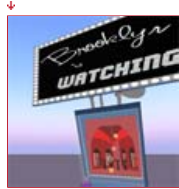


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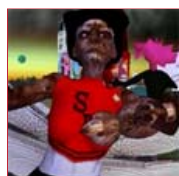
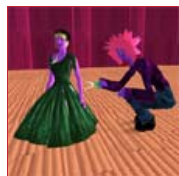
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feature

WHY ART IN VIRTUAL WORLDS? E-HAPPENINGS, RELATIONAL MILIEUX & "SECOND SCULPTURE"

by [Patrick Lichty](#)



In the 2000's there is an emergence of New Media art in virtual worlds - 3D online spaces where people navigate online media using electronic personifications called "avatars". These include MMORPGs (Massively Multi User Online Role-Playing Games) like *World of Warcraft* and *Everquest* [1](#), and MUVes (Multi User



Virtual Environments like *There* and *Second Life* [2](#). Though multi-user worlds have been around for years, the number of artists working consistently in concentrated numbers on specific platforms created a critical mass in which this art is being recognized by contemporary art curators and the mainstream art press (examples being ARTnews [3](#), Exibart [4](#) and Art in America [5](#)). These artists include Cao Fei, Eva and Franco Mattes, Second Front, Gazira Babeli, and many others. The emergence of these forms is an odd negotiation between genres, as virtual worlds as such have not been a general milieu for Contemporary Art. This being said, the question of why this particular genre of social media has merited this level of attention remains. What then, are the compelling aspects of virtual world art, its emergence within the larger contemporary milieu, and how does it locate within an art historical context?

Exploration of new forms has been a modus operandi of the avant garde for over a century, and New Media is doubly implicated in this gesture of praxis. New Media implicitly signifies novelty by virtue of its name alone, but also through its definition that includes emergent (but primarily digital) artforms. As a subset of this, one could recurse by saying that art in virtual worlds could be a "New" New Media. Before devolving into satirical discussions of comparative novelty, it's notable that "new" media are a locus of expansion of art praxis for centuries, including oil, print, and photography. However, is novelty sufficient cause to merit the consideration of virtual art? Beyond the maxim of "Art for Art's Sake", virtual world art *is* part of a historical arc of work that engages social relations.

To consider the function of art in virtual worlds, one has to look at the history of art that involves the creation of social situations. Emblematic of these are the Dadas and Futurists, whose soirees and evenings of syntesi broke the boundaries between art and theatre. Excommunicated Surrealist Antonin Artaud wrote of the "Theatre of Cruelty" [6](#), which proclaimed

↓ sommaire
 ↓ dossier
 ↓ perspective
 ↓ œuvre 1
 ↓ œuvre 2
 ↓ œuvre 3
 ↓ œuvre 4
 ↓ œuvre 5
 ↓ crédits

↓ numéros
 ↓ précédents
 ↓ liens
 ↓ collaboration
 ↓ abonnement
 ↓ contact
 ↓ ciac

the use of radical actions to reveal a reality without artifice, and in the late 50's Guy Debord and the Situationist international engaged in critical discourse by the creation of social situations. Although there are a number of artists who dealt in social relations in the 20th Century, I would like to draw influences for our engagement with virtual art through precedents from Alan Kaprow, Joseph Beuys, and Nicolas Bourriaud. From this, I would like to establish the creation of the ephemeral social/relational space through the "Happening" (Kaprow), establish the object as site of social exchange/generation (Beuys), and relational space with persistent traces/art (Bourriaud).

In his *Untitled Guidelines for Happenings*, Fluxus artist Alan Kaprow wrote of the "Happening" in which he sought to erode the boundaries between art and life. In this essay, Kaprow defined principles of the Happening, two of them being, "The line between art and life should be kept as fluid and indistinct as possible", and that "the source of themes, materials, actions and the *relationships* between them are to be derived from any place or period except from the arts..." ⁷ The importance of Kaprow's principles is twofold; first, art is formally freed from the object and the gallery to realm of life/action, and secondly it blurs the distinction between art and life to allow the Happening to be defined as any milieu of potential which is in agreement with virtual worlds. Although this author reiterates that there is intentionality to art, even in Kaprow's definition of the Happening, virtual worlds certainly exhibit many of the principles of the Happening, including variability of time, indistinctness of audience, and uniqueness of moment. Another model to the Happening that fractally includes socially interactive art and society as art is related to contemporary Joseph Beuys.

Joseph Beuys' conception of "Social Sculpture" ⁸ is a contemporary of Kaprow's idea of the Happening, but relates more to an objective practice in the creation of social situations. For example, his *7000 Oaks*, commissioned by the Dia Center for the Arts for Documenta 7, centers around the placement of that number of saplings and basalt plinths as a gesture of environmental awareness. Much of Beuys' work emphasizes ambiguity of interpretation in his objects and performances, underscoring his assertion that "artist is akin to that of a shaman and art is a means to a social utopia" ⁹. Beuys' "Social Sculpture" contrasts against the Happening as it is a site of social exchange that seems to operate around an object (artist or "art") as event-site that creates a larger milieu of change; a utopic one by Beuys' vision. It is certainly in line with Linden Labs' utopian vision of Second Life, and ironic in terms of Julian Dibbell's missive in the carbon footprint of the avatar ¹⁰ that Eva and Franco Mattes recreated *7000 Oaks* in Second Life. What is important in the source work and its remediation is that the effects are still the same - both created a discursive space formed around Beuys' original vision of environmental awareness. It is from these Beuysian effects that works in virtual worlds can be affective event-sites rather than merely loci for material exchange. However, we may add one more tool in the box in terms of Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics.

In Bourriaud's eponymously named book ¹¹, relational aesthetics emerges from the work of artists like Rikrit Tiravanija, Miranda July, Pierre Huyghe, Vanessa Beecroft, and many others. Relational art defines itself, in part, as collective social situations that involve actions/situations-as-objects under the guidance of artistic agency. This is not the utopian vision of Kaprow and Beuys stressing artist as libérateur, but as artist system that leaves traces, whether material or experiential/emotional. Relational art then, as opposed to the expansive definition of Kaprow (art as milieu) and Beuys' the milieu-creating work, are artist constrained formal collective social systems with persistent traces. This brings art back to the gallery, which was a site anathema to

Kaprow, and one that was transcended by Beuys. These issues exert themselves upon the situation of the relational, art becoming a sociological/material dialectic. Negotiating issues of "ownership" defines power relations that shape milieux in which art may operate. Within virtual worlds that have fundamental systems of exchange, commercial, social and otherwise, relationalism in virtual worlds redefine social art as complex affective systems with larger effects in that environment spreading into the larger culture surrounding the given virtual world.

The preceding discussion of the aforementioned practitioners has created a discursive field from which we may analyze virtual art. From consideration of the creation of milieux, sites of exchange, and relational systems we may return to examples of works and performances in Second Life, and once return to the "Why?" A beginning analytical tool may be to consider the valuation of virtual works, although this author wants to caution mistaking financial exchange as more than a site of symbolic exchange. Bourriaud has stated the purchase of immaterial work (conceptual, virtual) as merely a relational exchange no different than acquiring the signifier of a given historical event, as evidenced by artists like Klein and Manzoni [12](#). The red herring is whether the purchase price of a virtual artwork has an equal valuation in a physical gallery. The difference is that the work is in a maintained space in a privately-owned server where the "owner" can only retrieve the piece only with great difficulty. Therefore, virtual work is ephemeral, and traditional models of speculation are impossible. But by examining relational effects around sites of virtual objecthood, one can examine how "objects" create social relations and then build into oeuvres and communities.

OBJECT: OTAWARA

One of the most basic examples we can consider is that of the object as site of social exchange. Irena Morris (aka Eshi Otawara)'s *One Hour Sim* projects [13](#) were a set of at eleven daily installations using the entire space of an SL server, or 256 virtual square meters in which she creates a regional installation in one hour. For *Flower Tower* [14](#), Morris created a recursive space where a meditative space is framed by shell upon shell of flowers. When the inhabitant ventures outside, the "upper room" is actually the top of a vast structure comprised of flowers stretching up several hundred (virtual) meters. This particular piece is a multi-tiered structure for inhabitation, including spaces for congregation, assembly, and singular contemplation. Also of note is that the *Tower* was purchased for four figures and relocated by the owner in a doubled use as sculpture and social space, fulfilling Bourriaud's principles of experience and exchange.

The relational model solves the problem of the inherent material valuelessness of the work except as site of social exchange. This also relocates virtual art into "milestones" akin to Conceptualism, except within the new contexts created by location in virtual worlds. Conservationists may argue that open source initiatives like abandonware [15](#) and OpenSim [16](#) may preserve work outside the Linden Labs "grid" potentially extending their persistence as objects. Conversely, genres associated with Fluxus and Relationalism are often self-reflexively immaterial, although the latter is often more connected to objective production. Persistence is a curatorial dialectic within New Media Art circles, and perhaps only more urgent than these works being a subset of applications technology as opposed to those of computer operating systems that have slightly longer lifespans. Except for issues of emulation, neither have persistence at conservationists' timeframes, and should be considered as such. What is more relevant is the function of art as social "attractor" broadening into generation of milieux around it. For the *Flower Tower*, Morris/Otawara's patron saw the work

as social scaffold and milestone in that simulator, to the point where they desired to relocate that relationship, and through it build another social space, although perhaps more akin to those of Kaprow or Beuys.

MILIEU: BROOKLYN IS WATCHING

Another initiative that centers itself around the creation of social milieu is *Brooklyn Is Watching* **17**, a project founded by New York artists Jay Van Buren and Amy Wilson. *BiW* consists of an area on an SL region, as well as a blog and podcast. *BiW* is intended as a nexus where contemporary and virtual artists share art and critical dialogues between virtual and physical cultures. Van Buren's vision *BiW* is loosely based on Kaprow's thought in the creation of a space without any expectation except exploration of "art as life" within the virtual. It is doubled by its location as a portal at Brooklyn's Jack the Pelican gallery, and serves as a "space of chance" in an otherwise tightly inscribed space. *BiW* is a space where "art happens", with no preconception as to who might be the participants, creating a site with both relational (artist-constrained system with symbolic traces) and "Happening" place of indeterminacy (art, promotion, quotidian objects) inside the traditional space of a Brooklyn gallery. The reservation of a virtual relational art space/time, its shaping under that loose rubrics, and the (im)material traces generated by its interactions create a complex dialogue between 60's and 90's sensibilities.

Another concept of interest is Van Buren's thought on "objecthood" in SL, put forth in many *BiW* podcasts, but especially in #21 **18**. Intentionality and the mutability of virtual worlds, including avatars, created objects, and the environment itself, although Van Buren seems most interested in the avatar-as-object. This dialogue foregrounds fetishization/objectification of all elements within and the social contracts within user-defined online worlds. While the discussion has considered milieu-creating objects, and milieux that themselves attract objects with added levels of recursion such as the creation of avatars as art objects, that in themselves create objects and milieux. These can act as agents of creation which then create "archives" of those interventions. These agent-objects are then generators of objects, which create region-milieux or even emergent sensibilities around their actions.

GENERATOR: GAZIRA BABELI

One example of this methodology is "Code Artist" Gazira Babeli **19**. Besides revealing herself as a Milanese Italian, Gazira claims to be an independent agent with no human intervention. Gazira is a virtually embodied artwork/"Body of Work"/"Corpus" who/that is a creator of virtual situations, including a pizza delivery attack upon a virtual art gallery **20**, or provocative artworks like the Warholian "*Second Soup*" **21**. Gazira further recurses from Otawara and Van Buren, embodying a series of the previous social functions, but integrates further functions. Babeli, through her Locosonus region, moves into community building and "hybrid" objecthood. She/It is an avatar-as-object (a performative social "object"), who makes/intervenes (often with aggressive social components, such as "*Second Soup*"), has multiple studios for other artists in her region, Locosolus, and archives in the same region.

One of her pieces, *Don't Say* **22** is a metaphor for both practice and larger conversation. When another avatar encounters the piece and utters a "forbidden" keyword, it is swept up on a giant tornado which will not let go until the user apologizes. The vortex is a relational metaphor for Gazira's confrontational work; the avatar-"work" intervenes

with the audience, creating "objects" and cloud of (derivative?) works and resultant effects/affect. This larger corpus recursively collects artists and works, into the region of (Locus)olus, creating a space of Beuysian social sculpture of gesture (avatar), "objects" and their effects, and social aggregate in the creation of the artist's commune. From this, Gazira's play on the French audio collective Locus Sonus (loosely "Locus of Sound") to Locus-olus ("Small Locus") is a direct alliteration to the idea of creating a social/associative node for engagement. Gazira is the "little Locus"; creating an Indra's Net of loci that becomes a "metatecture" of persona, works/effects, and resident/collaborators.

THE NEW CITIZEN/ARCHITECT: CAO FEI/RMB CITY

Another metatect in online worlds is Chinese artist Cao Fei, whose *iMirror* and *RMB City* touch on the socially constructive nature of virtual worlds, especially Second Life. *iMirror* **23**, her romantic odyssey across Second Life, follows from her previous work, *CosPlayers*, that crosses cultures by exploring Chinese youth engaging in the Japanese pop practice of "Cosplay" who dress as anime and other characters (a practice which is also common in North America.) In *iMirror*, her avatar, China Tracy, a Chinese girl in synthetic skin (another form of Cosplay?) travels about the synthetic "Global Village" of SL in playful innocence with her virtual confidante, named "Hug Yue". They travel the virtual world, feelings, identity, and wondering about "forgetting the real darkness" of the physical. What is significant is that China, romantic cosplayer, does not unlink her "object self" from the artist Cao Fei (like Babeli). *iMirror* is a documentary with relational components as China searches in an innocent Calle-like quest for the person behind "Hug", but does retain the form of the document, retaining the formal component, and I would argue, a sort of objecthood.

In *RMB City* **24**, Cao Fei plays with (dys/ut)opia in assuming the role of a virtual developer for an interpretation of Olympic Beijing. The city contains virtual analogues of the Koolhaas' CCTV headquarters, pandas on construction cranes, a Duchampian (Ferris) wheel and many other signifiers of emergent Beijing. In addition, Cao Fei, reflecting the opening real estate sales scenes of *iMirror* doubles the speculative aspect of the signified city by offering development opportunities in RMB. These are offered at rates analogous to those in Beijing, but translated into the fractional currency of Linden Dollars. At Art Basel, Cao Fei sold a building unit in RMB, taking her exploration of the impact of the virtual upon the real, and then linking it to very real references to real estate, in contrast to Babeli's "object-oriented" practice. This is more in line with Bourriaud's model than Babeli, albeit slightly, but this also highlights the different perspectives through which artists are shaping relational spaces in virtual worlds.

UNSITUATED SOCIAL SCULPTURE & VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE: REMIEDIATING AND THE IMPOSSIBLE

The previous four situations have addressed progressions of object as site of social exchange from object as nexus, corpus and relational field. What is equally important as "located art" is art praxis that is "unsituated" and performative. Where the previous artists work with objecthood as crucial to their praxis, performance is also a powerful site for intervention in virtual art. This distinction is a fine line in cases like Gazira Babeli, being both the "generator" of Locusolus and part of Second Front, or Eva and Franco Mattes, whose remediation of Beuys' *7000 Oaks* signaled the objective and the relational. For the sake of this part of the discussion, we will discuss artists who in themselves create their own ad hoc sites through actions, focusing on experiential work that creates

art in terms of social relations in virtual worlds.

REMAPPING BODIES: EVA & FRANCO MATTES, SCOTT KILDALL

In 2005, Marina Abramovic performed *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim [25](#), a series of performance art works by artists such as herself, Export, Nauman, Acconci, and Beuys. For seven evenings, she performed pieces including Acconci's *Seedbed* and Beuys' *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, temporally recontextualizing the pieces outside their original time and place. This brought the works into question as to whether reenacting performance artworks as site-unspecific pieces might reduce them to theatre, which was not the case, but a resituation, creating far different effects. Abramovic's question of context and action posed by the very existence of the event and subsequent video raised further questions with contemporary artists to follow who use virtual worlds.

Scott Kildall's *Paradise Ahead* series [26](#) abstracts embodied art into the virtual as performance pieces as source of twelve print works including references to Klein's *Leap Into the Void* and Burden's *Shoot*. According to Kildall, translating performance and representation of same into the virtual creates a dialogue of "collective notions of emotional content in surreal space" [27](#), continuing the tradition of immediacy of the body. Kildall's explorations of classic performance works explores the gap "between the desired representation and the actual result", signifying the affective connection between the subject and the audience. However, Eva and Franco Mattes would explore their experiential disconnection, both with genre and medium.

Eva and Franco Mattes, aka 0100101110101101.ORG also questioned the effectiveness/affect of performance art by reenacting six "Synthetic Performances" [28](#) in Second Life, including Beuys' *7000 Oaks*, Abramovic & Ulay's *Imponderabilia*, Gilbert & George's *Singing Sculpture*, and mirroring Abramovic, Acconci's *SeedBed*. Their questioning took the form of an exploration of a "imponderable" medium, as Franco states, "Eva and me, we hate performance art, we never quite got the point. So, we wanted to understand what made it so un-interesting to us, and reenacting these performances was the best way to figure it out." [29](#) Likewise from conversation, Eva stated that they also did not like Second Life either, and doing performance art in Second Life created a doubled critical negation as test subject for the efficacy of disembodied body art in virtual worlds. Their performance of *Imponderabilia*, *Seedbed* and *Singing Sculpture* at the Odyssey region in Second Life for the Performa 07 Biennial [30](#) drew an audience of over thirty participants, and had an active reception, with the "visitors" eagerly taking part in pieces like *Imponderabilia*. This attests to a connection to the audience, and perhaps by its venue, to the larger art world. However, performance in Second Life is seldom a "white box". During the performance, a trompe l'oeil box sailed in like a "Recognizer" from the movie *Tron*, flying in and sitting down next to the scene. It contained a recreation of Abramovic & Ulay's *Modus Vivendi: Pieta*, performed as *Audience Response I* by the group Second Front, revealing the next stage of social relation in our argument.

THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENING: SECOND FRONT

Second Front [31](#) is an international performance group of seven members, located across ten time zones, who create original or "impossible" performance works in the spirit of the Dadas, Fluxus, and artists such as Guillermo Gomez-Pena. One of the key components of Second Front's work in SL is their adoption of elements from Kaprow's Happening format.

This allows for interpretation and non-repeatability, using disparate elements from cascades of barricades to rains of Super Marios. This is partially due to the sheer difficulty of simultaneously directing seven participants in a global virtual world, one that is often unstable. This instability creates inconsistencies of calling forth gestures, props, or even arrival via teleport, as with their *Border Patrol* [32](#) performance at Ars Virtua, where their arrival was turned into sheer chaos by failures in SL's server technology. The necessity of dealing with processes of chance also fits with traditions like Fluxus, but the ability to achieve the previously "impossible" sites of social interaction suggest the next generation of performance using virtual worlds.

Two examples of Second Front's "theatre of the improbable" are *28 Avatars Later* [33](#) and a realization of Al Hansen's *Car Bibbe #2*. For the first, Second Front assumed the role of a roving zombie horde, infecting the surrounding avatars by inviting them to put on a zombie "skin" and items that would help the "infected" to invite others to join. This relational gesture, akin to crossing Tiravanija with George Romero, was performed across six sites, including a virtual country bar in the Dublin region, infecting over a hundred avatars during the performance. The significance is that similar actions are often seen as "griefing" or disruptive interventions, and frequently result in the banning of the interveners from the area. The fact that over six regions, Second Front was not only not banned but welcomed as inciter of zombie activities is evidence of the piece's efficacy as emergent social milieu, social sculpture, or relational artwork.

The next of the two was a Al Hansen text, *Car Bibbe #2* [34](#), performed in Chicago, and Parvu, Estonia on Oct. 18, 2008. Hansen's first 1958 "Car Bibbe" [35](#), known as the "car symphony", has been performed a number of times, but *Car Bibbe #2* was written years after and was never feasible due to obvious liability issues involving large amounts of explosives. The piece emerged when Second Front member Bibbe Hansen revealed a scan of her father's original sketch, and asked whether the piece could finally be realized in the virtual. The *Car Bibbe #2* score involved cycles of systematic detonations of a Cadillac automobile using dynamite, ballerinas performing barre exercises, and maintenance engineers raking parts in, where the cycle repeats until the vehicle's destruction. Random virtual passers-by are invited to participate by raking or performing pirouettes while the detonations progress.

The performance of this piece fulfilled many of Kaprow's criteria of the Happening. *Car Bibbe #2* was a hybrid space in which participants were located in disparate locations, as even in Chicago, the projection avatar and the director were at separate locations. The principle of "non-art" materials was taken to extremes, as the explosives, instead of being dynamite, consisted of ten megaton nuclear missiles, and the other "movements" of the score included clouds ballerina images and platoons of cleaning robots. The importance of *Car Bibbe #2* is not its spectacle, but the palpable reaction created in Second Life and the spaces in which it was projected from testaments of onlookers "taking cover" during the performance.

DENOUEMENT: AFFECT & ENGAGEMENT

The study of art in virtual worlds begs a final question that was alluded to in the beginning of this essay: Why art in virtual worlds? This begs consideration of the differences between performativity and objecthood in relational art, as well as objective, site specific, and unsituated works. But again we are led to the questions of the extant, immediacy, and identification in the work that creates levels of compelling engagement. What are these issues, as evidenced by virtual

artists' volume of work and resultant recognition? Two possible answers may have to do with physiology and preverbal processes where humans express affinity.

The first of these references the discovery of mirror neurons in the late 20th Century. This particular class of neurons, called "Dalai Lama Neurons" by Ramachandran [36](#) has so far suggested their role in empathy, imitation learning and *understanding*. The idea of "mirroring" is also a well-known sociological concept, referenced by Sherry Turkle in the title of *The Second Self*, her volume about the multiplicity of the self in the networked world. The use of an avatar in a virtual world as a mirror of the self in digital terms is increasingly being understood not only in terms of sociological terms, but also physiological ones as well. It is fitting then, that Cao Fei's exploration of her virtual self in her documentary is called *iMirror*, as humans, who are self-aware and empathetic beings, are creating experiences in online worlds that create logical situations for identification with their virtual bodies.

The next is that of affect as preverbal response to social stimuli. Eric Shouse explores Masumi's thoughts on the distinctiveness of affect in his essay, *Feeling, Emotion, Affect* [37](#). According to Shouse, affect is a, "non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential based on responses that Masumi states are "prior to and/or outside of consciousness". This takes the argument for the identification with virtual art and its formation of social relations to potentially more fundamental correlations between the aesthetic experience of Morris/Otawara or the social onslaught of Second Front. Research in the role of mirror neurons in aesthetic experience is in early stages, but one could argue that our engagement with virtual art is a logical extension of identification with virtual embodiment and the creation of relational spaces by proxy. While empathy with Marina Abramovic's bleeding belly in *Lips of Thomas* is questionably analogous to Man Michinaga's re-mediation of the piece: identification, empathy, and engagement evidences that there is the creation of compelling social relations in art in virtual worlds.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, we have explored the social relations of art in virtual worlds, from an arc going from the objective to the purely relational. We began with artists who create "objects" by artists like Morris/Otawara that act as sites of interaction that widen into the creation of milieux, whether as social "gravitational wells" or larger environments for aesthetic engagement. The virtual "Happening" as created by Van Buren, et al at *Brooklyn is Watching* acts as objective frame for social actions around other objects. This also creates a contrast for artists like Gazira Babeli, who fulfills hers and Van Buren's ideas of objecthood. Babeli expands this metaphorical "Object-Oriented" practice where the source object recursively creates its own traces, then places them in her own "container" (Locusolus) which serves as a location for other artists/ "child processes" (in computer science terms) of the initial object/avatar. This encompassing structure emerges into the art world through the works of Cao Fei, who creates hybrid analogies between the real estate of Beijing, the issues of "real estate" in the physical and virtual, and the development of community.

As virtual art desituates from the object to the situational, a logical extension of the performative in the gallery tradition is certainly that of Kildall's *Paradise Ahead* series (the action that creates the record) and the Mattes' *Synthetic Performances* (the extension of the performance art tradition into the virtual). Second Front's "theatre of the improbable" builds simultaneously from the Fluxus tradition of the Happening, realizing previously "impossible" works, such as

Hansen's *Car Bibbe #2*, and the relational zombie work, *28 Avatars Later*.

Art in virtual worlds, and especially Second Life, explicates the epistemic arc of social art of the last sixty years, from Kaprow's Happening (the ephemeral relational space), Beuys' "Social Sculpture", (the milieu-creating work), and Bourriaud's relational art (social milieu that reveals persistent traces). Secondly, its emergence and level of engagement ties to the traditions of performance art as well as the relational. While the existence of the engagement is a phenomena extending a rich heritage of virtual art including Shaw, Davies, Novak, DeLappe and many others. As suggested here, it may be possible that humans are hard-wired to identify with virtual spaces and virtual art. Through this essay, we have explored the functions and historical contexts of these nascent artforms, examined the effects of these works on the larger social sphere, and the role of affect in identification with these works. Why virtual art? Hopefully, some insights, if not answers, have been gleaned from this discussion, and their emergence signals the importance of social artforms, not only in the late 20th Century, but in the millennial era of the networked age.

Notes

1 : [World of Warcraft](#), Blizzard Entertainment, released November 2004.

[Everquest](#), Sony Entertainment, released March, 1999. ↑

2 : [There, There, inc.](#) released October 2003.

[Second Life](#), Linden Labs, released June 2003. ↑

3 : Wolff, Rachel, "All the Web's a Stage," [ARTnews](#), February 2008. ↑

4 : Quaranta, Domenico, "Virtual Fluxus," [Exibart](#) #38, March, 2007. ↑

5 : "Everywhere and all at once: Performa 07, the second installment of the new biennial, brought a staggering range of live events to venues large and small throughout New York City," [Art in America](#), March, 2008. ↑

6 : Artaud, Antonin, "The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)," [The Theatre and its Double](#), Grove Press, 1994, p. 89. ↑

7 : Kaprow, Alan (1965), "Untitled Guidelines for Happenings," [Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality](#), Randall Packer & Ken Jordan, eds. New York: Norton Press, pp. 280-281. ↑

8 : Cooke, Lynne, "Joseph Beuys," [Dia Center for the Arts](#), accessed Oct. 23, 2008. ↑

9 : Cooke, Lynne, *Ibid.* ↑

10 : Bleecker, Julian, "When 1st Life Meets 2nd Life: The 1685 Pound Avatar and the 99 Ton Acre," [Near Future Laboratory](#), Sept. 18, 2007. ↑

11 : Bourriaud, Nicolas, [Relational Aesthetics](#), Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002. ↑

12 : Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Ibid.*, p. 48. ↑

13 : Morris, Irena (Eshi Otawara), [One Hour Sim](#), 2008. ↑

14 : Morris, Irena, *Ibid.* ↑

15 : "The Abandonware Ring FAQ," [The Official Abandonware Ring](#), 2006. Retrieved on 2008-10-20. ↑

16 : [Opensim](#). ↑

17 : Jay Van Buren & Amy Wilson, founders, [Brooklyn is](#)

[Watching](#), 2008. ↑

18 : [Brooklyn is Watching](#), Podcast 21, August 1, 2008. ↑

19 : Gazira Babeli's [Website](#). ↑

20 : Debatty, Regine, "The Second Life code performer," [We Make Money Not Art](#), November 27, 2006. ↑

21 : Babeli, Gazira, [Second Soup](#), May 2006. ↑

22 : Babeli, Gazira, [Don't Say](#), June 2006. ↑

23 : Schmelzer, Paul, "Cao Fei's *iMirror*," June 16, 2007, [Walker Art Center](#). ↑

24 : Rosenberg, Karen, "RMB City," [New York Times](#), March 21, 2008. ↑

25 : Abramovic, Marina, "Seven Easy Pieces," [Guggenheim Museum](#), Nov 9-15, 2005. ↑

26 : Kildall, Scott, [Paradise Ahead](#), 2006-2007. ↑

27 : Quaranta, Domenico, "Displaced Familiarity: Interview with Scott Kildall," [Spawn of the Surreal](#), August 31, 2007. ↑

28 : Mattes, Eva & Franco, [Synthetic Performances](#), 2007-ongoing. ↑

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