the interconnect
member. For Wasik, the point of the Flash Mob series of performances was to show that even
though users were interconnected by digital means they still had use of their bodies and could
cause a physical action just by showing up and participating in person:

They [Flash Mobs] were a social experiment, they were a demonstration of what the
technology of internet chain emails could do and text messaging can do and a
demonstration of social networks in the way in which people can just through you know
one person forwards it to ten people and they forward it to 10 people and before you
know it you can gather really tremendous crowds. And I also think that they were an
important demonstration to the people who took part in them where, you know,
especially in this kind of era of Facebook where we have these large communities of
“friends” but our relationship with them are so virtual and they’re so bound up in this
very ephemeral or kind of just purely digital transactions where you see a face on the
screen and you send a message or you see a post on the wall. There’s something about
flash mobs where those connections are suddenly made really explicit or really virtual
and they remind us that we are still people who have bodies and still people who have the
ability to create change in the real physical world.53

Art critic and historian Suzi Gablik views artists and art production via the increasing
uses of connectivity. For Gablik, this new awareness is a “paradigm shift” away from the “the
myth of the hard-edged autonomous individualist that has formed the artist’s identity,
particularly in modern times.”54 Gablik believes that the arts, and art practice, is now
fundamentally altering its perception of itself because artists see that they are currently part of a
larger system. “Currently, a new, less specialized, less monocentric mythology of the artist is
emerging that affirms our radical relatedness,” Gablik asserts. “At this point, we need to
cultivate the connective, relational self as thoroughly as we have cultivated, in the many years of
abstract thinking, the mind geared to the principle of individual selfhood.”55 Gablik calls this

53 Wasik, “Bill Wasik Introduces Flash Mobs,”


55 Ibid., 2.
new realization for artistic practice *Connective Aesthetics*. Gablik focuses on artworks that display the ways users used technological connectivity through social participation. Gablik recognizes the new realities of online connectivity as a way to make new work. Instead of artists creating the autonomous studio object of the modern past, Gablik presents a new theoretical turn for artists, one that displays the developing connection to others through technology and networks. Presently, artists may find that the connections to others offer possibilities for creativity, and, that those possibilities should be the focus of present creative examination as much as the independent and autonomous art object was of the past. Connective aesthetics highlights artworks that are “relational” and examine the relationships between participants that contribute to the creative practice and exhibition. As Gablik writes:

> Individualism and freedom were the great modernist buzzwords, but they are hardly the most creative response to our planet's immediate needs, which now demand complex and sensitive forms of interaction and linking. Such relationships require a consciousness that is different from the structural isolation and self-referentiality of individualism. In the post- Cartesian, ecological world view that is now emerging, the self is no longer isolated and self-contained but relational and interdependent.⁵⁶

Suzi Gablik’s use of the term “Relational” recalls Nicolas Bourriaud’s work with artists, developed under the practice of Relational Aesthetics. These relational artworks, as we have seen, reflect the interconnection of the social situations between artists, viewers, and audience. Yet, Gablik’s use of the “relational” in this place may be misleading. For much of Relational Art the work came from the situation around an engagement between participants, or event. While networks allow the feeling of connection and contact to others, this is mediated contact. Relational Aesthetics stem from a desire to connect with others in real world situations and Relational artists endeavor to remove the unneeded circumstances that may take away from one to one interaction between artist and participant. Therefore, a mediated and computer activated

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.
interaction would not be relational because participants would require technology for the engagement of and experience with others.

Works of relational art did not require input from a technological structure like the Internet. But, Wasik’s Flash Mob required the online email connection as much as the physical connection with a community and location. Unique to most of the COAPs listed above are the ways artists mix both the inside connection, the online linked network to create art, and the outside occurrence, the performance art that is set to action by the project’s realization. Because the outside production exhibited by online participatory artworks involves the viewer in much the same way performance art has done in the past, especially since DaDa and Futurism, COAPs tend to be misrepresented due to the relationship and attachment to audience participation. But, the problem with classifying all of these projects as performance is exemplified by Google Maps Road Trip. In this work, the artists never appeared in a specific locale with an activated, non-digital, audience. The presentation of the work remained online and solely digital. While some parts of it spilled out to real-life actions, where the artists reached out to others using the phone system, they never appeared at a location in physical form and the audience never met each other to create an action or production.

**Tactical Media**

In 2012, Yes Men co-collaborators Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos created a website that encouraged its visitors to think about what they wanted Bank of America to do now that the American taxpayer owned it. In response to the U.S. government bank bailout the two artists developed an online forum on the site where the public could submit their ideas about what Bank of America should do now that the general public owns them: “We [the artists] felt it was time to create a platform where you, and thousands of people just like you, could tell Bank of
America exactly what a bank of the people — your bank — should be doing with your money.”

The artists also developed an advertising campaign that took the collected public statements from users and superimposed them into generic advertising photos to be used around the web. Users could take these images and share them with others, causing the news of this project to get out faster and with much more strength. The Yes Men rely on this type of online and mediated interaction to draw attention to their work and to the political and social issues they feel are important enough to address by the larger user platform.

This politically activated and technology driven project is a more recent work for the Yes Men, who have been working in a similar manner for some time. In one of the earlier projects, Dow Chemical, Servin appears on a BBC newscast as a representative of the Dow Company and made the official statement that Dow Company acknowledged that the company caused the horrific disaster in Bhopal, where thousands of Indians from Madhya Pradesh died. In the interview, Servin apologized for the mess and promised the company would help clean the mess with a 12 billion dollar plan. In yet another work, which took place on Saturday, July 4th, 2009, the Yes Men constructed a fake New York Times website/webpage and printed 80,000 fake copies of the New York Times, which they placed in New York City and Los Angeles. On the front page of the paper and on the main page of the online site, the fake paper declared the end of the Iraq War, along with the establishment of a U.S. national healthcare service. According to their website, “The edition, which bears the same look and feel as the real deal, includes stories

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describing what the future could hold, if we forced Obama to be the president we'd elected him to be.”

Mediated technological activism is not unique to the Yes Men. Other political activist artists and art groups, like *Critical Art Ensemble* and *Electronic Disturbance Theatre* also use interconnected technology as a way to promote audience participation and even civic action. This type of work is referred to as “tactical media” and includes works of art that use technology as a way to put pressure on social institutions and political issues. Rita Raley describes Tactical Media projects as social critiques, which positions the audience as advocates and protagonists taking it upon themselves to “disrupt” the social order. Tactical media are works of art that engage big issues with small interactions, usually personal engagement between participants, interconnected mediated topic, and the act of disruption. As Raley writes, “These projects are not oriented toward the grand, sweeping revolutionary event; rather, they engage in a micropolitics of disruption, intervention, and education.” Tactical media events, much like COAPs, blur the positions participants assume when they engage with the work, usually interchanging artists with the participants. Tactical media work best when an interconnected community joins together under a amalgamated entity of action in order to cause better disruption. According to Raley, “Tactical media events and projects, and the moments of dissent and critique they produce, are not simply oppositional because there is no definitive ‘they’ to confront […] These artist-activists thus critique and resist the new world order but do so from

59 Ibid..

within by intervening on the site of symbolic systems of power: networks of finance, technologies of war, even, as in the case of The Yes Men, corporate conferences.61

Tactical media stresses the relationship between the acting person, the social encounter of the action, which is designed by the artists, the group that gives strength to the action, and the institution that becomes the target of the disruption. This engaged formation means that all parties must remain interconnected and that the engagement is an act of connectivity. Like the Relational Artists who rely on a situation for the engagement to happen, tactical media artists rely on the system of their connections, which usually means the shared systems of media communication like the Internet and Television. This is why Yes Men projects are so successful. They heighten the reason for the connection that usually happens, in this case, because members are upset at their political and social structure. For tactical media artists human relationships carry the same amount of weight as the Relational Art performances. It is the human interaction, the face to face meeting that allows the interaction to become valid. This is why the Yes Men and Critical Art Ensemble use physical appearance as the final product. Doing so gives the cause and the action authority. But, by giving the power of the production over to the audience and creating a platform using familiar forms of technology tactical media projects emphasize the human relationship with media. Performance, in these works, means action and engagement. As Raley writes:

To articulate tactical media in terms of performance rather than as static art object emphasizes viewer experience and engagement. Tactical media is thus relational in the terms Nicolas Bourriaud has outlined. […] Among its many subjects, then, is the sphere of human relations, moments of social encounter and moments of direct address and engagement with the viewer. Moreover, the performance paradigm allows CAE [Critical Art Ensemble] and other tactical media practitioners to conceive of ‘participants’ as a flexible rather than fixed role, encompassing both artists—cultural workers—and

61 Idem..
viewers. To conceive of tactical media in terms of performance is to point to a fluidity of its actants, to emphasize its ephemerality, and to shift the weight of emphasis slightly to the audience, which does not simply complete the signifying field of the work but records a memory of the performance.  

**Improvised Empathy Devices**

Collaborators Doug Easterly and Matt Kenyon built a wearable device, which collected statistics of slain U.S. soldiers in the Iraq war and notified the wearer of the electric solenoid device of a death with a needle prick to the wearer’s arm. In this work, appropriately titled *I.E.D.s (Improvised Empathy Devices)*, a play on the military phrase Improvised Explosive Devices, the artists aim to bring awareness of the active and ongoing death of persons affected by the Iraq war as it happened. Swamp’s *I.E.D.* project seeks to give substantial and physical awareness to the death and violence occurring in the Middle East, by creating direct physical pain from the reported events of killed American soldiers, whose details are not found to be as newsworthy by the media.”

The device, made up of a needle driven by a mechanical gear, a digital display board, a mother chip with wireless connectivity to the Internet, pulls collected information from the State Department causing the needle to notify the wearer of the events as the information becomes available. As Swamp’s website explains, “A custom software application continuously monitors a website (icasualties.org) that updates the personal details and numbers of slain U.S. soldiers. When new deaths are updated on the website, the data is extracted and sent wirelessly to custom hardware installed on the *I.E.D.* armband. The LCD readout displays the soldiers’ name, rank, location and cause of death, and then triggers an electric solenoid to drive a needle into the wearers arm, drawing blood and immediate attention.

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62 Ibid., 12.

to the reality that a soldier has just died in the Iraq war.” With this project the user participates in a passive way and receives the information via the needle prick and the display board. The physical awareness of the event, and then the listing on the display board of the person’s identification and details connects the wearer of the device to the event in a personal way. Unlike the connection through social media, where participants are “safe” from physical injury when they engage with the service, this device ensures the user does not forget, or overlook, the event. The only way to stop the pain and exit the system is to remove the device from the arm of the wearer. Even then, the device continues to collect data and move its needle back and forth.

Figure 2.2: I.E.D (Improvised Empathetic Device) Doug Easterly, Matt Kenyon. ND, Courtesy of Matt Kenyon.

While Swamp’s I.E.D. is a multifaceted robotic device requiring a direct relationship between participation and connection, the piece is also designed to rely on the continuous engagement with external information. If the device is not connected to the online news feed that releases information about the deaths of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, the device does not produce an action. The possible disconnection between event and statistics may be the context of the work. The artists suggest that the work stems out of how the U.S. media represented, or overlooked, civilian and military deaths out of the war in Iraq. As Kenyon and Easterly write, “The current U.S. led war in Iraq has suffered enormous casualties, where the toll on civilian lives in Iraq is
vague and many times unreported […]. Yet the media coverage of these atrocities are often overshadowed by more personal and spectacular stories. What is unique about this artwork is how it connects abstract figures, like uniform military numbers and government statistics, with information that causes personal pain. The data is not passive anymore once; once the data has been turned into an active antagonist its composition changes and information becomes action.

While the wearable device relies on the independent wireless machinery, the work requires connection to an external system. In many of their works, Kenyon and Easterly have created independent, actionable, robotic objects that work because they access, or have access to, external datasets. What is important is that I.E.D. ’s external system, the dataset and the online connection, has a particular job that continues to work as the wearable device is in service. The device’s “objectness” is independent from the system as a wearable item but it is also dependent on the external system that is decoded and repurposed by the artists. Here, the artists attempt to uncover the datasets that others may not see or may not find important enough to pay attention to and compel a visible outcome for that information. In this continuously self-reflexive arrangement between data, or the external systems of connectivity and access, and the object that defines and redistributes the system’s material, the system informs the design and the design reveals the system. In similar fashion to John Cage collecting radio wave transmission in order to create sound, Kenyon and Easterly access and collect digital data to power their robotic systems that live, and die, off what they find in the system.

In his landmark book, *Understanding Media*, media oracle Marshall McLuhan proposes one of his most important descriptions of media. In “The Medium is the Message,” McLuhan suggests that media can be created to remediate, address, and give content to previous media.

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64 Idem.
For example, the printing press was created to mediate scribal culture, thus giving content to written culture. For McLuhan the formation of new media uses the structures and content of past media by defining what is needed in order for a new medium to re-present old media’s essential characteristics and function. This means that the new medium has discovered the necessary function of old media and has found a way to repurpose information according to the content of the past medium’s structure. As McLuhan writes, “The ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph.”

Similar to the relationship between print material and spoken language, where print material remediated the essence and structure of orality, computer media and computation has remediated all previous media in order to redefine its own medium, as code. It does not matter if the medium was originally print or image; once it is remediated into binary code, once the medium has been introduced into the computer it becomes digital and, thus, becomes digital signal. This means that all past forms of communication structures become digital constructions once they are removed from their original presentation as technological structure and placed online. Once the code resurfaces on the computer as digital image, sound, or text, do Internet users favor one type of recall to previous media above any other? According to Arvind Rajagopal electronic media favors sound and image above others:

They [electronic media] can transcend a given linguistic field with sounds and images that recreate the sense of presence with oral communication. McLuhan referred to the effect of such media as ‘retribalization,’ in a radical break from the abstract, linear rationality of print and a return to the direct and unmediated character of oral culture. But each new medium changes the sense rations: print emphasized the visual to the exclusion of other senses electric media emphasize sound and image.65

Could this preference for sound over text refer to the relationship with oral culture? Do sounds and images connect us more specifically to orality? In *The Guttenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, McLuhan writes about the transition between orality and print culture with the invention and implementation of the Guttenberg printing press. He suggests that because of the creation of the written document, and especially the print document, a dramatic shift happened between the audible and the visual experience. Additionally, along with this sensory reliant shift came a deeper shift within the conscious. Since, the “reader” was asked to look at the words on a page, understand them as symbols and conventions, then produce them as sound, the process between the image, the thought, and the act allowed the reader to become more developed – and, therefore, more present. McLuhan relies on the example of medieval scribes to make his point: “When the eye of a modern copyist leaved the manuscript before him in order to write, he carries in his mind a visual reminiscence of what he has seen. What the medieval scribe carried was an auditory memory, and probably in many cases, a memory of one word at a time.”

The transformation from orality to print may not have been allows seemed to be a good change. In fact, for the early Greek philosopher Plato the transition from speech and written documents got in the way of true thought and conversation. Plato’s unease with scribal culture came from a notion that writing would take away from memory—that if one were to write something down there would be no need to remember it. In that sense, writing affects our memory and also the truth of our statements. Speech comes from the “heart,” Plato argues,

writing places a distorting distance between the original act of signification and its transcription. For Plato, orality was a primary act and any technology that would mimic speech would expunge the knowledge that was learned to accomplish the original act. As McLuhan suggests, recall is clearly affected in the transition from oral to written. As McLuhan writes, “[…]

the more fundamental reason for imperfect recall is that with print there is more complete separation of the visual sense from the audible-tactile. This involves the modern reader in total translation of sight into sound as he looks at the page. Recall of material read by the eye then is confused by the effort to recall it both visually and auditorially.” 67

There is a possibility for all previous media to be remediated and interconnected through technology, and by using the internet as a delivery platform with the binary code as a language, all past media have the ability to be remediated by the computer and shared through all digital platforms, including the Internet. The reason why digital media, and the Internet, have become so powerful resides in community, in the fact that users are encouraged to interconnect with each other in a way similar to oral culture. With digital media, and specifically with the Internet, users can come together to build their language using code and symbol, they can define things through conversation and engagement. To be active in the oral culture meant that participants needed to form community in order to communicate; they needed interconnectivity with others and with knowledge of the shared systems, of the language and symbols needed for communication. As Rajagopal writes, “Oral media present the immediacy and unpredictability of the face-to-face encounter […] It is important to recall here that oral media tend to reproduce the power of communities within which they occur. Expression in oral media is anchored and

67 Ibid., 116.
circumscribed through the senses of belonging and obligation, reciprocity and surveillance.”

It is no wonder that the Internet, and electronic media, favor sounds and image. Our newest forms of technology cultivate sound and images in more natural ways because we, as active users of technology, are returning to our primary form of communication. Participants increasingly desire interconnectivity with and through technology because they have found that new technologies and new electronic media, above previous media, best utilize and remediates all media. As Rajogopal writes, “To be sure, the telegraphy subsumes print […] similarly, television incorporates the cinema, radio and print, and the computer envelopes all the rest.”

Performing Interconnection

From our present position, the Internet is in everything we do, from driving our car and listening to our radios, to web-streaming web chats with our mothers, and to hacking government agencies. According to Arvind Rajagopal, “Technology is obtrusively present, in new and constantly changing ways. At the same time, it is everywhere and invisible, and it provides the representational apparatus through which to understand itself. There is no ‘off’ switch for technology, no place unaffected by it. Even the absence of new media in a given place is now marked by their presence elsewhere.” Interconnectivity is not unique to the Internet, nor is it new. Additionally, many artists who never knew of digital media as we know of them, nor ever had the ability to call up the Internet relied on forms of connectivity to produce new works of art. In fact, interconnectivity has been around, and a part of art making, for some time. Unlike previous media the Internet is shared across countless possible entrance points and accessed

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69 Idem..

70 Rajagopal, “Imperceptible Perceptions in Our Technological Modernity,” 278.
through an indefinite amount of technological user platforms. This makes it very difficult to sever the line that would disrupt technological access to the Internet. To illustrate, when national disasters happen in the U.S. and when citizens lose their ability to access electricity or power they may still rely on their hand-held devices to communicate with others. If one technological access point to the Internet goes down, another access point may be left open for user engagement. For instance, if Facebook goes offline momentarily users may decide to turn to Twitter, Tumbler, and email to reach out to others. Additionally, the multitasking use of technology is exemplified by how easily the interconnections are made between current types of electronics and digital devices. In fact, the cell phone is becoming a multi-use device that can contact friends for conversations and at the same time can remotely control the temperature of our homes and start our cars. If a personal computer crashes, a user may choose to access needed information through their smart phone service or iPads, or other forms of digital hardware and software platforms. Past technology did not possess this same transitory nature and interconnection, which meant that failures in the system could jeopardize the continuance of the data flow and the message. But, since technology has become so closely interlocked and reliant on the Internet, turning off everything is almost impossible. This does not mean it isn’t possible, just that it would take a monumental effort to shut down the machine.

In the latter part of 2003, when the United States stepped up its war efforts against Iraq and Saddam Hussein, a young woman began writing about her life as she struggled with the war that took shape around her. The writer went by the pseudonym “Riverbend” and communicated to the world through an entirely new form, a web-log titled *Baghdad Burning*. A web-log (blog) gives users the unique ability to log into their website, or personal online blog page, and write about whatever they want to without having to disclose place or personal information. As long
as users have access to a computer, or to a smart phone, they are directly, and in real time, connected to the world outside their own homes and can write or notify others of the events in their life through their blog. Because anyone who has a connection to the Internet can set up a blog and start a public conversation, bloggers are not required to disclose their true identity and can refuse to let their readers know their whereabouts. This ability to be anonymous is what gave Riverbend a platform to tell her story because she felt safer knowing that her words would not be linked back to her and her location. The power of her anonymous daily posts became a source of wartime information for the world, for many who sought a better, more human, portrayal of the war that did not come from filtered news media. Riverbend’s comments were gritty and biting. She was frank about her situation and revealed to her blog readers an unimaginable terror that affected her life and the lives of her neighbors.

What Riverbend presented through her real-time accounts, discussions, and news feeds were the personal stories of a trapped, scared woman who struggled to continue to live her daily life as she once knew it. War had changed everything for her and her community. Riverbend’s blog readers gained understanding as the author shared unique viewpoints about the invasion and its leaders and what the war was doing to her country. Many readers waited to hear from her. They would check her blog regularly to see if she had posted some updated news or accounts of her situation. The blog became a way to deal with a war that was half way across the world, in a foreign land with different customs and a different way of life. Riverbend’s blog, which was read by thousands of people, gave new meaning to the event and shed light on the people who, back in the U.S., we were told to be scared of. Her blog changed us, even if we did not know if we could trust the identity behind the words. In a published book version of Riverbend’s posts, James Ridgeway describes *Baghdad Burning* as follows:
We don’t know much about Riverbend. She is in her mid-twenties and lives in what seems to be a middle-class section of Baghdad with her mother, father, and brother. Before the war she had a job involving computers. She writes in excellent English with a slight American inflection. New entries to her blog appear sometime daily, sometimes days or even weeks apart. And to many of her readers, these entries have become perhaps the most important source of news from Iraq.\footnote{James Ridgeway, “Introduction,” in \textit{Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq} (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005), xi.}

When information about the war’s events judged difficult to find, especially from non-state channels and from the front line, Riverbend’s blog offered an authentic, and at the time more accurate, assessment of what was going on than what most westerns were leaning from national news agencies. As long as she had a connection to the equipment needed to do so, Riverbend could return to her blog whenever she wanted. The fact that the newer technology allowed for personal publication of story without having to go through external sources, like a newspaper, a book publisher, and the like, gave this one person the ability to reach a large audience with ease. The blog gave Riverbend’s story the ability to reach others Internet users, and even new media, as discussion of her situation continued to be spread by interested users who read her post, commenting back, and shared her blog with peers.

Not only did Riverbend post articles, she would oftentimes respond to comments and conversations that began from her original post but opened to further discussion on topics that might relate. As Ahdaf Soueiff writes, “because Riverbend is responsive to questions and comments sent to her blog, she from time to time treats us to a potted introduction to particular subjects; Arab family ties, women and Islam, the hijab, Ramadan customs, saving and investment, relations between Muslims and Christians, relations between Sunnis and Shia, university education in Baghdad, and many others.”\footnote{Ahdaf Soueiff, “Forward,” in \textit{Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq} (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005), vii.}
Through her work, Riverbend started a community that revolved around the effects of the Iraq war by offering readers a personal perspective into what it meant to be on the front lines. Others became interested in not only what was happening outside her front door but began to feel connected and even a little protective and worried, about Riverbend’s own safety. Even though Riverbend’s blog was not meant as an art project, the determination of her endeavor to construct a personal account of the physical trials with war virtually revealed the power one person can reach by building community through online interconnectivity. While all Riverbend did was set up a public conversation in blog format to illuminate her situation and investigate the world around her, it proved to be a topic that spoke to a wide range of users who, too, were looking for more information.

The problem many readers had with the blog was that it was not verifiable, that her identity was not known. In fact, since no one knew where she lived those who relied on her stories, her knowledge of events and accounts asked if her words were true. In many ways readers questioned her knowledge of the situation sometimes suggesting that she was not even blogging from Iraq, that maybe she was from the United States and writing as if she were part of the described world. This is the reality of the blog, and being online. Users often have to trust one another in order to get to the content being presented.

Since her blog remained anonymous, those in positions in power could also try to discredit her; this is why she often feared for her life. Remaining anonymous afforded her some safety, but it came with a price. She was constantly challenged by her readers as they left comment and comment that addressed the possibility that she did not know anything about the “real” situation. It was her unrelenting perseverance to continue to post to the blog gave her a way out, which became the life lesson from the blog. She kept reaching out to her community of
“followers” in order to tell them, to inform them, of the horrific and difficult realities of living through a war. Her perseverance and connection to technology gave her the possibility to engage, her anonymity gave her the power to engage.

A Talking Web

The punched card, the cash register, the nineteenth-century Difference Engine, the wires of telegraphy all played their parts in weaving the spiderweb of information to which we cling. Each new information technology, in its own time, set off blooms in storage and transmissions. From the printing press came new species of information organizers: dictionaries, cyclopedias, almanacs—compendiums of words, classifiers of facts, trees of knowledge. Hardly any information technology goes obsolete. Each new one throws its predecessors into relief.\footnote{Gleick, \textit{The Information}, 12.}

Even though Riverbend’s community was comprised of participants with access to digital technology, the ways in which people are connected to each other and to a community group through the use of technology has been in place for some time. Even during the early days of telegraphy participants attempted to use the telegraph in exciting new ways where the telegraph system could become more than a way to transport written messages. In some instances the telegraph was unofficially used to join telegraphers together and to start personal relationships over the wires. In one case, as Tom Standage describes, a group of telegraphers held an afterhours “real-time” meeting through the wires:

On one occasion the employees of the American Telegraph Company lines between Boston and Calais, Maine, held a meeting by telegraph after hours. The meeting was attended by hundreds of operators in thirty-three offices along the 700 miles line. Each speaker tapped out his words in Morse code so that ‘all the offices upon the line received his remarks at the same moment, thus annihilating space and time, and bringing together the different parties, in effect, as near to each other as though they were in the same room, although actually separated by hundreds of miles,’ according to one account.\footnote{Standage, \textit{The Victorian Internet}, 133.}
Not only were communities formed through the telegraph, they were also formed through systems like the postal service. In one case, artist Ray Johnson engaged participation by creating a mailing system where he would mail art to contacts using the U.S. Postal Service. Johnson’s “Mail Art” process incorporated an extensive group of participants who would send letters and artworks back and forth to addressees arranged by the artist. Unlike an oral community, where users could interact face to face, telegraphy and the postal service employed an intermediary to decode and/or deliver the message. But, as Johnson created connections between recipients, sometimes where he did not even know the recipients personally, he showcased a highly interconnected and close system of participants.

While Johnson’s application of the postal service and community was realized through the simple act of mailing a letter, his use of the postal service brings to light the use of an already functioning and successful interconnected technology and participatory structure. In these works, made between 1972 and 1994, Johnson’s mail art practice resulted in artworks centered on his personal and shared communication with others. He would send handmade collages to friends, often with directions for the recipient to forward the work to an acquaintance after making modifications to the original object. Among other elements, these artworks included photocopies, found objects, newspaper and magazine clippings, written or typed notes, and detailed drawings.

While digital theorists comment on the ability of Internet web to foster connectivity, it is critical to recognize that Johnson also navigated the larger system of connectivity to produce information. The information found inside and on the surface of Johnson’s mail art envelope came about by the interconnectivity and connection with someone else, a moment of shared collaboration within a system and further plugged into a database. Once the viewer/receiver
opened up the program, the envelope, they had the ability to dive into a wide range of links in order to decode its meaning. By interacting with the work the viewer has contributed to the system of its creation and expanded upon its database. Because of the interaction and interconnectivity that Johnson demarcated the receiver became a critical collaborator and generator. The receiver became the creator in that he/she retained the key to a special system of understanding shared by a community. Through the delivery of Johnson’s mail art, the receiver was plugged into a database and into a new presentation of code. The mail art practice was built in part by a shared understanding and logging of the world between artist as sender, receiver, and user of a connective social system. Yet, participants in Johnson’s mailings, at one point, were resigned to the fact that the system is much larger and that the work of art became only a document of that expansive system. While Johnson initiated the product and practices, it was the system that guided the completion of an original work of art. It is from within the system that Ray Johnson found a shared responsibility to create.

Figure 2.3: Ray Johnson, ephemera from the Correspondence Archive, 1972-1994, mixed media on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches (27.9 x 21.6 cm). Collection of Sally & Wynn Kramarsky, New York. © Ray Johnson Estate, Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co. / Photo: Laura Mitchell
On many occasions Johnson appropriated mass culture by photocopying magazines and newspapers. He would often cut out images and text from print media he happened across and reformed this material in a meandering, sometimes enciphered, coding of collage. The finished project may look like an amalgamation of handwritten notes and or drawing, printed material, advertisement, fashion sketchbook, comic panels, graphic novels, and found materials. In many instances Johnson would create his collaborations with the work’s recipient in mind. For instance, in one mail art letter, Johnson references the Shelley Duvall Fan Club. Here, Johnson is suggesting that he was part of a community who not only collectively identified themselves as fans of the actress but went as far as to have stationary printed for its members. I believe that Johnson attempted to draw a comparison between the use of the Duvall Fan Club and his own fan club, and the club of collectors who accrue his work. By becoming supporters of his own art, and by connecting to the artist through his mail directory, these individuals helped Johnson construct his own club of interested fans.  

Figure 2.4: Ray Johnson, ephemera from the Correspondence Archive, 1972-1994, mixed media on paper, 11 x 8 1/2 inches (27.9 x 21.6 cm). Collection of Sally & Wynn Kramarsky, New York. © Ray Johnson Estate, Courtesy Richard L. Feigen & Co. / Photo: Laura Mitchell

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75 Vaughn Garland, “Inside the System: Ray Johnson as New Media Artist,” in the online catalog for the art exhibition Art=Text=Art: Works by Contemporary Artists, First exhibited at the University of Richmond (August 17 to October 16, 2011), http://www.artequalstext.com/inside-the-system/.
Johnson’s mail art practice reveals the breadth of human and special interconnection because it displays not only the relations made to others through the address a letter would be directed to, but also the potential for the receiver to collaborate with the work as they make their own mark on the letter and, possibly, even send it to other members of Johnson’s identified postal community. Even when his letters are addressed to a particular person, the recognition of the number of persons who may have been involved in accessing that letter, and the number of places the letter might have mistakenly ended up, sheds light on the potential for further communication.

Starting in 2002, artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher created one of the earliest examples of a successful collaborative group online art work. The website and art project, *Learning to Love You More*, developed as a series of art assignments fashioned by July and Fletcher but completed by visitors to the project’s page. Once the artists had made available the art assignment they asked their page visitors to complete the instructions given to them and respond back to an email with a finished project. It is estimated that over 8000 people participated in the project between 2002 and 2009. According the July and Fletcher, “participants accepted an assignment, completed it by following the simple but specific instructions, sent in the required report (photograph, text, video, etc.), and their work got posted on-line. Like a recipe, meditation practice, or familiar song, the prescriptive nature of these assignments was intended to guide people towards their own experience.”

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In order to activate the participation of their community of collaborators and co-creators, July and Fletcher would add an assignment to the website in much the same way an art teacher might in a studio course. The assignments were usually presented as brief, but very open to interpretation, text descriptions where the artists would lay out the parameters and aesthetic goals/concerns of the project. Take as an example “Assignment 43” from the Learning to Love You More website: “Make an exhibition of the art in your parent's house.” July and Fletcher’s directions to the assignment are as follows:

This will be an online exhibition, existing as a slide-show on the site. Take pictures of your parent’s art. This is the art you grew up with -- that picture that always hung above the toilet, the abstract print that confused you as a child, the statuette of an angel -- art so familiar that you might not even think of it as art. But it is! And it shaped your vision of reality. Your photos should include a little bit of the surrounding area, a bit of the wall or table the art is on. Number the photo files and supply us with a corresponding numbered list of one-sentence descriptions of how you viewed this as a child (Did you like it? Or, how did it make you feel?)

Once a participant accomplished the assignment, July and Fletcher requested that the assignment be forwarded back to the artists in e-mail format. The new work would re-appear online and

listed under the original assignment’s description along with works completed by other
participants who choose the same assignment. In order to find a submitted work by a participant
with the project website, visitors must first locate the initial assignment. The assignments are
listed on the left side of the website page and are numbered one to seventy.

Assignments returned to July and Fletcher varied in media. Even though the final
returned documents, which are presented back on the website and are viewable under the
project’s title and description, took the form of a digital file, the individual submissions were
often times multi-media to start with. Ryan Mulligan’s submission for “Assignment Ten: Make
a Flier of Your Day” is an example of these new digital works of art existing in numerous forms
and locations at one time. The directions for this assignment ask participants to write a
paragraph describing their day on a piece of paper. Because the assignment required participants
to rely on paper, artists were limited by the materials at first. But by leaving the assignment
open, July and Fletcher encouraged the project to expand according to the needs of the
participant. Mulligan photocopied his original hand written and photo collaged image. By
asking the artists to start their assignment “writing” on the piece of paper instead of “print,”
“type,” or “draw,” July and Fletcher defined the approach of the project, asking the participants
to begin in one way.

Once the parameters were established and the direction of the work was identified, the
artists left the rest of the work open-ended so that their collaborators could also have the freedom
to create. For some projects July and Fletcher suggested several methods for the exhibition,
location, and documentation of each returned project, which continued to display how the two
managing artists directed each assignment’s form and function. In one assignment participants

78 “Learning to Love You More: Assignment #10,” an online artwork by Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher from
were asked to Xerox that paper 100 times and post it around their community. By asking artists to find places for exhibition in their own locals and communities, July and Fletcher exposed the differences, and similarities, between real and digital spaces for art. At the end of the assignment the artists asked their collaborators to “take a photo of one of them posted in your neighborhood.”

Inviting participants to submit their final image to the artists in email form some project photographs of the original image posted in the community needed to be scanned on flatbed scanners in order to get the film print into the digital format. What was submitted to the site, as is seen in Mulligan’s completion of the assignment, was a digital image that had been photographed in its exhibition location. While the original document was a paper collage/drawing, the entire work took shape over several media and was presented as a digital object online. With *Learning to Love You More* artists and participants needed to be flexible enough to cross traditional barriers of media in order to accomplish their task.

What was most unique at the time about *Learning to Love You More* was the community that sprung up in response to July and Fletcher’s assignments. While most of the participants were probably art students directed to the website by studio art teachers, the community continued to grow over time and included a diverse membership of participants. Yet, unlike a classroom environment where students know their instructors and peers, July and Fletcher’s collaborators may have never met. While all parties involved contributed to the work as a whole, the individual responsibility to complete the assignment and submit back to the artists did not mean that contributors had to engage more than that. Also, by defining assignments that anyone

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79 Ibid.
could contribute to, the site became a place where anyone with interest in a project or assignment could participate.

Similar to Cage’s examination of the radio wave as a potential creative tool, our current systems of interconnectivity among Internet communities and computer networks, may serve as the catalyst for future endeavors of new media practice. Innovations in the studio that utilize and implement technology, such as works that use computer technologies to create or reference digital data in a way similar to *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, highlight the interconnectivity between users and the technology. These are rendered possible by computer networks and the communities and connections made available through the Internet. Some artists see the networks and communities formed online through computer and digital devices as a powerful tool for the creation of new digital work due to the fact that interconnectivity happens throughout various technologies and in different real-life scenarios all at the same time. It is the interconnectivity between Internet users who utilize and develop digital social technologies that offer new artists exciting potential for producing new works of art. The Internet is a culmination of all previous media because it reveals and repurposes the past content into digital, especially with the realization of smart devices that share text, connect with others, take photographs and video, and have the ability to redistribute all of these media online.
Chapter 3
Remaking Remediation: Immediacy and Hypermediacy in Online Art

“Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation:
ideally, it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying them.”\(^1\)

It just feels right

COAP artists mediate between the physical world and the virtual world, transferring their creations between actual objects with physical presences to virtual engagements that call on the collaborations of others. Because COAPs require an extensive set of media—all coming from various technologies—constant and inexpensive remediation is key to the success of participation. Not only do COAPs seek the use of many different styles and types of media at a moment’s notice for their online collaborations, they also command media to not stay contained in a particular technology or held in the same remediated form for very long. For this reason our current sense of remediation needs to fluid, having the quality of moving easily between media and uses with ease. Because COAPs transition from physical space to various virtual applications they may appear as having specific characteristics to one or more media, which is why it is in a hyper-remediation that we may start to see new as multiple, as a specific version of one medium and, at the same time, a continuation of several media. According to John Guillory, remediation did not appear until the 19\(^{th}\) century and was used in order to describe the technological advancements between old and new media:

Let it be stipulated that older works of art can be transposed into later media [...] an operation that recent media theorists call remediation. The very fact of remediation, however, suggests that premodern arts are also, in the fully modern sense, media but that for some reason they did not need to be so called, at least not until the later nineteenth century. The emergence of new technical media thus seemed to reposition the traditional arts as ambiguously both media and precursors to the media.²

When the Museum of Modern Art uploaded their collection of photographs from Marina Abramović’s *The Artist Is Present* performance to Flickr, they may have only intended that the work continue as a simple online remediation and documentation of the performance. Yet the remediation from the performance installation to an online digital community of users, who were allowed to comment on and share the museum’s photographs, permitted the work to function in diverse settings. It gave the work further meaning because it developed a different life when the community took ownership of each photograph in the series.

Fittingly, Abramović’s virtual presence remains alive through the photographic and digital remediation online where online visitors may relive their engagement and continue to add to the experience by linking to and commenting on the digital images. This online Flickr community bestows Abramović even more presence through its ongoing development, presenting a more real sense that the artist is always present, virtually and physically. Even though the Flickr collection may not be viewed as part of a larger performance that takes place in the museum and then online, the possibility for the remediation of the images into an online community like Flickr presents a new potential for further connection to the work.

By making a remediation that arranges technology in a linear transference, where the materials of an old medium are reconfigured to be exclusively within a new technology, we can now examine another aspect of remediation that appears more web-like and fluid. This web-like

remediation is clearly significant for current computation, where digital devices allow users to be in multiple environments and situations at any given time. Through their interconnection and participation COAPs are able to pull from previous media while at the same time offering new media the ability to further reproduce through multiple types of computer software and hardware. But, what is unique to COAPs is that the digital remediation-- the use of photographs, texts, and sounds-- can be pulled back out of the computer and become, once again, performance. A perfect example of this is the *Learning to Love You More* project where users were asked to navigate creativity and the making process back and forth online and in their own communities or studios.

COAPs use of multiplicity through remediation is also evident in Abramović’s Flickr community, where the remediation start as a photographic documentation but is then reconfigured as digital documentation to be then replaced back out into a virtual community where it further becomes a new type of performance through the unique act of searching, scrolling, sharing, and commenting online. The Internet’s remediated multiplicity allows for COAPs to succeed as shared community projects and, at the same time, to not be confined by their digital recalibration. This means that the COAPs occur freely online and offline and always open to any form of remediation that heightens the engagement between artist and participant.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin define remediation as pertaining to two states of active use of a technology’s application, interpreting remediation in terms of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*. Immediacy refers to the speed of technology needed to engage users while hypermediacy refers to the multiplicity of technology to activate users through various devices and applications. The underlining fact of media, for these authors, is that they live in a continual relationship to their predecessors and are defined by, and at the same time, redefine previous
media. This “remaking” of media suggests that technology remains in a state of transference, even when it arrives as digital remediation, and is continuously undergoing relationships and arrangements to technological and mediated predecessors. Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin suggest that remediation transforms along with its “cultural assumptions,” that as long as the understanding of media changes, remediation will also undergo new transformations and meanings.³ Even as the Internet struggles to find its own characteristics, and as it appropriates from older forms of media, its predecessors now attempt to re-evaluate and redefine how they currently relate. Bolter and Grusin write, “Older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status. Both new and old media are invoking the twin logic of immediacy and hypermediacy in their efforts to remake themselves and each other.”⁴ It is this remediation from all possible ancestors that separates digital media from their predecessors. Bolter and Grusin further explain:

Digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. […] What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which old media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media.⁵

Important to remediation and immediacy is transference, when a remediation is accomplished quickly and without too much recognition between the technology and the user. The technological immediacy of the Internet connection promotes user engagement because the participant can act at any given second. Yet, awareness of the Internet’s function and application sheds light on the ways we see current media as compared to previous forms of communication media. Because newer media technologies portray themselves as more immediate than their

⁴ Ibid., 5.
⁵ Ibid., 15.
predecessors, they must continually be defined according to the job they do in the manipulation and remediation of the technologies of the past, which constructs the identity of the new media and reconstructs the old media in a new way. Bolter and Grusin explain:

Like other media since the Renaissance—in particular, perspective painting, photography, film, and television—new digital media oscillate between immediacy and hypermediacy, between transparency and opacity. This oscillation is the key to understanding how a medium refashions its predecessors and other contemporary media. Although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. This immediacy leads to hypermediacy.6

While remediation allows old and new media the ability to share actions and activities, it also changes the characteristic of the original act when redefined by the new remediation. Redefining what was once understood by the old media’s activity each new medium has a unique ability to re-present its remediation as more natural and transparent. Because users may already comprehend the act from the previous iteration, they may not need to re-learn what it means or does.

This is an important claim made by media theorists Marshall McLuhan. In “The Medium Is the Message,” McLuhan proposes that media can be created to remediate, address, and give content to previous media. For example, the printing press was created to mediate scribal culture, thus giving content to written culture. McLuhan’s message focuses on media in two ways, through the extensions of the body and through the extensions of media. Yet, some media start as information and do not need to be used as message. He takes as an example the light bulb. For McLuhan that medium is simply information and unless used as a way of making language not considered a remediation:

The electric light is pure information. It is medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media,

6 Ibid., 19.
means that the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. […] The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure.⁷

The transparent nature of remediation promises a more tacit experience with the engagement, which is why the Apple computer company makes the statement in their commercials informing us that we already know how to use their new products. While speaking about the newest iPad the commercial’s characters declare: “It just feels right to hold a book or a magazine, or newspaper in your hands as you read them. It just feels right to hold the Internet in your hands as you surf it. […] You just reach out and tap it, it’s completely natural. You don’t even have to think about it. You just do.”⁸ Apple attempts to draw parallels to the same functions of reading the newspaper and picking up a book to the user’s engagement of scrolling and interacting with a screen’s digital surface.

Another example of this transparency, or natural immediacy with technology, can be viewed in a commercial for the Droid DNA cell phone. The commercial’s actor is physically hooked into the Droid’s hardware, which causes the participant’s body to change into a machine. At the end of the commercial an announcer exclaims concerning the addition of the Droid cell phone into the life of the user: “It’s not an upgrade to your phone. It’s an upgrade to yourself.”⁹ Stemming from the need to enhance the natural connection between the technological/bodily remediation, and the need for users to feel that they are immediately engaged with, newer

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⁷ McLuhan, The Medium Is the Message, 8.
technologies present the user with a perceived understanding that they are more and more connected to technology and that they, at any time, can enter into the technology’s environment. This naturalness is what makes users understand their immediacy with the technology. As Bolter and Grusin write, “Immediacy is supposed to make this computer interface ‘natural’ rather than arbitrary. [...] What designers often say they want is an ‘interfaceless’ interface, in which there will be no recognizable electronic tools—no buttons, windows, scroll bars, or even icons as such. Instead the user will move through the space interacting with the objects ‘naturally,’ as she does in the physical world.”10

Sosolimited

During the 2012 Olympics visitors to the city of London could watch as “the emotional highs and lows of the U.K. were captured and transformed into a daily light show on the London Eye. In Energy of the Nation, the collaborative performance group Sosolimited collected information through digital devices like smartphones and shared through software like Twitter,

which were featured as visual light signals that appeared on London’s landmark Ferris wheel.\textsuperscript{11} Along with this data light visualization, Sosolimited projected information about the collected data alongside the installation, which included the live tweets that came from visitor’s reacting to visiting the city through their smartphones and interconnected digital devices. Once the tweets were activated into digital data, and collected by the Sosolimited system, they were analyzed for keywords, which were then added to the projection as emotional highlights. The Sosolimited installation included information about the number and location of users engaged with the Twitter project and showed this information as a fluctuating diagram.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{energy_of_a_nation london eye.png}
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Sosolimited’s artists and contributors, Justin Manor, John Rothenberg, Eric Gunther, Lauren McCarthy, Sam Kronick, and Wade Aaron utilize online user processes, programs, and information from a range of sources and present them as visual documents, interactions, installations, and real-time performances. They do so by remediating information and images from online search engines, and repurposing them as performance installations. “Sosolimited creates interactive installations, applications, and live performances,” the groups website explains. “These projects incorporate elements of dynamic typography, video manipulation, computer vision, sensor technologies and sound design.”

In one particular work, Cloud Seeding, the collaborative art group exploits the process by which library goers search information from computers located at a public library in Denver, Colorado. Sosolimited taps into the search requests that have been conducted by the users of the public library’s in-house database search service kiosk, where patrons of the library seek information from the library’s stacks and shared materials, then associate that data to visual documents found within the service. Sosolimited, then, rebroadcasts the new digital collage into a performance or installation work:

Visitors to the library that use special search kiosks to find books, movies, and music contribute to the evolving collage of visuals arrayed across a large video-beam in the center of the space. If lots of people are browsing for BBQ, the display shows images, movies, and quotes that have to do with food and cooking. If people are searching for golf, puppies, or Halloween, those topics become reflected on the screens. All of the videos, pictures, and text used in the piece were taken from the library archives.


While Sosolimited presents *Cloud Seeding* as a collaborative work of participation with the library patrons, some of their work stems from digital remediation from texts, images, and information either happening in real-time conversations or collected online through video and audio web streams. In one performance the collaborative art group remixed the 2008 presidential debate between Barak Obama and John McCain. Using computer logarithms in *ReConstitution*, the art group remediated collected spoken words from the debate into text fragments and then into visual documents, re-presenting the hypermediated collage as a live performance for an audience.

Sosolimited explains, “We designed software that allowed us to sample and analyze the video, audio, and closed captioned text of the television signal. Through a series of visual and sonic transformations we reconstituted the material, revealed linguistic patterns, exposed content and structures, and fundamentally altered the way in which the debates were watched. The transformed broadcast was projected onto a movie screen for a seated audience.”

The success of *ReConstitution* comes from the ability to quickly utilize and redistribute several types of media at once, and finally presenting it as performance or installation art. Furthermore, by presenting the data as installations of digital text, sound, and visuals the audience is presented

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with multiple ways to receive the same hypermediated information because they are confronted by the performance space and the virtual information.

What is unique for the multi-media Internet art like Sosolimited, is that a work may function in various forms at a given time and presented through differing technologies. Internet, as a hypermedia tool, presents its viewer with multi-activities, including deciphering the distinct code of an original medium’s function but also uncovering how each medium relates to others and how they redefine what the new media seeks to accomplish with the remediation. For example, a blog may present a number of different media at one time and may ask the viewer to navigate through text while glancing at a YouTube video, or image. The entry may also give you access to comments, email addresses, or to hyperlinks that take you off the original page and into a completely different online world. On the other hand, Google Maps can be accessed on a wide range of technological devices with its ever-expanding grasp on virtual maps; at the same time, it utilizes photographs in order to documents real life environments in three-dimensional space. The actualizations of blogs, as much as online mapping services, is achieved in the multiple sets of remediated information, which at any given moment is available by a host of digital devices.

**Google Art**

Google’s Art Project currently contains 184-image collections and 51-“walkable” museum digital reproductions. The project allows searching between museums and independent works of art, all the while providing visitors with the ability to virtually walk through the collection as if they were in the physical gallery space. Through Google’s Art Project and “Museum View” visitors may virtually enter into the gallery and walk through the installation of work hanging from the museum’s wall or sitting in front of them. By producing an Internet
database and encouraging users to view virtual collections, Google creates an experience that might not be available for people who cannot travel great distances or go to remote places. In fact, what is unique to this project is that the user never has to leave his or her computer in order to gain access to some of the greatest artworks in the world. Through the Google Art Project users have the history of art at the touch of their keyboard. Not only are users given the ability to look at these works of art, they may wander through the museum floor plan as if they would if they were physically in the exhibition space. As Google explains, “Few people will ever be lucky enough to be able to visit every museum or see every work of art they’re interested in but now many more can enjoy over 30 000 works of art from sculpture to architecture and drawings and explore over 150 collections from 40 countries, all in one place.”

Not only do users possess the ability to move through Google’s exhibitions virtually, they are also encouraged to zoom in and out from the work’s surface in order to see amplified details that would not be allowed without the technology. Because the images are photographed in high-resolution, users can see detail that would not have been possible before. This power over the image is extremely beneficial to the users because they are now in control of their explorations of the work of art and can take their time, leave the computer and come back to where they left off, access external information by opening computer windows and files on the screen, and hyperlinking to other websites through the internet browser. As described in the New York Times, Google’s Art Project gives its viewers an immense amount of control:

You either zoomed in on magnified surfaces of paintings and brush strokes or zoomed through galleries. [...]You can choose to unspool them in single, double or triple bands, while proceeding collection by collection or filtering according to medium or artist. [...] As the cursor glides over an image, its title, date, artist and collection appear beside it.

Click and you get a larger image of this work, which you can explore with magnification. Click again, on “details,” and you get written information about the piece, which will vary tremendously according to institution.\textsuperscript{16}

Even though the project incorporates so many different institutions, each with different aesthetic controls and features, Google’s own website for its \textit{Art Project} is presented in one style. This means that one museum is not represented any differently than the next which fact signifies a sort of aesthetic equality between collections. To illustrate, the Yale University collection is not treated differently from a smaller independent gallery. Each museum in the project has a connection to their main institutional website page which, then, forms a web between collections. This is why when Renoir is searched through the service the project displays several queues with works from multiple galleries. This searchable tool is very helpful because it enables quick reference throughout all of the engaged museum collection. This also means that the contributing museum identity is linkable and present through the image’s data. As Will Brand explains, “When I find a work on \textit{Art Project}, I am unavoidably placed into the museum that owns it, and bombarded with information about nearby works, the museum’s mission, and so on.”\textsuperscript{17}

Google created its trademark mapping feature and application using a photographic process called “Street View” by photographing physical places and then reconstructing a virtual copy of the original for use online. By compiling a digital landscape from the collected photographs, Google’s “Street View” presents a seemingly three-dimensional copy of the


photographed landscape. This reproduction is supposed to perfectly represent the landscape photographed by the Google car and includes anyone or anything that might have been present during the photographic travel. Not only are users allowed to see the walk through the world using these directional photographs but they may also zoom out of the “Street View” in order to see the aerial satellite images of the same location. Google Maps users can also turn their visual position outwards in order to peer out towards the stars. Google’s “Street View” first started when Google engineers affixed a high-powered camera to the top of a car and drove it around a physical locale, photographing and collecting as they drove. Google added a camera to a bike, a walkable “trolley,” and then a snowmobile as they moved to photograph the terrain not reachable by car; the bike and the snowmobile allowed for the virtual mapping of difficult terrain, the trolley allowed for the mapping from inside of buildings.

The trolley was utilized for many of the walkable “Street View” museum collections. As Google explains on their website, “When a group of art-loving Googlers wanted to take ‘Street View’ technology to museums around the world, we needed to develop a system that could easily fit through museum doorways and navigate around sculptures. We worked to fit all of the equipment on an even smaller frame, a push-cart lovingly dubbed Trolley.”

Google’s remediation between photographs, maps, art collections, and artworks into virtual representation highlights some possibilities for new creative work from Google’s mapping system, “Street View,” and Art Project.

While Roberta Smith applauds Google’s Art Project, she notes that the program presents serious dilemmas and opposition. The project is riddled with copyright issues, where images in the “Museum View” collection are blotted out and replaced with greyed digital pixels. The

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reason for the removal of works within the virtual special representation stems from the fact that some works cannot be distributed online because the museum may not have permission to present them in that manner, even though they may actually own the work and have the ability to show it within the physical gallery setting. As Smith describes this problem, “[T]he site still does not include a single work by Picasso. There is also apparently nothing by Georges Braque, Marcel Duchamp, Kazimir Malevich or Max Beckmann and only a single painting by Matisse. […] Postwar American and European art fares no better; none of the main Abstract Expressionists are represented. No Beuys, Fontana or Manzoni. Nothing notable by Johns, Rauschenberg or Warhol”¹⁹

This lack of inclusion is a problem for several reasons. First, if the work of art is not allowed to be included in the collection, because of copyright issues or ownership issues, then that work, and the collection that hold the original work, cannot expand with the advances in technology and fails to be a new representation of the virtual collection. Also, the ability to compare works of art online, and even build a new art canon online, is hindered by missing links, object references, and connected gaps where one work is viewable but another is blurred out; this creates an misleading environment and databank online.

Some commentators, like Tim Adams who wrote a critique of the Google’s Art Project in The Guardian, suggest that same old critique of reproduction and digital remediation in art. The online art resource, ArtInfo, describes Adam’s attitude towards the project: “[Adams] cannot get over the loss of art-viewing as mystical "communion" between museum-goer and a physical "little framed force field." Adams sees the site as more academic than emotional experience, and

¹⁹ Smith, “An Online Art Collection Grows Out of Infancy.”
as a reductive one at that.” Adam’s critique is echoed throughout art departments by art educators and lovers. But, if someone never had the fortune to travel across the world to see a work of art in person should they be prevented from seeing the work online? For instance the “Street View” function from the Palace of Versailles in Paris, France presents visitors with an almost-seamless copy of the original space where they can explore individual artworks, the walls, the floors, and the ceilings all with a click of a mouse. Users may zoom into the photographs in order to see exquisite details or may zoom for a wide shot of the full hallway or room.

Apple and other online sites and companies have likewise attempted to document the world and its resources using Google’s technology of remediation and mapping. A great example of Google influence with other online sites resides in the virtual online remediation, “The Great Hypostyle Hall” in the Karnak Temple of Luxor, Egypt. Visitors to the web address, managed by 360tourist.net, are placed directly in the middle of the temple, as if they were within reach of its massive stone columns. The reliefs are perfectly visible from the photographs and visitors may also walk through the space, look down to the floor and up toward the sky. The virtual visitor can view the column’s capitals by rotating the image up and down or they may click on an arrow located on the image and be transported closer to the structure, allowing for a better view of the reliefs. The environment, while not as finished and seamless as Google’s, allows the viewer the feeling that they are in the space because they can scroll around

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the photographs in 3D. While virtual visitors may not be able to feel the physical presences of places like The Great Hypostyle Hall, as if they were physically there, the site does give an exquisite rendering of the space.

The benefit of Google’s *Art Project*, and projects like it, is that you do not have to go see the original in order to see the beauty of the work. In fact, the remediated copy may get you closer to the work than you may have had before without traveling. Yes, there might be an enlightened emotion by being in the space; you will never get that feeling unless you see it in person. On the other hand, Google’s attempt to bring the work to you gives anyone the ability to see our greatest works of art. Furthermore, because the site welcomes all interested users the idea that you have to be an expert in the subject, or trained in Art History to see the work, is removed. The site is for anyone who wants to spend time with it. Steven Zucker explains the power of Google’s “Art Project” as follows: “For the first time in history it is easy for non-specialists to explore and closely examine art from museums across the globe on a single website […] the Google Art Project allows visitors to create and share a gallery where these paintings can be viewed side by side; it also includes links to their respective museum collections (where they exist).”

Google’s *Art Project* and the Museum of Modern Art’s *Artist Is Present* Flickr collections act as flat remediation because they only introduce their information as digital content. Even though each project is creative, imaginative, and unique the content of their work comes into the digital as a simple remediation, it does not go any further than that. But, this does not mean that the content must remain flat online. As discussed above, the appropriation and manipulation of the remediated data has given unintended life to these projects, as demonstrated

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by the community that grew out of the *Artist is Present* collection online and the new work by artists utilizing Google’s databank of mapped images and content. It is not hard to see how Google’s remediation reforms what space means online.

Where users can stand on a street corner and at the same time see the same corner appear in virtual photographed form on their hand held devices, ideas of space, distance, and aura seem to both disappear and at the same time become more perceptible. This exercise suggests that through remediation we may understand our human situation a little better. Additionally, due to immediacy and hypermediacy, the Internet redefines media but also gives insight into old media, which in return makes previous media more discernible. As John Guillory explains, “It is much easier to see what a medium does—the possibilities inherent in the material form of an art—when the same expressive or communicative contents are transposed from one medium into another. Remediation makes the medium as such *visible.*”24

**Artist in Training Online**

![Marisa's American Idol Audition Training Blog](image)

**It’s Over!!!**

I’m surprised how many people are surprised that I’m not still blogging about American Idol. Like all endurance projects, this one had an end in mind, and like this season of the show, this project has come to an end. Of course, now that the season is over, some of my contractual obligations have loosened, and in three months I’ll be eligible to sign a record contract. So, please, keep those offers coming! Like most blogs, this one is organized with the most recent posts at the top. If you want to read the entire three-month diary of my American Idol audition training, scroll to the bottom and work your way up.

If you just want to peruse the greatest hits, check out some of my fondest training memories, like the time I went high heel training, the time I passed myself at the tanning salon, the time I campaigned in front of Fox HQ, my practice interview with Tabitha Soren, my sold out weight training, and of course, the behind the scenes pilates I took until they stopped.

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24 Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” 324.
When Internet users searched Google in 2004 for the popular television series *American Idol*, contemporary artist Marisa Olson’s project entitled *Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog* appeared close to the top of the search. Due to Google’s structure of popularity, where pages that are viewed more are placed higher than pages that do not have as many hits, Olson’s art blog took on more importance due to the fact that a high number of Internet users clicked on her project and started to observe and connect with her through her posts. Marisa Olson’s online art project documented her actions, thoughts, and endeavors over three months as she readied herself for her *American Idol* audition. Olson continuously blogged about what she was doing in order to prepare to sing in front of the show’s judges. Through calls for viewer feedback, Olson asked blog visitors to assist her in her training by voting on outfits or consoling her when she got sunburned during a session in a tanning bed. Olson was successful in her attempt to form online participation: she had over 6,000 votes on her outfits and 10,000 or more expressions of interest.  

Through a series of short written posts, videos, and links to music files and webpages Olson sought help in almost every account of her audition practice. In one of her posts she contemplates taking dance lessons after viewing audition reels from the show’s previous contestants:

> Goodness gracious it's early. I had a great idea, between last night's cat naps. I had been regretting not taking dance lessons before the American Idol Auditions, but then I remembered that, on one of the audition reel episodes, last season, I saw this kid doing some cool dance moves, in line. So I thought to myself, "Hey, self... All of these thousands of other contestants have been in training for months, too, right? Maybe they can teach you how to dance!" This is really exciting. It will give me a good way to pass the time, and it will be constructive. I can't wait!

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25 Idem..

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Olson even asked for her blog visitors to help her pick out the clothes she would wear for the audition and the song she should sing in front of the judges. On September 23, Olson sought out what T-shirt her viewers thought she should wear and on September 29; she inquires of her visitors, in two separate posts, what shoes to wear and what song to sing. In one of her blog entries, Olson writes, “Ok, the time has arrived... I need to know what to sing. American Idol auditions are less than a week away so I really want to hone in on my main choice(s), over the weekend. Please listen to the clips above and let me know which you think is the strongest.”

In almost all of these posts Olson incorporates images, sound files, video files, and links to external sites. In her T-shirt post the artist refers to, and links to, external pages that define and describe the “electoral college.” In this particular post a reader has the ability to click on the underlined terms, “electorate” and “electoral college,” redirecting them to two external web resources that explain what they are. Olson’s linking, at first glance, seems to be accidental and not related to the project’s topic. But, as we find out after the project is over, the point of the whole project was to teach her visitors about voting in an American presidential election. Olson presents her external links in a cunning way, by relating her own attempt with the show to the larger social act of voting for an elected official. As the artist noted,

Ok, my beloved electorate, you tell me... What should I wear to the audition? All the kind folks who have written in with their post-Idol Audition tips have told me the key is striking a balance between being myself & not going over the top, so I've decided I should wear a T-Shirt... Post comments or e-mail me to let me know what you think. I'm hoping for a big voter turnout, here. (After all, there's no electoral college!) I'll tally the votes and get back to you. Thanks!!!

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26 Idem..
For Olson, the project proposed more than the simple mixture of remediation between performance, television, and the Internet. The artist also intended that the blog activity be a lesson on participation through voting, which was a key point to the show’s structure. Since the show encouraged viewers to directly respond to the contestants through the ability to vote people off the show, Olson suggests that much of this project was a commentary not just on the ways participants interacted with the TV show but also for the “voting” procedures of a presidential election. According to Olson, “this was not so much an effort to become an Idol contestant as it was a performative exploration of the norms bound up with the show. I also thought of it as quite political—I wanted to get young people thinking about the practice of voting in the lead-up to the 2004 Presidential elections, which ran parallel to the lead-up to my audition. This, I think, worked.”

Olson plugged this connection to voting in 2004 on October 1. At that time she wrote to her audience:

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27 Idem.
Good morning, Internet users. Did everyone watch the debates last night? Is everyone fired up to vote? The more time I spend thinking about American Idol, the more I think about voting... It strikes me that my generation is the demographic for the show--the group that votes in throngs to elect their favorite--but it's also the generation that does not show up to governmental elections. We will stand in audition lines but not in (much shorter) polling place queues. Since people have until 10/18 to register in time for the Presidential Elections, I've decided to bring voter registration cards with me to the American Idol Auditions. This is a totally non-partisan thing. I just want my peers to know that even if Randy, Paula, and Simon don't hear their voice, someone else will...

In her blog project Olson successfully used hypermediacy by combining the performed act of her body through YouTube videos and camera uploads with the active role of her virtual audience, all the while by utilizing the community that formed around a television show. She also successfully divided the viewer’s screen up with images, photographs, sounds, videos, texts, and hyperlinks that took participants to other interests online. Olson’s Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog thrived as an engaged online work of new media because it was immediate and revealed the structure of participation that was already taking place online. Moreover, the immediacy of the blog structure, along with the show’s televised running, allowed Olson to communicate with the show’s audience and heightened the ways her viewers could engage and collaborate. Sharing in the community that formed around the television series Olson found that she could activate a whole group of spectators who would then comment back to her because she shared in the love and excitement for the show. The hype that built around the show as it was aired, and the continual interest in the events on the show on a daily basis, gave reason for Olson’s fans to continue to come back to her own work of art.

\[28 \text{ Idem.}\]
By seeking help, comments, instruction, and assistance from her blog followers, the artists successfully constructed a camouflage of immediacy because she encouraged direct participation and engagement with her own events as they unfolded online, and in line with the show. In fact, during the project the artist appeared to be posting on a regular basis, sometimes addressing the most current events, which took place during the airing of the TV series. The participant in Olson’s *Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog* became an interpreter of print, photograph, video, audio, television, performance, and the Internet, applying shared knowledge between all media in order to act in regards to each. The success of Olson’s remediation is that all the aforementioned involved media work online as one, which could then be moved back into the physical world as a possible model of action and participation.
The Printing Press and Presence

According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, “A painting by the seventeenth-century artist Pieter Saenredam, a photography by Edward Weston, and a computer system for virtual reality are different in many important ways […] all of them seek to put the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed.” The viewers of these mediated objects find relationship with their physical presences, or extensions of their own physical body. An illustration of this can be found in cinema. Once the participant enters into the theater and the movie starts, the participant falls into a pseudo reality, leaving the outside world for a world reveled through the camera. The same can be said for hyper-realistic painting. In fact, upon entering a room George Washington bowed to a painting by Charles Wilson Peale because the figures in the painting seemed so real.

Remediation’s birth is generally associated with the printing press; from Marshall McLuhan’s Gutenberg’s Galaxy, Walter Ong’s Orality and Literacy, Elizabeth Eisenstein’s “The Unacknowledged Revolution” and John Guillory’s “Genesis of the Media Concept,” scholars and critics have described remediation as an extension and invention of the printing press. In Orality and Literacy, Walter Ong argues that the human consciousness increased when they learned how to write. Ong further states that writers may feel more in control of their words because they use remediation, they can alter the written word before it enters the public area. As Ong writes, “As the experience of working with text as text matters, the maker of the text, now properly an ‘author,’ acquires a feeling for expression and organization notably different from that of the oral performer before a live audience. […] The writer finds his written words


accessible for reconsideration, revision, and other manipulation until they are finally released to do their work.” 31 This control through remediation allows the writer to “realize” their words, makes them more visible. The remediation also makes orality more visible because the writer must understand how the remediation reflects its previous medium. According to Ong, orality’s remediation into written text heightened human consciousness: “Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising.” 32

Probably the most important analysis concerning remediation through technological replication comes from Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” In this article Benjamin proposes that works of art lose their presence, or “aura,” when they are born from mechanical reproduction. While Benjamin includes art mediums like film and photography as particular examples that suffer from their remediation what might be important to realize is that hyper-remediation seeks to create more aura with transitioning works of art. COAPs remediation constructs a new aura or presence in that it adds highly complex layers of overlapping references to the original, which may, in fact, exist as multimedia and at the same time both physical and virtual. This new hyper-remediation is a large step away from Benjamin’s theory where the aura is lost when it is reproduced. As W.J.T. Mitchell explains, “Benjamin famously argues that the advent of photographic copies was producing a ‘decay of the aura’—a loss of the unique presence, authority, and mystique of the original object.” 33 According to Benjamin when a work of art is multiplied via technological

32 Ong, Orality and Literacy, 75.
reproduction the copy creates a distance from the original. Benjamin’s defines aura “as the unique phenomenon of a distance.”34 This would then mean that the original has forever given over its presence and the copy; too, being denied a life of its own is also lost because it had created distance between the two states. Furthermore, it is the process of reproduction that enhances the distance because the original may be copied in quantity, causing the original work to lose its authority because the original is, from the start, a copy due to its technological creation. As Benjamin writes, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authority. […] Confronted with its manual reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the original preserved all its authority; not so vis á vis technical reproduction.”35

John Guillory suggests that the words associated with remediation were not conceived of until after the invention of the press. For Guillory, the printing press mediated scribal culture into print culture and in so doing made visible the act of writing. As Guillory writes, “It is much easier to see what a medium does—the possibilities inherent in the material form of an art—when the same expressive or communicative contents are transposed from one medium into another. Remediation makes the medium as such visible. The early modern period saw the first truly major practice of remediation with the invention of printing, which reproduced the content of manuscript writing at the same time that it opened up new possibilities for writing in the print medium.”36


36 Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” 324.
In opposition to the notion that the printing press changed the world in a split second, Elizabeth Eisenstein suggests that the transformation from a written culture to a print culture was gradual and took years. According to Eisenstein, transitions between written texts to the reproduction by print technology went through various transitions, sometimes working in parallel to one another and occasionally used at the same time during publications. For Eisenstein, some scholars simply saw a disparate break between manuscripts and printed books, where once the printing press was used the written page was discarded. This was not always the case. In fact, Eisenstein explains how multiple technologies were in use for quite some expanse of time after the arrival of the printing press and that the dominant form of printing did not appear as overwhelming to its earlier remediated practices as once thought. On the other hand, one thing that remains a problem for Eisenstein, and becomes an example of the multiple platforms of communication during this time, is the lack of documentation that could possibly describe what the transition between written cultures to print cultures looked like. Eisenstein writes:

Just what publication meant before printing or just how messages got transmitted in the age of scribes are questions that cannot be answered in general. Findings are bound to vary enormously depending on date and place. Contradictory verdicts are especially likely to proliferate with regard to the last century before printing- and interval when paper had become available and the literate man was more likely to become his own scribe. [...] They generalize about early printing is undoubtedly hazardous and one should be on guard against projecting the output of modern standard editions too far back into the past. Yet one must also be on guard against blurring a major difference between the last century of scribal culture and the first century after Guttenberg. 37

The Most Infamous Leap

Parker Ito’s The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet moves across media and at the same times seeks to define clearly how each newly formed remediation is different

from the last. This work, a digital image of a young woman with a backpack, which is abundantly used across the internet to designate purchasable website and often called the “Parked Domain Girl” becomes reproducible material for Ito when he remediates the image into paintings and digital art. At any moment the work may exist as an online document, a printed photograph, a digital image, a painting, and an exhibition installation. The success of such a work is that each remediation requires the assistance of its other forms. Additionally, in remediating the work from the online object, to a printed copy, to a painted original, and then to a sculptural installation, and even back to an online art object, the work never rests within one medium. The work is part of the intermixing of hypermedia, appearing as a more accurate product of the multiple creative processes that are enabled by the Internet, as it relates to other media. While the original document appears as an anonymously collected digital object, it shares its characteristic as a photograph. Seeing the crossover between the particular digital setting and the possibility for it to be used in a new way, the artist remediates the images by giving back what it once had, reprinting the digital image as a portrait photograph.

Figure 3.5: (Left), (Middle), and (Right) Multimedia Prints from Series. The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet. Parker Ito 2010. Courtesy of the Artist.
By remediating the work into a printed painting out of an anonymously shared online digital photograph, Ito challenges the image’s media character further and provides for the applicability of the work as an object of hypermedia. Ito goes even further to dislocate the work from one particular, and unique, setting by installing the work in gallery installations and public areas, whether existing as printed painting or computer projection. At one point in his creative process, Ito relies on the physical construction of the images as much as the digital, making physicality and digital equal requirements to the creation of new art. Ito’s “parked domain” paintings are an example of what it means to be a digital art object and a physical painting.

While the images on the paintings are appropriations from the web, Ito hires out the reproduction of these works to commercial painters in Asia. As Ito notes, “I got a painting made through eBay before and it came from Thailand. […] Since this is the best idea I've probably ever had I'd like to try and make like 100 of these paintings by 100 different ‘custom oil painting’ painters. If anyone wants a painting, email me and I'll make one just for you.”38 In this case the work becomes an object of hypermedia because it is never satisfied with its location within a singular medium. Ito continues to push “The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet through as many media as possible, all of which connect back online where they may continue to work in their multiple ways. As described online, “The work is charged with the irony of having a photo that became famous via the Internet as a nameless icon, turned into portraits painted – again via the Internet – by unnamed artists.”39


A similar work was produced in 1960 by performance artist, painter, and Judo master Yves Klein, *Saut dans le vide (Leap into the Void)*, documents the artist jumping out of a second story window above the pavement of an empty street. Two photographed images, the only remaining representations of the actual events and performance, depict the artist leaping upward as if he is attempting to fly. Photographed by Harry Shunk and Jean Kender, Klein’s performance shifted across media and appeared as both a newspaper heading and, also, a personal manifesto about spirituality, art, and science. Where Klein’s multi-media art performance combines photography, print, and theatrical performance, and does so by calling into question the systematic constructions utilized by the technology of collage and the exploitation of the newspaper heading as property for the creation of new art, it, too, would fit into Paik’s statement on media art.

Klein’s performance appears uniquely new media due to the various forms by which the artist, through photomontage and newspaper headings, attempted to document his own flight. What is mostly important is his advertising campaign, which featured the performance event as a newspaper story and manifesto. By presenting the event as a multi-media work, *Leap into the Void* requires the audience to move quickly and freely from one medium to the next in order to find the experience credible. In Klein’s existing photomontages the artist’s representation is captured as he jumps from the second floor window over a roadway but there are discrepancies
with the event’s perceived history. In fact, over the course of the total performance, which seemed to take place at two different times, *Leap into the Void* is documented in two images, raising questions of Klein’s action during the event and how the resulting photographs may or may not have been doctored and changed. As critic Rebecca Solnit explains, the photograph appears as the document to the performance and, at the same time, the only aspect of the work that viewers can rely on to validate the performance’s happening and the artist’s success:

A photograph is evidence, but this photograph of Klein’s leap is evidence of something more complicated than a man beginning to fly. […] The photograph is only the trace of souvenir of the work of art, which is the leap itself. Taken on October 19, 1960, it is one of the first of a new kind of photographs to become important in that decade, the photograph as document of an artwork that was too remote, too ephemeral, too personal to be seen otherwise, an artwork that could not be exhibited and would otherwise be lost, so the photograph stands in for it.”

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From each image Klein’s performance setting “shows a quiet Paris street with stone walls, an old sidewalk, leafy trees above the wall, and from the attic roof of the wall or walled building on the left, Klein leaping. Not falling, but leaping upward.”

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The setting’s elements in each image are different and the positions of the artist’s leap contrast from one to the other. One photograph shows the artist ascending into the air as if he were jumping out of the window and flying away. The second photographed leap is much less regal and shows the artists falling out of the window or descending from the attempted jump. Solnit explains: “The official photograph shows him traveling upward with composure. Another one shows him blurrily facing downward and thrashing a bit.”

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What is important in each is that due to the photomontage the images seem to suggest the artist jumped out of the window without any sort


41 Ibid., 180.

42 Ibid., 181.
of safety harness or landing pad and what we see is the moment the artist has gained flight. What is later revealed is that the event took place twice and that the photographer, who was responsible for documenting the second flight, had removed the images of the group of “ten judo practitioners” who caught Klein as he fell.  

The reason the two photographs exist is that after Klein’s first leap in January, which was not witnessed, Klein needed to present his act a second time. As Solnit explains, “There was a true leap into the void that January, but the principal witnesses were absent and there was no evidence. […] One trace of the leap was Klein’s limp from ‘a twisted ankle’ for some time afterward. He found that few believed he had made the leap, and so he performed again for the cameras that October at another site.” The second performance gave Klein the setting to add further media, namely the self-published newspaper distribution. The original image first appeared in this publication, along with Klein’s personal artistic manifesto. According to Solnit, “He [Klein] published a single edition of a four-page newspaper, Le Dimanche (Sunday), whose front page was dominated by this photograph of the leap and whose various newspaper-formatted texts were a description of and manifesto for his work. ‘A Man in Space!’ said the headline for the photograph.”

Klein had found a way to both exhibit and document his act of strength, whether it happened or not, through publication and public announcement. Utilizing the newspaper, and competing with NASA’s determination to send men into space, Klein discovered a way to manipulate the printed image, past his initial photomontages, in order to move his performance from that particular alleyway out into the public view. Leap into the Void first existed as a

43 Idem..
44 Idem..
performance of physical strength for those who happened to be present at the time, but then
gained attention when it entered into the public realm of printed news. Like the NASA
announcement that had spurred news articles, Klein’s leap into space had the equal potential to
be distributed and remediated. Furthermore, by adopting photography and the means to
document the event, a process that could be manipulated and then remediated easily, Klein could
portray, even if this was a false perception, that he had succeeded and overcome gravity through
levitation. Through the manipulation of photographic and newspaper reproduction and
remediation, Klein succeeded in separating from his weight and continued to remain weightless
inside his documentation. According to Walter Benjamin, it is the identity of the captured film
actor, like Klein’s performance as theater, that inevitably ends up in the public eye and beckons a
separation from the original due to its reproduction. Benjamin writes:

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the actor before the camera […] is basically of
the same kind as the estrangement felt before one’s own image in the mirror. But now
the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported?
Before the public. Never for a moment does the screen actor cease to be conscious of this
fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public. […]
Similarly, the newsreel offers everyone the opportunity to rise from passer-by to movie
extra. In this way any man might even find himself part of a work of art.46

Not only is Klein leaping into his own physical and mystical void, it could be said that he
is also leaping into the technological void. In Klein’s space the camera becomes the spectator
and the audience is left as a storyteller to the original experience. Additionally, because it is a
camera that the actor turns to, instead of an audience, he or she reflects the wants of the camera
instead of the ongoing wants of the live audience. This means that Klein’s performance is meant
not for a live audience but conducted with the camera, and the process of reproduction, in mind.
Klein also experiments with the composition and the capturing of the lenses, not the attachment

or engagement of an audience. Walter Benjamin describes the capturing of the event by the camera as the seminal performance experience and that the performer performs for the camera and not the spectator behind the camera. In Klein’s case it does not matter who attends the original production of the act because the camera was the spectator who captured the moment of levity. Benjamin writes:

Guided by the cameraman, the camera continually changes its position with respect to the performance. The sequence of positional views which the editor composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed film. It comprises certain factors of movement which are in reality those of the camera, not to mention special camera angles, close-ups, etc. Hence, the performance of the actor is subjected to a series of optical tests. This is the first consequence of the fact that the actor’s performance is presented by means of a camera. Also, the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of the critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience’s identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing… What matters is that the part is acted not for an audience but for a mechanical contrivance”

Through the captured photographed document, where filmed actors avoid live representation and reproduction, the actor has lost connection to the body, and thus, has removed presence from the act. In Klein’s case, his own body is severed by the camera’s capture, which is what makes the feat of acquiring levitation possible. Benjamin explains further:

With a vague sense of discomfort he [the filmed actor] feels inexplicable emptiness; his body loses it corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noised caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence […]. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it… Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays.”

With *Leap into the Void*, as a mystical act, as part of the process of becoming enlightened and possessing the ability to lift off the ground and levitate, Klein sought to escape from his body

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both through the meditative act and through the technological apparatus. The mystical and the technological act required Klein’s physical transference as he shed his body self in order to become weightless. According to Solnit, Klein showed deep interest in this ability. In fact, he strove to accomplish this act through his mastering of Judo and by his interests in eastern religions, practices, and meditations. As Solnit explains,

    Klein had been obsessed with flying for much of his life […]. Flying meant literally entering the sky he had claimed, meant vanishing, an obsession of his equal to his preoccupation with levitation […] and it meant entering the void. The leap into the void is sometimes read as a Buddhist phrase about enlightenment, about embracing the emptiness that is not lack as it seems to westerners, but letting go of the finite and material, embracing limitlessness, transcendence, freedom, enlightenment.”

In the same way Klein hopes to separate from the weight of his physicality, the photographs assume a separation and become reproductions, or weightless copies, of an original act. This means that the remediation replaces the live performance and creates multiple points to access the work. Instead of having to be present during the live performance viewers can witness Klein’s leap through the photograph or through the newspaper account. In this particular work it is the remediated document, not the performance, that is then given a presence and aura—the actual reality of the event is overlooked. We see this overlook through the acceptance of the two photographs as acceptable recognitions of the one event.

    It is this new aura where reproduction creates a type of truthfulness and presence that centers from this notion of distance between action and being. It is this distance between action and remediation that determines the totality of the aura. Klein eliminates distance through the use of the photograph and at the same time attempts to reform what was separated in the photograph through hypermedia, creating a multiplicity at one time.

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49 Solnit, “Yves Klein and the Blue of Distance,” 180.
Additionally, since the photograph remains constructed from various moments, Klein’s presence in time is removed. By constructing the image from two shared moments in time, the image escapes from its original presence and becomes more than a representation of a time and location. The new remediation, then, acquires its own existence and does not need to be related to the original composition or setting. By manipulating the work into the newspaper announcement Klein approaches a uniquely developed and highly used construction of communication in print reproduction. It is through the newspaper articles, with their fabrications and summaries of real life events, that Klein could propose the truth in his event to a mass audience. Once the event was read in the paper it had the potential to appear more real, more authentic.

Can This Be Real?

Since we do not have enough evidence that Klein had an audience, which could verify what happened during his attempt, we do not know how the leap transpired. We interpret his performance as relying on a remediated photomontage and a newspaper description, which questions the assumption that an authenticated experience is needed to verify what is real or not. COAPs work in the same manner, most times appearing not as works of performance art but as digital remediation that happen timelessly and always present, always acting. While these new online projects highlight immediacy and hypermediacy they also heighten our expanding concepts of reality and reform the new concepts of reality. Parker Ito’s *The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet* is one project that sheds lights on our complex nature on and off the Internet. Through this work, Ito directly explores how online identity is both lost and gained when it is remediated back into the physical world. At first, the identity of the woman in *The Most Infamous Girl in the History of the Internet* is entirely lost because she is an anonymous
online image and artifact. But, because Ito reforms her identity, through the use of hypermedia, he is able to give the digital figure new life and construct a more developed meaning of the image’s presence than the anonymous representation online. On the one hand, by sending her back into painting, the artist reveals that even then reality cannot be re-created and that attempting to un-mediate the digital image does nothing to bring the true identity of the artist’s subject back. On the other hand, what is accomplished is that the work can exist in multiple places at the same time, as is seen in Klein’s *Leap into the Void*. It is through hypermediacy and multi-mediacy that each artist, Ito and Klein, have found new ability to give life to the mediated art object.

What this chapter calls for is a remediation that goes further than simply placing documents or new works of art online solely to reside as markers in the digital world. This type of flat remediation, whether used to document or to exhibit, does not speak of the external structures that comprise and characterize the Internet and does not challenge us to uncover what being digital means. But, when remediations like these are utilized, appropriated, and manipulated for new work what becomes clearer are the complex, readily available, and technological ways in which we work with what we are given. Either through immediacy, hypermediacy, or both, our new media art works force us to think of technology’s growing influence in contemporary art. They also ask us to see ourselves in a different way, one that is multi-media, connected, and willing to participate. The unique COAP work also asks us not to think of remediation as flat but to think of it as ever more natural. Remaking remediation means to release the device, the computer, as the reason for the remediation. Remaking remediation hopes to challenges artists to continue to create anew from a method that has always existed, and to do so by pushing the boundaries of our media and mediated structures.
Chapter 4
Virtual Practice

Live Feed

While participating online may give users a sense of freedom and connectivity there are apprehensions about how far we go to engage with others. Although it may be overly optimistic to praise new technological efforts to create works of art through community engagement, we must also recognize very important constraints in connecting through the Internet. How users act online, and the reasons why users come together to forms groups online, is complicated. Furthermore, the ways in which participants decide to stop engaging online, or may only engage with a community or project up to a specific point, may expose the deep anxieties users have with the digital world and how that world relates to their physical reality. Apprehensions around virtual presence, viewership, ownership, authorship, the digital divide, and legal limitations are all possible sources of critiques of online culture, creativity, and use.

Additionally how we classify and define new works of art that are made for exhibition and collaboration online is a matter of pressing concern, especially because more and more artworks are created with digital technology. The uneasiness users feel, and the reason why participants still have problems with the issues listed above, arise from our new and active experiences online. Users are still not sure how to find balance between the technology they carry with them and the lives they could live without new media. Alleviating some of the strain participants may face as they engage with new projects online, finding ways to better integrate these new projects into daily experiences, and shedding light on issues that keep people from acting and engaging with others online are an important next step for artists. First, easing the tensions between “real” and “digital” are of paramount importance. Digital reality can be real.
The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) coverage of the 2012 Olympic Games is a perfect example of the complexities that arise within the context of online engagement, participation, and the realities of physical space. Throughout the sporting competition, NBC had problems keeping news and results of live events from interfering with the re-airing of the event several hours later for the American television audience. NBC found themselves in a precarious situation between an audience who watched the live event, the news reporters who recorded the results live, online social media enthusiasts who self-broadcasted information through Twitter and Facebook and those who watched the re-broadcasting hours later.

Viewers were forced to come face to face with a duality of online space-- one of the actual events and the “after” other. NBC tried to address the complexities of juggling between two ways to view the same event: they aired live events during the day online and then re-aired these events later on selected television channels.¹ Even as NBC re-aired the five-hour-old event later, many viewers had already found out the results of the event so the surprise and excitement of the event was not as great as it would have been if the information had not leaked through the Internet.

The physical realities of the London event collided with the Internet in a one to one relationship where the online screening of information appeared as the event happened; those who participated online were, in fact, presented with a more “real” relationship with the event. The television audience which wanted to watch the event without knowing the outcome had to avoid online participation or actively stay away from news agencies that broadcast the results. This meant that normal Internet users were faced with the decision to either not participate as they normally would, by not returning to online communities like social media sites where it

would be easy to find the results before they had seen the event, or to surrender to the all-over
presence of the Internet and deal with the fact that the information was available too fast to not
engage with it. TV viewers of the event were not participating in the realness of the competition
because it was then second hand information. In this case the digital space could be seen as a
detriment to the physical experience.

This mismatch between information, time, and place, is not exclusive to the Internet. In
fact, the telegraph system was one of the earlier forms of communication that allowed people a
way of participating with real time information. The audience witnessing an event over the
telegraph connection could communicate with others as events happened. One case in point was
how war time operations were recounted and also determined due to the release of news over the
telegraph’s wires. As Tom Standage writes, “The telegraph was to cause further complication
when it was used to send reports to London from the front revealing the chaotic nature of the
campaign. […] The telegraph had annihilated the distance between the soldiers at the front and
the readers back home.”

This information immediacy, where real time events can be swayed due to the use of
communication technologies, is what James Gleick calls the “paradox of the observer.” As
Gleick explains, “The outcome of an experiment is affected, or even determined, when it is
observed. Not only is the observed observing, she is asking questions and making statements
that must ultimately be expressed in discrete bits.” When observers seek additional information
they may be able to determine the outcome, especially when large numbers of people choose to
participate in the same way. Examples of this are increasingly present online, where political,
social, and organizational movements appear in physical locals but fueled by online organization

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2 Standage, *The Victorian Internet*, 157.

and the spread of information through Internet technologies. Online users may realize new ways to become participants because they are directly connected to the events unfolding through their connectivity to the Internet. It is through the immediacy of the Internet that I see COAPs being most successful, with artists being able to activate a large number of people to create an interaction and even a social movement.

**Quiet: We Live in Public**

Sometimes users may be confronted with too much information at a given time, causing them to stop participating. Becoming overloaded with online information is increasingly evident, often causing fatigue and anxiety. With system overload or system fatigue, users may stop participating or stop a project because they have been overwhelmed by the persistence and profundity of engagements asked of them. This means that they do not feel like they can keep up with the participation needed to continue. Like New York City’s nickname as “the city that never sleeps,” the Internet is also never slumbering. Because the Internet never breaks for rest and because users continuously add to what is already online, the amount of energy participants need to keep engaged grows more and more each day. System overload and system fatigue are real issues, especially for online community projects that take time to create and come to fruition. In many cases participants who have contributed to a project online stop engaging because they are faced with system overload or system fatigue. According to James Gleick, “As the role of information grows beyond anyone’s reckoning, it grows to be too much. ‘TMI’ [Too Much Information] people now say. We have information fatigue, anxiety, and glut. We have
met the devil of information overload and his impish underlings, the computer virus, the busy signal, the dead link, and the PowerPoint presentation.”

The devil of real time information haunting a digital online public is best illustrated by the three early online art projects created by Internet pioneer Josh Harris. Harris’s Internet performance communities and streaming broadcasts, Pseudo.com, Quiet: We Live in Public, and We Live in Public, exhibit how online engagements with real time events lead to anxieties about the boundaries between public and private. Pseudo.com emerged online in 1993 and encouraged participants to shift from passive viewership to active participants. Online viewers of the performances and broadcasts could watch the events as they were being recorded and streamed online or they could engage with the characters on their computer’s screen through text boxes and comments. New forms of technology, including web cameras, Internet software, and websites, have enabled the live online performance of a new type of community of participants, which approached the work in the privacy of their own homes and through the computer screen’s digital projections. Viewers could watch the event without anyone one knowing and could even participate and engage with the people they watched through online chats forums. Pseudo.com participants engaged in a number of ways and could filter through independent channels where online personalities, like TV hosts, engaged viewers into participating. In an early article on Pseudo.com, David Kirkpatrick explained the phenomenon as follows:

Almost all of the programming involves interaction with the audience -- usually via a simultaneous online chat room, to which on-air characters sometimes respond. All of its shows are based in reality, targeted to people obsessed with a narrow subject, and presented in a way that seems authentic to hard-core fanatics, whether they are urban gangsta-rap fans or Midwestern pro-football devotees.5

4 Ibid., 11.
What was unique to *Pseudo.com* at the time was that it capitalized on a new way to communicate online. *Pseudo.com* allowed users the ability to determine the action by giving them the technological resources to “talk back.” This meant that *Pseudo.com*’s adoption of the Internet’s community web structure encouraged new types of participation, where users could drive information. Since it employed the Internet to build connections to others through user participation the site’s membership grew exponentially; soon after its launch the website reached thousands of participants. As Kirkpatrick writes, “Each month, 400,000 users download one or another of *Pseudo*’s 50-odd shows, which together add up to about 240 hours of original programming a month. The site includes about a dozen thematic ‘channels,’ each with its own shows. The most popular are 88HipHop, a video-gaming channel called All Games Network, and an electronic-music channel called Streetsounds.”

*Pseudo.com* founder Josh Harris created and performed his largest online project, which he titled *Quiet: We Live in Public* (or *Quiet* for short), on his new Internet community broadcasting tool. Harris’s projects *Quiet* and *Pseudo.com* were groundbreaking, becoming predecessors for numerous contemporary online media institutions. For *Quiet*, Harris invited one hundred fifty New York City artists into a converted warehouse where they would live, and be filmed in real time and projected online. Harris outfitted his New York City warehouse with web cameras which he linked up to a website. Not only did Harris install cameras in public areas throughout the warehouse so that his online viewers could click on and watch, he also installed cameras in various private rooms, such as showers, bathrooms, and the sleeping quarters of his actors. In this project everything was filmed and put online, private became public. Harris’s

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6 Idem.

audience was both inside the building and on the other side of the computer screen. The performance exhibited the video recorded characters making some sort of life and community as they were locked away in their private and common rooms. Every bit of information that happened during this performance was put online and all interactions that took place between the documented members of the online cast were being filmed and transmitted across the web. Everything part of the life inside this warehouse was for public consumption, which meant that the private moment existed no more. In order to make people more comfortable with the space, Harris threw parties in the space, and recorded every second. Harris hoped the parties would encourage participants to use the communal spaces installed in the building, where cameras could pick up more of the action. Andrew Smith describes some of the elaborate communal spaces as follows: “Quiet featured a shooting range you could hear from the street, a banquet hall, theatre, temple, club, giant game of Risk, and a public shower area, all covered by cameras.”

Viewers of the project could move from one set of cameras to another in order to see the project’s participants engage with all the warehouse spaces. This system, which is probably more acceptable to us now, resembled a type of camera grid on the computer screen where multiple camera shots and warehouse spaces were visible at one time. In an article on Harris’s project Steven Kaplan suggests that Quiet brought into focus a growing surveillance culture online and in America. As Kaplan writes, “Quiet was a heady but deranged bit of social sculpture. [...] It envisioned a Brave New World of surveillance, control and loss of privacy, both predicted and facilitated by the Internet. Harris imagined that these long standing dystopian

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issues would be given technological feasibility through an interlocking network of computers and webcams. It would re-invigorate the pan-in Panopticon.°

Harris’ *Quiet* came at a time when many viewed digital technology as both intensely invigorating and threatening. Since the Internet had given users a way to participate without others knowing the identity behind the screen, some communication between the audience and the actors got out of hand. Instead of the Futurist Theater’s performers who could look into the audience and see the participants’ faces, the shouts that arose in the digital text panels and across the streaming videos were from faceless digital connections where identities could be completely altered and the responsibility of any physical presence and culpability were removed. This meant that the shouts from the viewers on the site’s broadcasts seemed more relentless.

At the end of the 1990s many believed that the digital code, which had become a way to store important data like bank accounts and personal data, would be wiped away when the clock struck midnight on January 1, 2000. Many worried that since computers code relied on 1s and 0s and on the time dates between 1900 and 1999 that once the clock turned over to a fresh string of 0s that everything would go haywire. Some thought that the Internet would go down while others thought that the banking system would collapse. Some even thought that the electrical grid would automatically destruct due to a fault in the use of the binary code. 1999 was a very anxious year and marked the first time that people realized they were deeply part of a widely sensitive technological web that linked the world together. Steven Kaplan describes how Harris’s *Quiet* related to this moment in time:

We were waiting for the Millennium to change everything, prepping for the mother of all New Year's parties. Because in late 1999, people thought the computers would inevitably crash when the clocks turned from 19__ to 20__. Things would just go plumb haywire.

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Data would be irretrievably lost. Banks would lose their assets. Credit would fail. It was supposed to be the end of time, the beginning of a New Age. We were there at the cusp to confront a devolved reality after the machines imploded and left us with a post-apocalyptic, feral, dog-eat-dog world. This sort of Luddite anticipation was grafted onto the larger panopticon structure of QUIET. We were the self-conscious seeds of a new dystopia, and there were cameras everywhere to record us.\textsuperscript{10}

In order to get everything that happened within the SoHo warehouse space online, Harris had to get people comfortable with his video recording system and with each other. Participants needed to engage with others in the space in order to get viewers to watch the action online. This meant that performance was a large part of the project and “performing” for the viewers meant performing with the hopes that someone was watching the live camera feed. However, becoming comfortable with the web camera system, continually being watched no matter where you were, took some time. Some actors could not handle the pressure and started to drop out of the project. Others played along for the duration of the project, the full five weeks. When asked which week of \textit{Quiet} was the most important, Harris felt the final, and fifth, week was his best.\textsuperscript{11} He believed his recorded characters and online streaming participants were most accepting of the system during the last week because the broadcasted cast had grown more accustomed to the idea and started to forget about the fully-recoded system they were confined to. Yet, the presence of a constant and unknown viewer seemed to cause the main concern for so many of Harris’s actors in his projects. In many cases actors would find new ways to move in the space where they would be out of the camera’s range.

Watching online was not always easy. \textit{Quiet}’s audience needed access to fast computers with good video and audio cards and high Internet speeds. At the time the project’s online

\textsuperscript{10} Idem.

\textsuperscript{11} Smith, “Josh Harris: The Warhol of the Web.”
connectivity speed was slow and users had to engage the site with specific software. Not everyone knew how, or even could, participate in the project. As Kirkpatrick writes, “Unless you have high-speed Internet access at home, or your office’s corporate connection can download the requisite software (many company firewalls block it), you might as well forget it. Even if you have access, all the action takes place in a slightly grainy four-inch-square box in the middle of your computer screen.”

By the time Harris had started a third project, which he titled *Quiet, We Live in Public*, both *Quiet* and *Pseudo.com* had ended. The warehouse project had shut down and his online broadcasting company had gone into bankruptcy. But, it was in *Quiet, We Live in Public* that Harris realized the full harm caused by the assiduous system of online participation, as he persuaded his girlfriend Tanya Corrin to live with him in an apartment he had equipped with web cameras. The project was meant to appear online for one hundred consecutive days. Corrin lasted only sixty. Everything that Harris and Corrin did was recorded and sent out across the web. Harris filled his apartment with cameras in order to document and present every single minute of his life. Harris wanted to capture everything that he and his girlfriend did inside his home, even installing a camera inside his toilet.

In order to encourage outside input from visitors to the site, Harris also installed a real-time chat room where users could communicate directly with the couple. This meant that not only did the couple know they were being watched but they also had to answer, and even respond to some of the comments from those watching the action. In a unique article written by Tanya just shortly after she left the project she described the situation as follows: “Josh wanted us to be able to interact with our visitors. We bought laptops with wireless Internet cards so we

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12 Kirkpatrick, “Suddenly Pseudo.”
could tell who was watching by looking at the user names on the screen. We couldn’t see them, but we could talk back via cameras and keyboards, giving us a flimsy sense of control.”

Because the system was too much to handle and because she was not comfortable with being the center of attention at every minute, Corrin left the project and the relationship between Harris and Corrin ended. Not only was she a participant in the system but the sheer number of people watching her at any given time seemed to grate at her own realization of personal space.

Here is what Corrin recalls as her experience began:

At midnight on Nov. 21, Josh and I were curled up in a curvy Herman Miller chair in the control room, surrounded by 42 mini-monitors and 18 VCR’s that were about to begin recording the next 144,000 minutes of our lives …Within minutes, there were 15 people in the room…The next morning, Bob Stratton from Controlled Entropy, the company that designed the camera infrastructure, called and woke me up. “I just wanted you to know that there are 62 people in the chat room, and they are all speaking Chinese,” he said. Soon we were being watched by the French, Swedish, Germans, Canadians and Australians…Visitors thought Josh was a genius. They thought I was cute. They wanted Josh to talk to them. They wanted to see me naked. For the first week, Josh and I spent evenings in the control room hamming it up and talking to them through the camera. Then we started calling them on the tapped phone. Both sides of the conversation went out over the Internet; if we wanted to order food to be delivered, we had to do it by cell phone in a closet or everyone would know our address. It was invasive and bizarre, but it felt cool.

As the time progressed Corrin tried to escape the recorded system by not coming home or finding reason to be out of the apartment. Not only was Corrin living with the stress of her relationship, she was bombarded by viewers asking her to do things for them, as if she was a puppet. Her secure space, the apartment she called home for a while, had changed. Her home was now a public space where anyone could spend “digital” time. Corrin was not allowed to feel intimate and safe in her own apartment because she knew she was never alone, she was being watched at every minute—even as she slept.


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With “Quiet: We Live in Public” the physical location of a safe place changed from an apartment where one could relax and be alone to one of continued communal spectactorship. In this apartment, Corrin and Harris found that their lives were completely open to the public. Now, others could associate their own “living” spaces, in front of their own computer, as a shared space with Harris and Corrin. Being on different sides of the camera, and computer screen, did not matter. The viewer’s home was directly connected to the recorded apartment. Being intimate became a shared experience.

In her book “The Lure of the Local,” Lucy Lippard describes place as a “Lived-in landscape…which implies intimacy.” What is unique of the online culture and evident in the project with Harris and Corrin was that the lived in space included those who had never set foot in the building and the apartment. Instead of “living in” the space, as was Harris and Corrin, a new type of occupancy emerged. Viewers were encouraged to not only watch the performers life play out on their computer’s screen they were encouraged to share in this progression of the events by joining in and conversing with the performers.

The Digital Divide

Compared to the number of people online at the time, very few really spent enough time with Harris’s projects. No matter what people say about the total democratization and ease of online participation and use, many still do not have access to the online platform and therefore cannot participate with projects like the ones mentioned in this dissertation. Minorities, urbanites, remote communities, those without transportation, the elderly, and the poor are generally more likely to not have access to computers or to the Internet. Sadly, these same

groups have probably faced similar problems when trying to reach artworks held in galleries and museums. Furthermore, the education needed to comprehend and appreciate some works of art is also reflected online. Some users do not know how to relate to online works of art because they have not received the training to do so.

Furthermore, as more people access United States based websites they are confronted by a resource that favors English-only speaking users with a large percentage of sites only displaying content in English. Non-English speaking and reading visitors cannot engage with the information they see on the screen and this language segregation keeps users from participating with the content and purpose of the site. As Nancy Stutts and Liana Kleeman write, “Non-English speaking Internet users often struggle to find content online, particularly those with low-incomes (Gorski, 200). Recent data suggest that less than 8% of all U.S. –based websites offer any content in a language other than English (Hispanic Market Advisors 2010).”\(^{16}\) It is also possible that works that do not give preference to English may also be left out of consideration for inclusion in the new advancements in art. This is why it is important that on his blog, The Silo, art critic and Art in America senior editor Raphael Rubinstein includes a wide range of artists he thinks should be added to the artistic cannon. Rubinstein’s art history encompasses persons and work that may have not gotten recognition because they came from non-western or non-English speaking backgrounds, giving artists a presence that they were denied elsewhere.\(^{17}\)

The perception that the Internet is democratic gives participants the misleading impression that racial and ethnic barriers are erased. Dr. Wendy Chun suggests that the Internet


was marketed in television commercials from the beginning as a tool that rids the world of racism and gender inequalities. In fact, many of the marketing campaigns were created around an eradication of racial issues, where users could give up identities and physical boundaries in order to be equal users online. The Internet of these early commercials allowed users to get rid their own physical bodies in order to become a type of online “other.” In a 1994 MCI Communication commercial actors of various races present the Internet as a new space of free access where participants can rid themselves of their physical appearances. The video declares that users do not have to show their true identity because the Internet is a place for participation without “appearing.”

It is this new world, where the user is hidden, that participants do not have to feel repressed because of their color, age, sex, and location. In fact, what was so great, and why the actors in the commercial seemed so happy, is that they could be anyone at any time. We know that the idea of a completely democratized and democratizing Internet is a false representation but as Chun suggests in her lecture on “Imagined Networks,” the delight in the Internet’s greatness overwhelmed our rational understanding of its use:

In the mid to late 1990 […] it was impossible to advertise the Internet without featuring happy people of color who were arguing that technological empowerment equaled racial empowerment, by transforming the desire to be free from discrimination to the desire to be free from one’s body. The messages of commercials like these weren’t even the banal don’t discriminate but go online if you want to avoid being discriminated against because that’s where one can be truly free because one can control one’s representation.\[19\]


\[19\] “Imagined Networks, Glocal Connections.”

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The Internet on the Run

Users have an increasing ability to mix and match numerous forms of communication technologies at one time through mobile smart device applications and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). Users of ICTs may access a vast wealth of information at a given moment and share that information out quickly with great technological force. Social media sites like Tumblr allow members to post a wide range of media formats, including “text, photos, quotes, links, music, and videos” in one place online but automatically appear in a number of places and across various technological platforms. With Internet devices like smartphones, and with programs like Tumblr, users have access to a wide range of possible participants who are interconnected and equipped to engage.

Because ICTs change quickly and because new, better, and more equipped software/hardware devices appear frequently, users may not be as engaged if the interaction takes too long or is done with outdated technology. This means that those engagements, which may take time to unfold or require specific access or technology, may not maintain their members because they have moved on to the next technological device, event, media, and cause. This is one reason why Facebook seems so all encompassing and ever present. Yet, while simply “liking” the Red Cross Page on Facebook allows a user to feel they support the organization, they may not directly participate in an organization’s physical life. This means that the identity that is created in collaboration with the technology may have little to do with the physical identity embodied by the user.

Peter Dahlgren addresses this “identity” problem while gauging participation. In his book Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy, Dahlgren

suggests that an engaged and active identity is now a classification that extends out from the individual and relies on the performance of the engagement, not specifically on the amount of level of the participation. In that sense the successful engagement may be best understood according to group participation, not through an individual act. One example of this is seen in online organizational pages that appear to be socially supported because their online identities seem to suggest that they have gained a larger amount of mentions, likes, or page views. This means that the identity of an organization, especially an organization that treats its membership in terms of social media likes or mentions, is a reflection of a new way to consider participation and may not be a true measure of member activity or interest.

For Dahlgren membership such as “liking” a Facebook page is significantly different from the membership developed through citizenry. To be a citizen means that identity and action are mutually shared and represented by group understanding. In this case the understanding of what membership means is created by a group. As Dahlgren argues, “One of the hallmarks of late modern society is the emergence of the self as a reflexive project, an ongoing process of the shaping and reshaping of identity, in response to the pluralized social forces, cultural currents, and personal contexts encountered by individuals. Moreover, identity is understood as plural”\textsuperscript{21} Dahlgren suggests that identity is a multifaceted activity, an increasing sense that personal lives do not just occupy one space but that citizens actively identify in response to a specific group mentality.

Dahlgren’s assertion proposes a unique situation for those works of art that seek to build identity and action through community in so much as the engaged user acts in accordance with the group’s needs. In respect to COAPs, it is up to the artist, who are in charge of recognizing

\textsuperscript{21} Peter Dahlgren, \textit{Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication and Democracy} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 64.
how the group comes together and forms identity, to manipulate the group in a way that it seems that identity is both the property of the artist and of collaboration.

One example of the plurality of engagement can be seen in a recent project by James Walker, who wanted to memorialize and call attention to the bicycles that were abandoned to bike racks, trees, and light polls in Richmond, Virginia’s downtown. Walker initiated a program where he sought abandoned bikes, often times with parts removed or seemingly broken, and shrouded the bike in a coffin like shrine in order to bring awareness to how people treat bikes in the city. While the initial project stemmed from a personal discovery of the space Walker witnessed as he walked around the city, the Dead Bicycles project grew and became an online conversation around bicycling and the bike culture in the city. Walker suggests that as he documented his project online he was soon swamped with people who had also found discarded bikes and wanted their own memorial installed. In the case of Walker’s project, citizenry appeared in the active engagement with the problems of bicycling in the city, facilitated by online posts, comments, and blog shares. While Walker’s efforts sought to call attention to a mostly unnoticed negligence, the community that appeared in response to the artist’s sculptural re-presentations developed an active social movement that sought efforts of political and social citizenship focusing on Richmond’s attitude to bikes. Because Walker initiated this project, he became a leader in the social movement and assumed an organizer position for the larger conversation.

Shared Versus Owned

A growing amount of criticism related to collaboratively created online art resides around notions of group data clouds, of information that is built out of a large group of users. Jaron

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Lanier is the most outspoken critic of the online commons, often times warning his readers of the dangers that may appear as creativity and individuality becomes property of the online collaborative community. For Lanier, the cloud represents a possibility for users to lose individuality and originality. Lanier looks to Wikipedia as the most recent example of this collaborative structure.

Wikipedia has announced that it is a free and open community when it is in fact managed and regulated by a small group who call themselves “SYOPS” (system operators). SYOPS are self-appointed and group approved supervisors who can decide if an entry is worthy of inclusion in the encyclopedia. In most cases what becomes problematic in Wikipedia’s structure is the question of the authenticity and conception of the information presented. Unlike past encyclopedias, where it was assumed that an autonomous and authoritative person researched and constructed factual, analytical information out of source material, Wikipedia is built by a group of volunteers that come together and construct a collaborative definition on a topic. This construction of information is accomplished through user participation and Internet documentation. This means that users who act as managers watch over the information and do so through various self-checking systems which rely on the participation from others.

Wikipedia’s structure is rather atypical because it relies on a level of trust to participate, even when the members that manage the information are not necessarily experts. Even on their own page, the administrators of Wikipedia suggest that they do not know the background of many of its authors: “Wikipedia allows anonymous editing: contributors are not required to provide any identification, or even an email address.” While SYOPS rely on each other for the

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guardianship of the site’s content, determining what is included or not, SYOPS are not evaluated by a higher authority. In fact, the only ways SYOPS are evaluated are by other SYOPS.

The ways in which objects are viewed by a group is a growing concern for many, including collecting repositories like museums or libraries. Due to digital technologies and ICTs, these traditional, and long-lived, institutions have now found themselves in a precarious situation. Instead of presenting information from a singular voice that appears as a material specialist or expert, these traditional spaces wish to include the opinion of the public in order to judge and generate content. Here, the visitor has as much a say in the material in front of them as does the specialists who, in the past, was given the responsibility to documented and re-contextualize the work.

Some new projects seek to rearrange the role of expert and replace it with the voice of the participant. The hope in these unique new projects is that participants will become more engaged, taking it upon themselves to contribute content instead of the specialist. One current example is the collaborative museum project, Steve Museum (or Steve), which permits viewers the ability to attach descriptions or documents to objects on view through social media. In an effort to “connect” with their patrons, and to persuade others to enter into the institution, museums are starting to see the importance of social media as a connecting tool to audiences. With Steve museums use social media as both an interconnection with viewers and a way to enlarge the language that defines objects. Museums allow visitors the ability to “tag” to the objects in their collection “by applying keywords, or tags, to objects.”24 This means that visitors are encouraged to add to the descriptions of the artwork by associating certain reference terms and common expressions as they interpret the work.

In *Steve* the expert of the art object, the historian, and the trained critic’s knowledge is put aside as the general public has their say. While this model encourages more use from the general public it removes what it means to be a “specialist.” The reason why projects like *Steve* are developing rests in the fact that museums seek new connections to their visitors and opportunities to show that they are using the latest technologies. According to the *Steve* website; “social tagging may provide profound new ways to describe and access cultural heritage collections and encourage visitor engagement with collection objects”\(^{25}\)

**Looking Forward**

While collaborative participatory Internet art is still in its infancy, COAPs look to the characteristics on the Internet for definition but also for new possibilities. For now, COAPs are the best example of the types of creativity made online and the most current example of Nam June Paik’s claim for new media art. Not only do COAPs allow us to survey art on the Internet they permit a developed analysis of the applications of Internet technologies and the uses that are created in response to new technologies. Projects like *Google Maps Road Trip, Marisa’s American Idol Audition Training Blog, LearningtoLoveYouMore.com, Net VS Net Collective,* and *JstChillin*, represent only a sample of the range of works that use the online community. These COAPs demonstrate how participants collaborate to use the Internet in a multitude of new ways and across number of devices, all the while exploring an increasing interconnectedness and sense of community with others.

Even though the Internet commons have met with criticism, the presence of creative collaboration online and authority over the production of art, definitions and uses of online participation are still up for discussion. This means that much is to be discovered about online

\(^{25}\) Idem.
participation through technological applications, especially those that can be appropriated for art. In fact, the production of art online provides a unique situation, one where new creations can really be new because they are defined by technological applications that have not yet been realized. Additionally, as new Internet applications appear, artists may also be able to determine how a group interprets and integrates a new technology.

This suggests that artists have a real chance to develop how technology is used, appropriating and reinterpreting technological applications applied by a community. In order to understand how a new technology affects a group, and to turn that examination into a new creative tool as Paik suggests Cage accomplishes in *Imaginary Landscape 4*, the new applications of technology require a series of examinations, which looks at the technological apparatus and the social developments and functions that arise in response to its application. I support Paik’s assertion that new media art focuses on those works that evaluate the development of a technology through its applied social construction and use. The Internet is the most current technology under investigation while Community Online Art Projects (COAPs) are the vanguard of our new art.
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