



unplace

networked art: places-between-places

The unplace Exhibition

At the present time, when digital technology is no longer considered to be a novelty and when its use – both simple and elaborate – has become such a common and familiar everyday event, it is worth noting how the production of virtual online exhibitions, dedicated above all to Internet Art and the artistic practices arising from computer-based media, is still faced with a set of variables that condition, but do not necessarily limit, the different forms for their realisation and enjoyment. Such variables include: the fact that only a minority of contemporary artists make use of the possibilities offered by virtual technology to produce their works and to install them online; the high and fairly uneven cost of this advanced technology; the lesser interest shown in this artistic genre by the agents involved in the distribution and conservation of art (galleries, collectors, critics, museums); and the low visibility/accessibility of Internet Art, even among those who are assiduous visitors to the virtual public space.

At the same time, there is also another set of variables that result from the use of digital technologies in the creation and exhibition of art works and that, at various levels, turn these works into an enormous and stimulating challenge for curators. While, on the one hand, we are referring to art works without any physical reference that, above all, call upon the senses associated with the regimes of sight, hearing and kinaesthetics, these works are not yet cinema, or perhaps they are already a kind of ‘post-cinema’ – proposing new narrative typologies, operating in accordance with machines and their own particular production rituals, reconfiguring their reception in changeable communities of different audiences. On the other hand, we are talking about artistic objects that are extremely malleable and unpredictable, since their apparent two-dimensionality may frequently – through the effects of a falsification of perspectives and the infinite qualities of movements – result in a volumetry that enhances the effects of parallax, kaleidoscopic effects and the contraction and amplification of scale, all of which are capable of unexpectedly challenging the condition of the audience observing them and the mechanisms used for their apprehension and reception.

While the nature of these works makes them suitable for museums without their own fixed place, without their own residence or their own collection, it does not limit the spaces available for artistic visits. On the contrary, one of the most open questions related with these new artistic typologies results precisely from their permanent traffic. The place of these works is, therefore, nowhere at all and yet everywhere: they may appear in the midst of a flow of other images, data, graphs, or virtual mail; they may break through filters or be held back by them; they may be codified and subjected to protocols of accessibility; they may function as purely virtual infrastructures or appear associated with others, with physical and tangible limits. This polyvalence places these works in a constant state of mutability and therein lies part of their fascination and their pertinence for the ‘Unplace’ exhibition.

The choice of works that is presented here does not seek to tell the story of the path that digital art has been following, from the pioneering examples of the 1960s, passing through the experiments related with the first expansion of the Internet, to the most recent revolution of the so-called Web 2.0, characterised by the emergence and range of the social networks, the virtual communities and the participative media. Despite our taking into consideration the great seductiveness that the sophisticated and spectacular technology of the virtual world can exercise over us, we have mainly sought to gauge the effect that the new type of shock of these artistic genres can produce. In particular, the ‘Unplace’ exhibition gives privilege to the questions that are implicit in digital art, but, above all, to the way in which this art form circulates and is exhibited: for these are the reasons for the great disturbances that have taken place in the domain of creation, and mainly in its reception and conservation.

Besides the questioning of the functions of traditional artistic institutions, the frequency and fluidity with which these works are manifested in the circuit between producers and receivers has turned them into a hot medium, overcoming the initial stigma that associated this technology with cold forms and figures, such as those of cyberculture and of the fearful and hybrid post-humanism. We currently find ourselves in another type of artistic culture, whose powerful technological presence, being both current and ubiquitous, cannot be thought of without a critical perspective that questions it: the apparent democratisation of the Internet and the network culture; the various political movements that appropriate these models of connectivity and make them more spectacular; the relationship that exists between the technological development of war machines and their reuse in these works; who manages them, who archives them, and, in the final analysis, who causes such a large production of information to circulate.

Such a reflection also serves as a curatorial stimulus for the research that underpins this exhibition, defining a necessary posture of epistemological criticism. Where, after all, are the powers that control and legitimise all of this vast quantity of production and artistic experimentation, and what are their main aims? And, besides this, how does this art reconfigure (or not) the most common and resistant artistic categories?

The problem of the authorship of these new forms is particularly innovative, for it is also based on the particular dynamics of creativity and of the artists themselves. Going beyond the model of the solitary creator, we now find forms of collaboration between agents with different (sometimes radically different) disciplinary backgrounds, between authors who only know each other and communicate with one another in the virtual space, or between artists who assume different identities from their civil identities. Also of particular interest for this exhibition are the collective authorial regimes, which welcome all those who call for the collaboration of communities of cybernauts or episodic passers-by, and who flit between the real public space and virtual public space.

Once they have been released by their creators into these uncontrollable ecosystems, the art works remain in constant movement, metamorphosing indeterminably into forms that deviate from the initial intentions of their authors, and marking out territories that are continually *between* one thing and another – between states, people, spaces and temporalities. Faced with this growing dematerialisation of artistic practices in zones of constant transition, survival and incompleteness, the creation of the art work cannot be much more than a perpetual starting point.

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