New Media Art and Institutional Critique: Networks vs. Institutions

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New media art has inspired a variety of dreams about our technological future, among them the dream of a more or less radical reconfiguration of museums and art institutions. As a process-oriented art form that is inherently collaborative, participatory, networked and variable, new media practice tends to challenge the structures and logic of museums and art galleries and reorients the concept and arena of the exhibition.

New media art seems to call for a "ubiquitous museum" or "museum without walls," a parallel, distributed, living information space open to artistic interference—a space for exchange, collaborative creation, and presentation that is transparent and flexible. This notion of an "open museum" reaches further than the concept of a postmodern museum without walls outlined by Rosalind Krauss, (1) according to which architectural structures create a visually and physically decentring movement by opening relational spaces in a referential process that continuously questions formal order. By virtue of its highly contextual and often networked nature, new media art both extends beyond the walls and structures of the museum and, at times, undermines the museum's very logic of exhibition and collection. The fact that new media art has its roots in the military-industrial-academic complex and is closely linked to "entertainment systems" adds further contexts. While all art forms and the movements that sustain them are embedded in a larger cultural context, new media can never be understood from a strictly art historical perspective: the history of technology and media sciences plays an equally important role in the formation and reception of new media art practices.

One could argue that new media art [per se] constitutes a form of Institutional Critique by its very nature, in that it questions the traditional boundaries and structures of the museum and is rooted in multiple contexts outside of the institution. However, it would be misguided to assume that new media art intentionally engages in Institutional Critique as a field of artistic practice. Only in the case of Internet art, which exists in its own potentially global exhibition space and does not need an institution to be presented to the public, did Institutional Critique occasionally become an explicit focus of artistic explorations.

Hal Foster has described Institutional Critique as a crossing of institutions of art, political economy, and representations of social life. (2) The artists who formed Institutional Critique as an artistic practice during the 1960s and 1970s—among them Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Dan Graham and Hans Haacke—made the institution both the subject and object of their art works. One could trace the lineage of this from of critique back to the beginning of the 20th century when artists such as Marcel Duchamp questioned the status of the art object, a line of inquiry that also surfaces in the dematerialization of the art object pursued by the Conceptual Art practice of the 1960s and 70s. Artists such as Asher, Buren, and Haacke departed from this more epistemologically focused investigation of the object and treated art institutions, quite explicitly, as both "target and weapon," as Foster puts it. (3) It is legitimate to ask whether Institutional Critique as artistic practice has by now become safely institutionalized and—contracted to the acronym IC—continues to exist as a clearly defined process in which institutions and artists validate each other through a critical engagement that does not result in more radical redefinitions.

In its many forms—ranging from installation and immersive virtual reality projects, to Internet art and art for mobile devices such as PDAs, cellphones etc.—new media art can be said to occasionally intersect with Institutional Critique in that it poses important questions regarding the status and role of the art object as well as institutional

processes. This reorientation of institutions and exhibitions is mostly a product of the art's very existence and nature rather than a considered artistic goal, yet it often proves to be more radical than projects that could be labeled under Institutional Critique. In what follows, I will discuss the intersections between new media art and Institutional Critique paying special attention to the challenges posed by both the inherent characteristics of new media art and its specific forms—with a focus on the "immaterial" nature of digital art and the notion of digital networks and collaborative creation.

The Artwork as Immaterial Flow: Characteristics of New Media

Since their inception, museums, galleries and the art world and art market in general have been preponderantly "object-oriented," and have configured their frameworks and infrastructures to accommodate the presentation and preservation of the static art work. This inherited infrastructure often fails adequately to support new media works, which have arisen from a shift from object to process and differ substantially from previous process-oriented or dematerialized art forms.

The challenges posed by new media art are often discussed in the context of the art form's "immateriality"—its basis in software, systems, and networks. From an art-historical perspective, new media art has strong connections to the often instruction-based nature of previous movements such as Dada and Fluxus and continues the "dematerialization" of the art object that lies at the core of Conceptual Art. Dada, Fluxus, and Conceptual Art all placed an emphasis on the variations of formal instructions and focused on concept, event, and audience participation as opposed to art as a unified object. The layer of "code" and algorithmic instructions in digital art constitutes a conceptual level which connects to Dada and Fluxus experiments with formal variations and the conceptual pieces by Duchamp, John Cage, and Sol LeWitt, based on the execution of rules. Dada poetry aestheticized the construction of poems from random variations of words and lines, using instructions to create an artifice that resulted from an interplay of randomness and control. Duchamp's ready-mades—such as *L.H.O.O.Q* (1919), a reproduction of the Mona Lisa on which he drew a mustache and goatee—foreshadow the appropriation and manipulation of "found" (copied) images that plays a dominant role in many digital artworks. The concepts of the "found" and instructions in relation to randomness also formed the basis of many compositions by Cage, who filled the predefined, structural parts of his compositions with found, preexisting sounds, thus anticipating numerous experiments in interactive art. The Fluxus events and happenings of the 1960s and 70s were often based on an execution of precise instructions, and their fusion of audience participation and the event as the smallest unit of a situation also, in many ways, anticipated the interactive, event-based nature of computer art works. Fluxus artists staged "action" events and engaged in politics, and their often playful one-liners earned them the reputation of being not much more than a group of pranksters (a criticism that was also voiced about early net art, much of which consisted of elaborate pranks). The Conceptual Art of the 1960s and 70s placed an even stronger focus on idea and concept, considering them as more central to the work than its execution. As Sol LeWitt famously put it in his landmark article, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” (Artforum, June, 1967): "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."

While immateriality and dematerialization are important aspects of new media art, it would be highly problematic to ignore its material components and the hardware that makes it accessible. Many of the issues surrounding the presentation, and particularly the preservation, of new media art are related to its materiality—hardware

and its ongoing maintenance during an exhibition. While immateriality is an important element of new media that has profound effects on artistic practice, cultural production and reception, as well as the curatorial process, it cannot be separated from the material components of the digital medium. A more productive approach to understanding this tension may be Tiziana Terranova's definition of immateriality as "links between materialities." (4) Probably more than any other medium for art, the digital is embedded between various layers of commercial systems and industrial technology that continuously define standards for the materialities of any kind of hardware components. At the same time, the immaterial systems supported by the digital medium and its network capabilities have opened up new spaces for cultural production and DIY culture. From the macrocosm of cultural practice to the microcosm of an individual artwork, the (immaterial) links between materialities are at the core of digital media. The presentation of new media art within an institution therefore needs to be seen against the background of the tensions and connections between the material and immaterial.

As an inherently variable, time-based, dynamic and interactive art form, generated through participation, collaboration and customization, new media art has introduced a pronounced shift from the object to process and resists objectification and commodification. Each distinguishing characteristic of the digital medium (which are not necessarily compounded in one work and are often used in varying combinations) poses its own set of challenges. The fact that new media projects are time-based and require extended viewing is not necessarily medium-specific, as it applies equally to video work and performance. But it is significant that the latter have long been an exception rather than the rule in the mostly object-based art world. Some three decades after its inception, video now seems to have found a safe and established place in the art world, though the museum’s relationship to performance or sound as art forms remains problematic. While an artwork that needs to be experienced over an extended period of time poses a challenge per se, the time-based nature of new media art is more problematic than that of film or video, which usually still present themselves as a finished, linear "product." New media art, however, is potentially dynamic and non-linear: for even if a project is non-interactive, the viewer may be looking at a visualization that is driven by real-time data-flow from the Internet (which will never repeat itself) or a database-driven project that configures continuously over time. Walking into a gallery space and spending a couple of minutes with a video is not an ideal or desirable experience for a viewer, but it at least gives a glimpse and brief impression of the project. Spending the same time with a new media project will often reveal much less: the viewer might only see one possible configuration of an essentially non-linear work. The context and logic of how and why that particular sequence unfolds at that particular moment will remain unclear. While every art project is embedded in its own specific context, the shift towards a dependency on context increases with new media works that require information about which data (in the broadest sense) is being shown, where it is coming from, and according to what logic it is configured. The data in question might have been submitted through the Internet by users worldwide who sustain the art work by their ongoing contributions.

Carlo Zanni's *Oriana* (2004) (5) sculpture (part of the series *Altarboy*), for example, constructs a physical object and portrait as a "living process" that contains a multitude of other possible portraits and takes its shape through the choices of users in a real-time networked process. The sculpture consists of a customized, portable aluminum case with an embedded LCD screen showing a portrait of writer and journalist Oriana Fallaci. The pupils of Fallaci's eyes consist of images gathered through live queries on Internet search engines, which are resized as 1 x 1 pixels and linked to a thumbnail of the original image (images are refreshed every 30 seconds). The right pupil of the

portrait is filled with images that users worldwide gather through queries at the project website (www.oriana.us), interacting remotely with the piece to launch the images in the pupils at the website. The left pupil of the portrait consists of images that result from a search for the words "Cu Chi" conducted by the artist on the Google search engine. The Cu Chi tunnels were some of the most famous battlegrounds of the Vietnam War and one of the nation's prime tourist attractions today. (Fallaci has written extensively about the Vietnam conflict, notably in her Vietnam journal *Nothing, and So Be It*.) (6) The bottom shell sheet of the aluminum case contains a small, transparent, glass box with fresh rose petals inside and out—pointing to the ephemeral nature of the object. While *Oriana* is clearly object-oriented, and not open to interaction for visitors to the gallery, the piece still questions the nature of objecthood since it is shaped through interactive network processes initiated by its online users.

In fact, the position of new media art is further complicated by its potential for direct interaction and participation—allowing forms of navigation, assembly, or contribution that supplement the interactive, mental event of experiencing it. The term *interactive* has now become almost meaningless due to its inflationary use in relation to countless levels of exchange. The models of interaction that form the basis of these exchanges differ widely in their "openness" and conceptual and technological sophistication. A huge segment of interactive art can be subsumed under the label of "reactive" or "responsive" art, which is generated by input such as the audience's movements and actions, changing light levels, temperature, or sounds that trigger responses from the environment. In other works, the interaction is based on enabling the audience to explore "databases" of preconfigured materials through seemingly infinite combinations. An increased degree of openness can be found in projects in which the artist establishes a framework for users to create their own contributions. Yet another model arises from system interaction, where elements of software systems themselves interact with each other with varying degrees of audience input. Interaction can also take the form of technologized tools and systems used and played by the audience, and the "reengineering"—or subversion—of existing, commercial systems (such as game engines). The highest degree of openness occurs in projects that permit users to subject the system (or immaterial art object) itself to sophisticated reconfigurations or rewriting.

One of the biggest challenges for the presentation of new media art is to engage the audience for a period of time long enough to allow a piece to reveal its content. The basic rule of museums, "Please do not touch the art," is suddenly undermined, often with the result that large segments of the audience are hesitant physically to engage with art works in a gallery space. With few exceptions, most art audiences around the world have become accustomed to acting as "art consumers"—a passive role that has been accentuated by the sometimes excessive consumer cultures of the West. Most people go to a museum or gallery with the expectation of being served a "selection" of high quality art for contemplation. At the same time, we always interact with art—engaging with it or even "completing" it in the form of a mental event. The degree of interaction remains, however, highly personal, as traditional art objects do not require active, physical engagement in order to reveal themselves. Art that breaks with the conventions of contemplation and a purely private level of engagement is often shocking to the average museum-goer, as it disrupts the very mindset so carefully cultivated by art institutions from the beginning. For most people, direct involvement with art and its tools takes place in school. In museums, art-related, participatory "activities" are mostly confined to workshops and tours for children and families—for, in general, "creativity" in the domain of art is nurtured predominantly in children and young adults. So while, ideally, new media art works should inspire and precipitate interaction, given the context

of traditional museum culture, it will often take some initiative on the part of institutions to overcome the ingrained resistance of their audience.

If new media art is presented in museum or gallery space, the work is always recontextualized and often reconfigured. Since new media art is inherently performative and contextual—often networked to the "outside"—it can feel decontextualized in the white cube, which tends to create a "sacred" space or blank slate for the contemplation of objects. Clearly, installations of digital art already create a distinct presence in physical space and sometimes need to be installed according to specified parameters (such as height, width, defined lighting requirements, etc.). But the variability and modularity inherent to the medium means that a work can be reconfigured for a specific space and shown in very different ways. Variability entails a fluent transition between the different manifestations that a "virtual object" can take on: the same work might be presented, for example, as an installation, a projection, or within a kiosk set-up. It is not uncommon that the presentation of a digital installation changes substantially from venue to venue, creating a sequence of versions that calls for new documentation strategies and a rethinking of the wall label (with its conventions of "dimensions" and creation dates).

Relying on a flow of information, networked new media projects often raise questions regarding the "site" and "substance" of works which consist of performative exchanges occurring in multiple spaces. Adrianne Wortzel's robotic installation *Camouflage Town* (2001), (7) for example, explicitly explored the connections between physical and virtual spaces in the context of questions of identity. The project's protagonist was a robot which "lived" in the gallery space of the Whitney Museum. Its movements and speech could be controlled locally, in the museum space, as well as over the Internet—resulting in a creature that was both (or neither) "here" / "there" as vsitors to the museum could not necessarily be sure whether the robot was "inhabited" by a virtual visitor or someone in the galleries [see fig. 2]. In addition to moving and speaking through the robot, visitors to the project web site could see people in the physical space through the robot's eyes and the museum's surveillance cameras. It was the performative exchanges between people in remote locations that ultimately constituted the work, while the robot as an object remained a vehicle for performance that became an ephemeral residuum after the exhibition. The site of the project was distributed and potentially global with a local access point (the museum) housing the "art object" as transmission device. While projects as *Camouflage Town* or *Oriana* do not constitute acts of Institutional Critique, they challenge the boundaries of the art object and represent the type of work that museums find difficult to support, maintain, document, collect and communicate to an audience.

The inherent characteristics of new media art require the creation of platforms of exchange—whether between artwork and audience or the public space of a gallery and the public space of a network. This gives rise to a number of challenges. Some are practical, such as the need for continuous maintenance and a flexible and technologically equipped exhibition environment, which museum buildings cannot easily provide. Others arise from conceptual issues and the continuing need to organize educational programs for audiences in order to familiarize them with the art form.

As an inherently process-oriented and participatory practice, new media has a profound influence on the roles of the curator, artist, audience, and institution. Increasingly, curators must work with artists on the development and presentation of works that reconfigure many of the traditional structures of an exhibition. In "Immateriality and its Discontents: An Overview of Main Models and Issues for Curating New Media," curator Sarah Cook discusses several metaphors and models for alternative exhibitions, including the software program (an ever-changing data flow in the

context of which a constantly traveling exhibition generates a network of gallery spaces through its tour, and installation and checklist are modified for each venue); the trade show (a short-term presentation similar to a trade show that strips the art of its preciousness); and the broadcast (a durational viewing and scheduled one-to-many broadcast with as many or as few channels as needed). (8) In new media practice, the artist often becomes a mediatory agent and facilitator—both in collaboration with other artists/programmers/engineers/scientists/researchers, and in relation to audiences' interaction with and contribution to the art work. As the traditional roles of curators and artists increasingly shift to new collaborative models of production and presentation, there is a clear defection from the model of a single creator or "star" that still predominates in the art world. New media works are often created in ongoing processes over several years by collaboratives with variable membership.

All of the issues outlined above require that art institutions, at least to some extent, reconfigure themselves and adapt to the demands of the art. To varying degrees, the developments in the field of digital and information technologies will affect the nature and structure of arts organizations and institutions for the coming decades and change the role of "art spaces" in the broadest sense. While the characteristics of new media I have discussed are seldom framed in the context of Institutional Critique, they effectively highlight some of the limitations that institutions have established for the reception and understanding of art. Elements of Institutional Critique become far more pronounced in projects that are predominantly or exclusively network-based and do not require an institution for their production and presentation.

Networks vs. Institutions

The fact that new media art successfully evades definition is one of its greatest assets, and a main reason why so many artists, curators, and practitioners in general are attracted to this art form. It seems impossible to pin down this genre of work, and safely categorize, institutionalize or commodify it. And, at times, new media art seems more “alive” than even its practitioners want it to be.

One of the most problematic art forms presented in museum or gallery space is Internet art. Net art has existed since the inception of the early World Wide Web, with several "movements" developing in parallel to its emergence. In the mid-1990s, a core group of European artists, among them Olia Lialina, Alexei Shulgin, Heath Bunting, Vuk Cosic and JODI (Dirk Paesmans and Joan Hemskeerk), who were connected through the mailing list *nettime* (founded in 1995 by media theorists and critics Geert Lovink and Pit Schultz and devoted to Internet culture and criticism) drew attention to the genre of art on the Net and formed the "net.art" (net art with a dot) movement. Discussions about the net art genre also took place on *Rhizome*, a New York-based mailing list for new media art founded by UCSD alumnus, Mark Tribe. Net art fairly quickly established its own art world on the Web with online galleries, curators, and critics, among them Tilman Baumgärtel and Josephine Bosma. Since net art can be seen by anyone, anywhere, anytime (provided one has access to the network), artists early on saw this particular medium as a way of circumventing the institution and its system of validation and commodification. Some artists explicitly refused to be included in any institutional exhibition, and there were widespread fears of being co-opted by institutional structures (which proved to be largely unfounded, since, even after 10 years, museums have not developed solid or successful models for integrating the art form).

Slovenian artist Vuk Cosic argued that, "the relationship between net.art and the art system remains silly," and used the term "net.art.system" to express the impossibility

of this relationship. (9) In an interview with Tilman Baumgärtel in 1997, Cosic also pointed out that many of the conceptual tools created by Marcel Duchamp, Conceptualism, or artists such as Joseph Beuys have become normal in the everyday routines of Internet use. Cosic suggests that decades ago, the act of opening Netscape and typing a random URL in the address bar might have been the most advanced artistic gesture imaginable. He concludes, "in a way we are Duchamp's ideal children." (10) Cosic's statement not only highlights net art's art-historical connection to the playful exploration of randomness in the works of Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp, or, later, John Cage, but implies that the often radical "acts" of these artists are intrinsic to the networked digital medium—a “given” that is taken for granted and expanded upon everyday by net artists.

One of the tensions between net.art and the institution derives from the fact that the alternative space of the Internet resists traditional, physical models of ownership, copyright, and branding. As an open system and archive of reproducible data, the Web invites or allows for instant copying, recycling, and recontextualization of information. These possibilities of instant reproduction have implications for both the understanding of the art object and the demarcation of institutional territory.

The *Unreliable Archivist* by Jon Ippolito, Keith Frank and Janet Cohen, (11) for example, uses the projects featured on the web site of äda'web, an early online gallery created by Benjamin Weil, as its raw material, allowing visitors to reconfigure and "mix" the original projects. By adjusting four sliders (language, images, style, layout) to the categories "plain," "enigmatic," "loaded," and "preposterous," users can select text and visuals from any of the projects featured on äda'web, which are subsequently displayed on the screen in a collage. The authorship and boundaries of the original projects are erased, and a new context for understanding the collage is largely set by subjective categories determined by the Archivist’s creators. A similar comment on the fluid boundaries of the art object was made in Olia Lialina's *The Last Real Net Art Museum* (1996 - present), a project based on her net art piece *My Boyfriend Came Back From The War* (1996). *My Boyfriend* is a reflection on both "wars" (literally and metaphorically), and on the nature of the communication and dissemination of information over the Web, including the process of linking (as a connection and interval) and the formal implications of the window and frame. Clicking on the images, comments, questions and statements in the frame structure of the web site causes the frame (and conversation) to split into subdivisions of increasing complexity. *The Last Real Net Art Museum* took *My Boyfriend* as a starting point and evolved into an archive of variations on the project, created by multiple artists. [Fig. 3a, b, c] *The Last Real Net Art Museum* makes use of the Internet's intrinsic possibilities for recycling in order to remix the original images, concepts, and texts from *My Boyfriend* in various media formats, from Flash to VRML, video, and audio. The framing of the project as a last net art museum points to possibilities not traditionally accommodated by museums as institutions—the infinite reconfigurations of a work in an ongoing, open-ended process.

The issue of openness to information flow was also problematized in an intervention by the art collective ®Tmark whose web site was included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial. For the duration of the Biennial, ®Tmark opened up their site for contributions by other artists and the public, allowing them to feature their work via the ®Tmark site. Any interested individual worldwide could thus participate in the Biennial, and visitors would experience the work in the museum space at the terminal featuring the ®Tmark web site.

The reproducibility of data on the Internet has the consequence that the virtual real estate of a company or institution can easily be copied ("cloned") and reinserted into new contexts, a tactic that many artists, net activists, or hacktivists, have pursued. In the

mid- to late 1990s, cloning became a popular strategy among net artists for questioning rules of access and the demarcation of institutional boundaries in the virtual space. When Documenta X (Kassel, 1997) decided to "close down" its website after the end of the physical exhibition, artist Vuk Cosic cloned the site, which remains available online until today as the art project *Documenta Done*. (12) While Cosic's act seems deceptively simple, it also constitutes an a clear gesture of Institutional Critique that questions traditional models of access and finitude (e.g. closing the exhibition), which are simply not applicable in virtual space. A comparable action in physical space would have necessitated the recreation of the existing museum buildings and their annexes in a different location, complete with their "collection," branding, and all their institutional signifiers.

The project *Uncomfortable Proximity* (2000) (13) by Harwood, a member of the British art collective Mongrel, affords another good example of shifting institutional contexts. The first piece of net art commissioned by the Tate, *Uncomfortable Proximity* reproduces the layout of the Tate's web site, with its specific logos and design, and offers a history of the British art system that may be less than comfortable for an art institution. [Fig. 4] One of the blurbs describing a section of the site reads: "Tate Britain—the home of 500 years of tasty babes, luxury goods, own goals and psychological props of the British social elite." Based on Harwood's readings of Tate works, publicity materials, and the history of Tate Britain's physical site, the project examines the history of the institution in relation to class and society. As Harwood puts it on the project web site:

> *The Tate's scrapbook of British pictorial history has many missing pages, either torn out through revision or self-censored before the first sketch. Those that did make it created the cultural cosmetics of peoples profiting from slavery, migrant labour, colonisation and transportation. Clearly the images in the historic collection and the image of the Tate itself are pregnant with the past's cosmetic cultural surgery made ready for the shopping lists of the future. … While Tate can never be fully inclusive of peoples' histories that may have run counter to its own, it can at least be a site of critical participation in the present history of cultural cosmetics of these islands.*

While Harwood's criticism of the institution itself is by no means radically new, the use of the Web as a vehicle makes it possible to frame this critique as an official statement from the institution by literally rewriting the museum's online representation. One of the essential markers of online identity—individual, organizational, or corporate—is the domain name (microsoft.com, lacma.org), and since the early days of the Web, the registration of institutional or corporate domain names by individuals not affiliated with the respective entity has been common practice. While most of this type of domain name registration fell into the category of mere "real estate speculation" (generating money through the resale of the name to the company or institution), it has also been consistently pursued by artists and activists in order to create an alternative, revisionist version of an institution or corporation. In 2002, Miltos Manetas registered the domain name whitneybiennial.com and, during the 2002 Whitney Biennial, featured an alternative selection of net art at the web site, which was not immediately identifiable as unofficial and, at the same time, not related to the Whitney Museum.

While net art exists within a (virtual) public space, it seems to be particularly difficult to "connect" it to the public space of a gallery. There have been multiple approaches to showing this art from, which all have their advantages and disadvantages. The presentation of net art in a "lounge area" with sofas, chairs, computers and screens invites visitors to spend time with the art works, but leads to an much-criticized "ghettoization," since the art cannot be experienced in the context of works in other media and becomes marginalized in relation to the "(hi)story of art"

unfolding in the other galleries. On the other hand, integrating net art into the gallery achieves contextualization but does not support the extended period of engagement that often is necessary in order fully to experience the art. Nevertheless, museums can fulfill an important function by presenting net art in the context of other media and encouraging visitors not familiar with the art form to explore further projects in the privacy of their homes.

A decade ago, "networked art" was understood mostly as art residing in and accessible over the Internet from the privacy of one's home, a notion that has substantially changed over the years. Wireless networks are increasingly penetrating public space and the fastest growing field within new media practice has been mobile or locative media art—created for networked devices such as cell phones and Palm Pilots; incorporated in "wearables," such as clothing or accessories equipped with sensors or microprocessors; or making use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and wireless networks in order to deliver content specific to a location. This form of new media art is mostly alien to the museum context and at the same time exemplifies the idea of the museum without walls. The notion of "ubiquitous computing" naturally transcends the physical boundaries of the museum space. In the case of mobile devices brought by the audience to a museum (such as cell phones or Palm Pilots), the institution becomes an access point or node in the network—by setting up a beaming station, for example. In order to communicate the inherent concept of these projects, it often becomes necessary to establish a larger network for the art work by collaborating with other organizations that could serve as additional nodes.

Another area of networked new media practice that exists largely outside of the institution—and is difficult to represent within existing institutional structures—consists of artist-created media production systems and software tools used by online communities over extended periods of time. These so-called "artwares" or "social softwares" often restructure or critique existing media systems by enhancing or re-engineering software; creating alternative, community-driven platforms for exchange; or examining the agency, autonomy, or political agendas inscribed in software. *Nine(9)* (2003), created by Harwood, a member of the British collaborative Mongrel as a continuation of its project *Linker* (1999)*,* (14) while artist-in-residence at the Waag Society Amsterdam, is a good example of social software for community-driven publishing. An an open-source software structure that allows individuals and communities to "map" their experiences and "social geographies," *Nine(9)* consists of a server-based application that can incorporate 9 groups x 9 archives x 9 maps for a total of 729 collective knowledge maps. An important part of the project's operation as "social software" is founded in ongoing dialogue between users and programmers in order to transcend standardized social relations.

These projects exist and develop in the "digital commons"—a term introduced by the Sarai New Media Initiative in Delhi in their reader on the public domain (2001). (15) The idea of the digital or networked commons obviously requires a reconsideration of traditional definitions: public space, here, is not a shared territory but a non-locality consisting of global communication systems that, while subject to protocols and regulations, largely exist outside of a single nation's or state's jurisdiction; the "commoners" also can not be defined strictly in terms of physical location, but are often communities of interest that share ideas and are dispersed around the world. The digital commons is a space of shared information resources collectively owned by a more or less well-defined community that establishes certain rules of access and boundaries. As art activist and theorist Geert Lovink has pointed out, "digital commons" projects inhabit a "third space" between state interests and market forces. (16) As activist art projects, these works are "living processes" that exist outside of any institutional framework. Within a gallery or exhibition they can only be reduced to a form of documentation

unless the gallery is transformed into a local "community center" that is open to and supports ongoing engagement.

Extending Institutional Critique

It is important to consider whether new media art has in fact extended the idea of Institutional Critique to address wider issues in the relationship between visual culture and institutions. At this point in time, new media art is far from integrated into the art world and art market and exists in multiple contexts. However, the distributed existence of this art form is due not simply to the fact that it has only recently registered on the radar of the art world: new media art is, by nature, deeply interwoven with the forms and structures of our information society—the networks and collaborative models that are creating new forms of cultural production and profoundly shape today's cultural climate. New media art will always transcend the boundaries of the museum and gallery and create new spaces for art. One of the larger cultural implications of new media practice is the creation of (temporary) autonomous zones (17) for production, dissemination, and reception that exist outside of—and float through—the institution.

While this can be considered an extension of Institutional Critique, it may be simply inappropriate and misguided to consider new media practice in the context of "IC" as a defined term and concomitant field that has its established place in institutional history. Clearly, digital technologies have supported a new form of visual culture that finds itself, in various ways, at odds with institutional structures. New media also raise fundamental questions about the museum's role as an archive and its adjudication of "cultural memory." (18) For how can institutions present and archive the visual culture arising from an artistic practice shaped by real-time processing and entailing instant remix, production, distribution and reception that unfold outside the museum space itself?

Recent discussions on mailing lists have raised the question of whether new media art has led to a departure from Institutional Critique towards a form of "transgressive ecology"—an environment of shared resources that allows for divergence, fluctuation, and interpenetration between localities and bodies of knowledge. (19) Network technologies certainly blur the boundaries between center and margin and question institutional boundaries, as well as the politics of inclusion and exclusion; but, as this exchange made clear, there are still multiple limitations at play, many carried over from pre-existing power structures and informed by pre-established ideologies. Nevertheless, new media art can be seen as a new platform for the renegotiation of boundaries—for the art work, artist, audience, and institution—and support for this work is in the best interest of museums. For not only is this art form a contemporary artistic practice that the traditional art world cannot afford to ignore, it has already expanded the notion of what art and the institution itself are—and can be.

Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss, "Postmodernism's Museum Without Walls" in Reesa Greenberg (ed.), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (Routledge: New York, 1996).

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