LEONARDO
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE
ARTS, SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

Sabancı
Üniversitesi

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

LEA

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

Touch and Go is published in collaboration with Watermans and Goldsmiths College in occasion of the Watermans' International Festival of Digital Art, 2012, which coincides with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. The issue explores the impact of technology in art as well as the meaning, possibilities and issues around human interaction and engagement. *Touch and Go* investigates interactivity and participation, as well as light art and new media approaches to the public space as tools that foster engagement and shared forms of participation.

TOUCH AND *GO*

Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012

Touch and Go **is a title that I chose together with Irini Papadimitriou for this LEA special issue.** On my part with this title I wanted to stress several aspects that characterize that branch of contemporary art in love with interaction, be it delivered by allowing the audience to touch the art object or by becoming part of a complex electronic sensory experience in which the artwork may somehow respond and touch back in return.

With the above statement, I wanted to deliberately avoid the terminology 'interactive art' in order to not fall in the trap of characterizing art that has an element of interaction as principally defined by the word interactive; as if this were the only way to describe contemporary art that elicits interactions and responses between the artist, the audience and the art objects.

I remember when I was at Central Saint Martins writing a paper on the sub-distinctions within contemporary media arts and tracing the debates that distinguished between electronic art, robotic art, new media art, digital art, computer art, computer based art, internet art, web art... At some point of that analysis and argument I realized that the common thread that characterized all of these sub-genres of aesthetic representations was the word art and it did not matter (at least not that much in my opinion) if the manifestation was material or immaterial, conceptual or physical, electronic or painterly, analogue or digital.

I increasingly felt that this rejection of the technical component would be necessary in order for the electronic-robotic-new-media-digital-computer-based-internet art object to re-gain entry within the field of fine art. Mine was a reaction to an hyper-fragmented

and indeed extensive and in-depth taxonomy that seemed to have as its main effect that of pushing these experimental and innovative art forms – through the emphasis of their technological characterization – away from the fine arts and into a ghetto of isolation and self-reference. Steve Dietz's question – *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* [1] – remains unanswered, but I believe that there are changes that are happening – albeit slowly – that will see the sensorial and technical elements become important parts of the aesthetic aspects of the art object as much as the brush technique of Vincent Willem van Gogh or the sculptural fluidity of Henry Moore.

Hence the substitution in the title of this special issue of the word interactivity with the word touch, with the desire of looking at the artwork as something that can be touched in material and immaterial ways, interfered with, interacted with and 'touched and reprocessed' with the help of media tools but that can also 'touch' us back in return, both individually and collectively. I also wanted to stress the fast interrelation between the art object and the consumer in a commodified relationship that is based on immediate engagement and fast disengagement, touch and go. But a fast food approach is perhaps incorrect if we consider as part of the interactivity equation the viewers' mediated processes of consumption and memorization of both the image and the public experience.

Nevertheless, the problems and issues that interactivity and its multiple definitions and interpretations in the 20th and 21st century raise cannot be overlooked, as much as cannot be dismissed the complex set of emotive and digital interactions that can be set in motion by artworks that reach and engage large groups of people within the public space. These interactions

generate public shows in which the space of the city becomes the background to an experiential event that is characterized by impermanence and memorization. It is a process in which thousands of people engage, capture data, memorize and at times memorialize the event and re-process, mash-up, re-disseminate and re-contextualize the images within multiple media contexts.

The possibility of capturing, viewing and understanding the entire mass of data produced by these aesthetic sensory experiences becomes an impossible task due to easy access to an unprecedented amount of media and an unprecedented multiplication of data, as Lev Manovich argues. [2]

In *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* Timothy Murray writes that "the retrospective nature of repetition and digital coding—how initial images, forms, and narratives are refigured through their contemplative re-citation and re-presentation—consistently inscribes the new media in the memory and memorization of its antecedents, cinema and video." [3]

The difference between memorization and memorialization may be one of the further aspects in which the interaction evolves – beyond the artwork but still linked to it. The memory of the event with its happening and performative elements, its traces and records both official and unofficial, the re-processing and mash-ups; all of these elements become part of and contribute to a collective narrative and pattern of engagement and interaction.

These are issues and problems that the artists and writers of this LEA special issue have analyzed from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, offering to the reader the opportunity of a glimpse into the complexity of today's art interactions within the contemporary social and cultural media landscapes.

Touch and Go is one of those issues that are truly born from a collaborative effort and in which all editors have contributed and worked hard in order to

deliver a documentation of contemporary art research, thought and aesthetic able to stand on the international scene.

For this reason I wish to thank Prof. Janis Jefferies and Irini Papadimitriou together with Jonathan Munro and Özden Şahin for their efforts. The design is by Deniz Cem Önduygu who as LEA's Art Director continues to deliver brilliantly designed issues.

Lanfranco Aceti
Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery

1. "Nevertheless, there is this constant apparently inherent need to try and categorize and classify. In Beyond Interface, an exhibition I organized in 1998, I 'datamined' ten categories: net.art, storytelling, socio-cultural, biographical, tools, performance, analog-hybrid, interactive art, interfacers + artificers. David Ross, in his lecture here at the CAD-RE Laboratory for New Media, suggested 21 characteristics of net art. Stephen Wilson, a pioneering practitioner, has a virtual – albeit well-ordered – jungle of categories. Rhizome has developed a list of dozens of keyword categories for its ArtBase. Lev Manovich, in his Computing Culture: Defining New Media Genres symposium focused on the categories of database, interface, spatialization, and navigation. To my mind, there is no question that such categorization is useful, especially in a distributed system like the Internet. But, in truth, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, "ornithology is for the birds what categorization is for the artist." Perhaps especially at a time of rapid change and explosive growth of the underlying infrastructure and toolsets, it is critical that description follow practice and not vice versa." Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists? Web Walker Daily* 28, April 4, 2000, http://bit.ly/QjEWlY (accessed July 1, 2012).
2. This link to a Google+ conversation is an example of this argument on massive data and multiple media engagements across diverse platforms: http://bit.ly/pGgDsS (accessed July 1, 2012).
3. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.

Touch and Go: The Magic Touch Of Contemporary Art

It is with some excitement that I write this preface to Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012. It has been a monumental achievement by the curator Irini Papadimitriou to pull together 6 ground-breaking installations exploring interactivity, viewer participation, collaboration and the use or importance of new and emerging technologies in Media and Digital Art.

From an initial call in December 2010 over 500 submissions arrived in our inboxes in March 2011. It was rather an overwhelming and daunting task to review, look and encounter a diverse range of submissions that were additionally asked to reflect on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Submissions came from all over the world, from Africa and Korea, Austria and Australia, China and the UK, Latvia and Canada and ranged from the spectacularly complicated to the imaginatively humorous. Of course each selector, me, onedotzero, London's leading digital media innovation organization, the curatorial team at Athens Video Art Festival and Irini herself, had particular favorites and attachments but the final grouping I believe does reflect a sense of the challenges and opportunities that such an open competition offers. It is though a significant move on behalf of the curator that each work is given the Watermans space for 6 weeks which enables people to take part in the cultural activities surrounding each installation, fulfilling, promoting and incorporating the Cultural Olympiad themes and values 'inspiration, participation and creativity.'

Some, like Gail Pearce's *Going with the Flow* was made because rowing at the 2012 Olympics will be held near Egham and it was an opportunity to respond and create an installation offering the public a more interactive way of rowing, while remaining on dry land, not only watching but also participating and having an effect on the images by their actions. On the other hand, Michele Barker and Anna Munster's collaborative *Hocus Pocus* will be a 3-screen interactive artwork that uses illusionistic and performative aspects of magical tricks to explore human perception, senses and movement. As they have suggested, "Magic – like interactivity – relies on shifting the perceptual relations between vision and movement, focusing and diverting attention at key moments. Participants will become aware of this relation as their perception catches up with the audiovisual illusion(s)" (artists statement, February 2011). Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Emeka Ogboh are artists who also work collaboratively and working under name of One-Room Shack. *UNITY* is built like a navigable labyrinth to reflect the idea of unity in diversity that the Games signify. In an increasingly globalized world they are interested in the ways in which the discourse of globalization opens up and closes off discursive space whereas Suguru Goto is a musician who creates real spaces that are both metaphysical and spiritual. *Cymatics* is a kinetic sculpture and sound installation. Wave patterns are created on liquid as a result of sound vibrations generated by visitors. Another sound work is Phoebe Hui's *Granular Graph,* **a** sound instrument about musical gesture and its notation.

Audiences are invited to become a living pendulum. The apparatus itself can create geometric images to represent harmonies and intervals in musical scales. Finally, Joseph Farbrook's *Strata-caster* explores the topography of power, prestige, and position through an art installation, which exists in the virtual world of Second Life, a place populated by over 50,000 people at any given moment.

Goldsmiths, as the leading academic partner, has been working closely with Watermans in developing a series of seminars and events to coincide with the 2012 Festival. I am the artistic director of Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS), which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engages in a number of research projects and provides its own postgraduate teaching through the PhD in Arts and Computational Technology, the MFA in Computational Studio Arts and the MA in Computational Art. Irini is also an alumni of the MFA in *Curating* (Goldsmiths, University of London) and it has been an exceptional pleasure working with her generating ideas and platforms that can form an artistic legacy long after the Games and the Festival have ended. The catalogue and detailed blogging/documentation and social networking will be one of our responsibilities but another of mine is to is to ensure that the next generation of practitioners test the conventions of the white cube gallery, reconsider and revaluate artistic productions, their information structure and significance; engage in the museum sector whilst at the same time challenging the spaces for the reception of 'public' art. In addition those who wish to increase an audience's interaction and enjoyment of their work have a firm grounding in artistic practice and computing skills.

Consequently, I am particularly excited that the 2012 Festival Watermans will introduce a mentoring scheme for students interested in participatory interactive digital / new media work. The mentoring scheme involves video interviews with the 6 selected artists and their work, briefly introduced earlier in this preface, and discussions initiated by the student. As so often debated in our seminars at Goldsmiths and elsewhere, what are the expectations of the audience, the viewer, the spectator, and the engager? How do exhibitions and festival celebrations revisit the traditional roles of performer/artist and audiences? Can they facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity? How do sound works get curated in exhibitions that include interactive objects, physical performances and screens? What are the issues around technical support? How are the ways of working online and off, including collaboration and social networking, affecting physical forms of display and publishing?

As I write this in Wollongong during the wettest New South Wales summer for 50 years, I want to end with a quote used by the Australia, Sydney based conjurers Michele Barker and Anna Munster

> *Illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception.* [1]

The world is upside down in so many alarming ways but perhaps 2012 at Watermans will offer some momentary ideas of unity in diversity that the Games signify and *UNITY* proposes. Such anticipation and such promise!

Janis Jefferies
Professor of Visual Arts
Goldsmiths
University of London, UK

23rd Dec 2011, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

1. Stephen L. Malnik and Susana Martinez-Conde, *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our Everyday Deceptions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 8.

Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Volume 18 Issue 3

GEOMETRY

FELICIE D'ESTIENNE D'ORVES

in conversation with

Claire Le Gouellec

Geometry is a kinetic installation which is made up of two masts, on the top of which rotating mirrors are located. The mirrors are programmed to move together in synchrony. This movement creates a rhythm of different positions. The pre programmed mirror blades turn on horizontal axis and in so doing create geometrical movement. The reflection of the sky in the mirror blades and the movement of the sculpture itself creates different kinetic effects according to the time of the day and season.

At the fall of night the signal is reinforced through projections of laser light from the horizontal mast. Laser lines are projected from the Watermans building onto the horizontal mast and reflected from the surface of the sky. The programming of the movement of the sculpture means that geometrical forms are created and reach into the sky.

The installation diffuses both strong and weak light impulses into its surroundings. The installation uses light as a means of communication and is inspired by such communication devices as light houses, military signal lights and the Morse code. The interplay of the different movements of the sculpture create a symbolic language of communication between the sculpture and the viewer.

Geometry, Félicie d'Estienne d'Orves , 2012, photos by Julien Lanoo.

Geometry, Félicie d'Estienne d'Orves , 2012,
photos by Julien Lanoo.

Claire Le Gouellec: What an expansive but elemental title you've given your work. How do you relate thematically to the synthetic approach of 'point, line and plane' geometry, and to Kandinsky's reading of it?
Felicie d'Estienne d'Orves: The sky has a strong, overbearing presence at the site of the Waterman's building. The suburban location of the piece consists of low buildings and the river Thames setting an open horizon. I wanted to use this feature to realign the spectator's relationship with the natural environment of the sky and to expand their experience of the space.

The geometric abstraction allowed me to emphasize this relationship by drawing lines of light between the earth and the nocturnal sky. In 'Point, Line and Plane,' Kandinsky describes the line as the very expression of movement: "The destruction of the point's supreme immobility"... "the leap of the static towards the dynamic." The laser beams from the Mirrors of the sculp-

ture are animated either simultaneously or separately, projecting from the terrace of the art center.

According to their positions in the sky the lines of light create a confrontational link and dynamic movements against the sky.

By observing the laser lines from different viewpoints, one can see various elementary geometric forms.

The line also directs the viewer's gaze and draws it deeper into the sky. Geometry is first and foremost a tool to measure the world.

I know kinetic is a term you use in describing your work's focus. How do you relate to the kinetic movement at present? Do you see a future involvement with such projects as the Kinetica Art Fair in London and do you have a dialogue with the kinetic art community?
Kinetic Art developed the relationship of the viewer's body with an artwork. Through movement and action the artistic object becomes a tool, which challenges the preconceptions of the viewer. The physical experience and the confronting of known perceptions are, in my opinion, effective ways of bringing about an opportunity to review our acquired assumptions and tastes.

The technological possibilities of our times have brought about new opportunities for the revival of Kinetic Art. Computer Coding and the advancement

of intelligent behavior lends us to review analysis of our human functions and offers new questions for our intellectual processes.

The Kinetica Fair which has been taking place in London annually for several years illustrates this to some degree.

Are you interested in kinetic geometry by any chance?
Of course this field interests me but in the case of *Geometry* the kinetic interaction is minimal.

In this installation I am attempting to create a relationship between man and space. The geometric shapes are therefore very simple and symbolic. The role of these lines is to draw the gaze into the sky. These lines should not become the main object. The movements engineered by these lines remove their responsibility as the man object of the viewer's gaze. Various geometric shapes are however, visible from different viewpoints around Brentford.

In this installation I am attempting to create a relationship between man and space. The geometric shapes are therefore very simple and symbolic.

Laser has been your medium for a number of years now. How important is the light aesthetic in your art? Do you see yourself exploring alternative media in pursuit of the machine or technology aesthetic or is light your primary motivation?

The use of light in my work stems from research I did into the means of representing vibrating and intangible phenomena. I mainly use what's known as ambient light, which reflects from physical objects. By superimposing the virtual reality onto physical objects I have found a balance between the real and the virtual allows me to play with the effects light has on one's perceptions.

My work with light originated from the production of video images. I started my first installations in the late 1990s using mapping video of colors on objects.

I use different supports for my projections (a white dome, smoke and frames, for example) to give a body to the light within varied contexts.

Depending on the spaces in which I work, I can use different tools as shown in *Geometry*. A powerful laser needs no support to enhance the light of its beam. It is an ideal tool to break into a vast space using light.

The outstanding characteristic of laser is its continuous beam, which alters little along its course over long distances. This allows me continuous links of light in order to produce geometric forms in the monumental context of the sky. It is an impressive tool and is also used to calculate the distance between the moon and the earth.
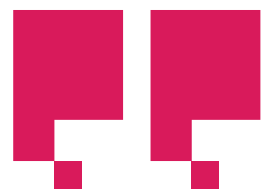
> *By superimposing the virtual reality onto physical objects I have found a balance between the real and the virtual allows me to play with the effects light has on one's perceptions.*

Geometry, Félicie d'Estienne d'Orves , 2012, photos by Julien Lanoo.

Installation art over the past decades have successfully de-framed (or is it dis-framed) art. Do your geometric mirrors and lasers re-frame a new perspective? Are you challenging your audience to look through a new form of frame in motion?

In an era in which contemporary art sanctifies the importance of the object I find it interesting to create a work of art in a more ephemeral space where the main focus is on the spectator's experience of their own environment.

I am always impressed by our capability to place ourselves within a picture.

Figurative art has never stopped evolving techniques in response to the curiosity of the artist, thus revealing new sensory perceptions to the viewer.

Cinema today uses numerous effective techniques to get through to its public. I am interested in taking from it certain tools to re use in the pictorial research field. I am particularly interested by the projection of an image outside its frame and also of the screen to replace it in tangible space.

This context of mixed media that blends physical space with virtual space opens new possible methods of representing reality. Image is always taught on the basis of perspective however could we not explore a new dimension of reality that I would qualify as 'immersive' by integrating the spectator within the physical dimensions of the work?

function, the two paddles of mirrors rotate constantly providing constantly changing angles in the light signals.

If I wished to associate the project with a practical application I would rather choose to affiliate it with the laser telescopes used in astrophysics!

Clearly you regularly place your work in the public sphere but what are your politics of public space? Are you motivated to encourage a re-engagement with the cultural heritage of land or are you more inspired by the challenges of urban society?
This is not exactly voluntary. I like to work in places with strong spatial characteristics and different uses. Working in a public place I try to challenge the habits of its public, to surprise them in contrast their expectations within an exhibition space.

In the context of *Geometry*, I have designed the installation in such a way that it captures the attention of the passerby, the bus driver who passes daily and the art center visitor alike.

My sculptures are addressed to the individual, a means of reaching out to the spectator from within their own perception of reality. In a sense I try to draw closer to the body of the urban person and place him at the heart of the physical experience of my art.

Furthermore, this installation sends out a communal signal framed by urbanization, to local viewers.

Critics have associated the structure of *Geometry* with lighthouses and wind turbines both of which share a symbolism with 'free' public benefit. Do you relate to this symbolism?
Yes, another aspect of the project was to create a message encoded in light and rhythm like lighthouses or other light signalers. I am interested in drawing out this connection with an ancient form of communication that targets a definite geographical area; a communication that links us to a physical place and a landmark.

The comparison with the wind turbine is more anecdotal. The form of the sculpture has a simple kinetic

Art has, through history; managed to bridge cultural divides, as indeed Morse code bridges linguistic ones. Where does you work communicate itself? Is the freedom of art and signals to overcome boundaries relevant in your art?
Geometry uses an abstract code to transmit a symbolic message. The light code evokes, for me, a human construction that defies the immensity of space.

In this sense it is a rather humanist vision. Perhaps this also calls to mind a more instinctive human communication, a rather savage one, between man on earth and the vast presence of the sky. It reminds me of the way in which fireworks use an almost instinctive language to dazzle the obscurity of night. ∎

Geometry, Félicie d'Estienne d'Orves , 2012, photos by Julien Lanoo.