

# THE LAPSES OF AN AVATAR: SLEIGHT OF HAND AND ARTISTIC PRAXIS IN SECOND LIFE

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From the outset, the Internet has proven to be an ideal channel not only for communication and aggressive capitalism, but also for artistic creation and counterculture. A review of the history at net.art will doubtless bear witness to how the development of a specific expressive language in the web has been consolidated over the years, configuring an autonomous artistic discipline. It has been backed and promoted by the production of specific know-how disseminated by portals such as *w3art*, *rhizome* or the now deceased *aleph-arts*, among others. Similarly, as regards the specifically artistic aspects of this format, there are several virtual galleries that exhibit and/or trade with the artistic works that hang from their binary walls, with varying degrees of success, a set of individual websites of artists “of all kinds”, digital publications, reviews, blogs, etc., that have altered and widened the traditional artistic and cultural circuit.

After it was opened to the public in 2003, Second Life, a three-dimensional virtual universe that is hosted in the mesh traced by the Internet, has allowed for the coexistence of these productions inside and on the periphery of the vast community of Internet users. In a short space of time, and supported by an economy that is cultivated both inside and outside its limits, it has modulated a virtual environment that functions as an entertainment platform, an expressway for the exchange and purchase of information and a headquarters for social work projects that has managed to recreate a popular spirit that is open to the accessibility, interactivity or reciprocity, etc. offered by the new technological media.

The purpose of this research project is to determine and analyse the position that artistic ideals and their quota of productions occupy in this virtual universe, the extent to which the creative projects developed by avatars (the Internet users that participate in Second Life) or groups of avatars, might constitute an artistic reference, configured by an imaginary and a set of new *modus operandi* or unique *scripts* that might enrich R+D+i (research, development and innovation) of new artistic practices in the future, or the extent to which it all might be, in the last analysis, an empty phenomenon, devoid of depth, anchored to a mere theatrical transgression

of “reality” and betrayed by the speculative excess that characterises the platform at certain levels.

## **1. WHAT IS SECOND LIFE?**

For those who are not yet familiar with it<sup>1</sup>, Second Life is described as a virtual universe<sup>2</sup> hosted in the mesh of the Internet. A parallel world, very similar to the world that we know – with its bars, shops, homes and so on - where it is possible to stroll around, go shopping and socialise with other users with the ease provided by the fact that one acts behind a virtual alter-ego (or avatar, as they are called) that is configured from top to toe for the occasion. In this space, we can map out, as the title indicates, a second life that can make up for some of the tangible inconveniences of reality. I am not referring to the ease with which the programme allows us to fly, travel in time or change our gender or race at will, but to the opportunity to prosper socially and economically without the complex obstacles to which we are accustomed in the real environment. If we manage our Linden (the local currency) well and fine-tune our speculative intuition, any purchase that we make may become a rising value that may be renegotiated for real dollars. The real financial scope of the invention will be easier to understand in the light of the investments and imports that companies like IBM or Nissan are making on the ground.

## **2. BACKGROUND: VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES**

The origin of virtual communities is usually attributed to MUDS, Multi-User Domains<sup>3</sup>, collective communication systems that emerged in the early 1990s, when the Web, which did not yet have today’s technology, still based most of its functioning on textual language. Without graphics, participants had to use their imagination and collectively develop all of the literature that would describe the surroundings and the plot of the game, as is the case in live role-play games.

It is not as if there had been no precedents, such as the case of the “Habitat” game by Lucas Arts, which had already tried in 1985, via the CompuServe network<sup>4</sup>, albeit not very successfully, to build a virtual community with graphic systems and avatars. The fact is that the communication networks in which these communities were registered were not strong enough for these projects to solidify.

The next generation, by then supported by the Internet, came along with the on-line videogames<sup>5</sup> and their attempt to create globalising platforms that could support the games via the Internet. Although the goal of the game is to achieve objectives that are irremediably violent, the premise of survival depends on the need to solve

problems as part of a group. Special mention should be made here, from among the few attempts at on-line videogames developed by the Spanish industry, to the game “La prisión” (Prison). It is clear from the first games that in order to survive in this community, the user depends on his/her negotiating skills and promotion among the gangs formed by the rest of the users.

Another peculiar on-line social construction project is “Haboo Hotel”, a space that combines the pixelated aesthetics of the early days of synthetic image with the possibilities of the Chat, creating a textual dialogue space determined by the communication systems that had already brought in the IRC<sup>6</sup> or the Messenger<sup>7</sup> programme.

None of the above examples complied with the basic evolutionary factor in Second Life: the economic system that supports it. Therefore, nowadays, as may be seen from its number of members and the dimensions of the investments, we may only count two direct competitors to Second Life, i.e. “Entropía Universe” by Mindmark and “Cyworld” by SK Communications. The former is a futuristic metaverse<sup>8</sup> that brings together the concept of a peace-loving, constructive virtual community and the addictive sense of adrenalin in the on-line violent videogame with clearly defined aims and missions. In this system, the exchange currency ensures permanence and power; i.e., the better the weapons, the more superior the defence systems and evidently, the better relations to cover your back. The other system is “Cyworld”, an electronic society for the exchange of data and the performance of financial operations, the functioning of which is based on a highly-evolved system of personal blogs, like updatable diaries that with their three-dimensional central screens, are used at the same time as meeting halls, private clubs or offices for exchanging and trading in currencies.

### **3. CHANNELS FOR DISSEMINATING ART**

Within SL, there are various channels for disseminating art. For example, museums inspired by *Real Life*, like the Second Louvre Museum<sup>9</sup>, which make the most of the power in the name and then proceed to depress any minimally specialised spectator when he/she comes across a hotchpotch imitation of the most banal precepts of museum culture, combined with the most irritating tastes in the virtual life.

Aside from this type of experiences, more and more RL art centres and galleries are opening premises in SL. However, they do not offer much more than a virtual substitute with displays of the “real exhibits”. For example, the cultural centre that supported by the Caja Madrid Savings Bank social fund, *La Casa Encendida*, recently complemented its Madrid premises with a replica in SL (on *Casa Encendida*

Island), where visitors may visit from their terminals the exhibitions on display there or attend on a deferred basis the concerts and shows that are hosted on their premises.

On the other hand, the *Art Plus Association pour le Développement de la Création Contemporaine* (Association for the Development of Contemporary Creation, which was created by the French Minister of Culture and Communication, Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres, has set up a centre called the Contemporary Art Simulator that acts as an interface for this organisation, which lacks an actual premises in RL. It was the politician himself that inaugurated and visited the Arts Plus<sup>10</sup> facilities in SL.

However, of all the virtual centres and galleries, on an exclusive basis and limiting ourselves to the artistic praxis that is specific to the environment, we should mention the avant-garde gallery *par excellence* in SL, Ars Virtua, New Media Center<sup>11</sup>, a New Media centre that defines itself in its statement as “a space set aside for the new media”, which helps us to understand the new creation practices developed on and thanks to the platform, although also sometimes for what they call “traditional art”. Its objectives include issues like how to develop the SL environment for artistic production, to become a laboratory for training on new artistic practices, to provide a platform for the intersection of the media and the fields of knowledge/ information, or to promote the development of communities in the web, as well as offer a place that will be propitious to the exchange of ideas that goes beyond the borders in a space dedicated to experiences and participation. The gallery may be accessed 24 hours a day by an unlimited number of people on a simultaneous basis all around the world. The centre has also developed a residence programme for artists, pioneering in SL, known as AVAIR (Ars Virtua Artists-In-Residence), which is aimed at consolidated or emerging artists that work with the SL 3D setting, who are paid a salary of 400 dollars, given a certain degree of training and provided with a mentor or tutor - if necessary-. The residence programme, which lasts for 11 weeks, culminates in an exhibition and/or event at the gallery. It is interesting to note that the AVAIR project is a theoretical proposal aimed at reflecting on the concept of residing in a space that has no physical location, as a radical alternative to artistic proposals, because there are no physical limits or as regards construction materials; the artists are only constricted by social conventions and software (which is flexible and developable). The artistic forums that are most visited and that have the highest prestige among the artistic communities in SL include specific on-line magazines like *Slart*<sup>12</sup>, whose name is composed by the acronym for the multiverse and the word “art”, or *Spark*

*Magazine*<sup>13</sup>, a magazine that may only be found and read at specific coordinates in SL.

#### **4. ARTISTIC PRAXIS IN SECOND LIFE. TYPOLOGY**

As described above, a great number of artistic projects whose composition and expository assembly are governed according to the most conventional codes from the “real” artistic circuit are predominant in the synthetic multiverse. In the last year, the number of art galleries opened in SL has increased at a vertiginous rate, going from the very small group when the platform was launched to more than 200 now in existence. This is an indication of the growing awareness of the market potential of SL, because despite the fact that many are not making a profit, there are artists, such as Dancoyote Antonelli, a.k.a. DC Spenseley, that estimate to have sold about 5 million Lindens (almost 19,000 US dollars according to the exchange rate) and who are receiving an increasing number of orders. This money is reinvested in research, payment for programmers and other SL employees. In fact, we can find the majority of these “art markets” grouped together in thematic neighbourhoods like the Cetus Gallery District<sup>14</sup>.

##### **4.1. DIVERSIFIED PROJECTS: HALF-WAY BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE VIRTUAL**

The “Femmes héroïques, une mythologie moderne”<sup>15</sup> project is carried out by the group known as The Computer Band, which is inspired by the iconic universe of comics and more specifically, by the superhero universe. The members of this group are the protagonists of the first thematic exhibition organised by the aforementioned Arts Plus association in their SL centre. “Heroic women, a modern mythology” aims to pay tribute to women all over the world, with a labyrinthic installation of 11 silhouettes representing a set of mutating creatures and their powers”.<sup>16</sup> In the real world, the exhibition took place between 8<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> March of this year at the Musée de l’Homme at Palais Chaillot, located on the Parisian Place du Trocadéro. After the inauguration of this Women’s Day – at which the French Minister was present-, the exhibition was echoed at the association’s facilities in SL (108, 161,33), where the residents of the environment created by Linden Lab were invited to produce and introduce avatars based on the 11 heroines described in the exhibition. However, it is a project that is based on a stereotypical and essentialist concept of women, which bears the imprint of the classical opportunism of the prototypical political agenda of 8<sup>th</sup> March each year.

The active Eva and Franco Mattes, also known as 0100101110101101.ORG, made their first incursion into SL at the beginning of 2006. Since then, they have been exploring its sites and interacting with its peculiar inhabitants. Given the intrinsic condition of the SL environment as a “factory of identities”, the tandem has been attracted beyond redemption to its domains, which is logical, considering that the demolition of the cult around the figure of the artist and the concept of conventional artistic ownership have constituted a centre of interest for the duo since their early days at Luther Blisset (1994-1999), including the creation of the alias Darko Maver, a tormented artist (1998-1999).

The first visible result of what they called their “video-game flânerie” were a series of portraits, exhibited for the first time at the Ars Virtua virtual gallery and titled, in tribute to Warhol, the “13 Most Beautiful Avatars”, inaugurated on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006. For this display, the Mattes – with the help of James Morgan (Ars Virtua)- virtually recreated in the gallery an exact reconstruction of the physical space of the Italian Academy at the University of Columbia in New York, where the works – digital prints on canvas - were exhibited 15 days later (on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006). A giant screen connected to the virtual exhibition was installed on the second floor. It is a game of mirrors orchestrated by the artists between the real and the virtual: the virtual space is a reconstruction of the reality of the gallery, but the real exhibition is a reproduction of what had previously been done in the virtual plane. In this regard, it is also interesting to reflect on the audience in RL and in SL. In the virtual application, the members of the audience were visibly some of the subjects of the portraits, while in the case of the real exhibition, who knows if any of them could have gone to NY City and even then, if they could have been recognised without their virtual interface?

What is the sense of making a portrait of an avatar? The artists understand the very concept of avatar (the visual interface of a subject in a synthetic on-line world) to mean a self-portrait. Unlike the majority of portraits, the portrait technique in SL is not based on what the subject of the representation looks like, but rather on what he/she would like to look like. Therefore, they are not exactly portraits, but rather self-portrait images.

Eva and Franco Mattes do not choose beauty as a theme. Instead, they underline this concept in the title of the series. In their opinion, those that choose beauty according to the classical Western stereotype are the “alter-egos” of the avatars that build their morphology according to this stereotype. The portraits are as cool and

sexy as they are tragic and terrifying, a classical cocktail from the pop culture menu, which is very much present in this work and confirmed by the allusion to Warhol in the text and in quotations from his texts. The fact is that they consider that on-line communities and videogames are the equivalent in today's popular culture to comics in the 60s and what they represented in the imaginary of artists like Warhol or Liechtenstein.

*Synthetic Performances* is a series that was started in January 2007 and which consists of the representation of historical performances in a synthetic world like SL. They have all been carried out via their avatars, built on the basis of their actual physiognomy. People can witness the performances online as they are being carried out, or visit the documentation (photographic and videographic) afterwards. The performances by Vito Acconci, Marina Abramovic, Valie Export and Peter Weibel were broadcasted at their individual exhibition in RL, titled "The Theatre of Life" and shown at the Galleria d'Arte Civica di Trento (Italy) on 31<sup>st</sup> January last, hosted in Ars Virtua thanks to James Morgan. The Mattes carry out a major production with collaborators -programmers in charge of making architectures, animation and 3D-modelling for them, as well as designers of the their avatars' figures and skins. These recreated performances include titles like: "Synthetic Performances/Valie Export's Tapp und Tastkino" (2007) or "Synthetic Performances/Chris Burden's Shoot" (2007).

"Synthetic Performances/Joseph Beuys' 7000 Oaks" (2007) is the recreation of the project started by Beuys on 16th March 1982 at Documenta 7. This project consisted of planting 7,000 oaks, each of which was paired with the action of planting a granite stone in the form of a column. The intention of the German artist was that the work done in Kassel should become the first stage of an ongoing reforestation project that would spread all over the world as part of a global mission whose purpose was to bring about an environmental and social change.

The Mattes have reactivated Beuys' work, carrying out the first performance in the synthetic world of SL. The first virtual trees and stones were planted on 16th March last, exactly 25 years after the first original oak had been planted by Beuys in Kassel. 7,000 basalt stones have been amassed on the Mattes' SL island, called *Cosmos Island*, the reduction of which will indicate the progress of the project, which will continue until the 7,000 oaks and rocks have been placed (distributed) around the synthetic world.

This project has been displayed recently as part of the exhibition “*Deambulatorios de una jornada, en el principio y el proyecto Tindaya*” (curator Nilo Casares, for the *Centro de Arte Juan Ismael de Puerto del Rosario* (Fuerteventura)<sup>17</sup>, between 16th March and 14th April, including works by Eduardo Chillida, Robert Smithson, Hamish Fulton, Christo or Santiago Cirujeda, among others. The purpose of the exhibition is to study the links between art and nature, displaying documents of masterpieces in art and territory and other contemporary active works.

BORDER-ART. John Craig Freeman, a.k.a. JC Fremont, is an associate professor of New Media in the Department of Visual and Media Arts at Emerson College, Boston. The work *Imaging Place SL* is an application of a homonymous work from the “real world” that has been under development since 1997, in collaboration with Greg Ulmer, who has provided the theory for the project. It includes fieldwork carried out all over the world, combining panoramic photography, digital video and 3D technologies to research and document situations in which the forces of globalisation produce an impact at local levels. The objectives of the project include the development of technologies and methodology for obtaining an immersive, browseable narrative, based on real places. However, this will be achieved by using non-linear narrative structures, which are made possible thanks to computer technologies and the telecommunications provided by the World Wide Web. Instead of following the prototypical structure of traditional documentary cinema, it is closer to the “narrative database” and the “soft cinema” of Lev Manovich, as the project allows to connect the stories by means of non-linear browsing on the basis of the database generated by the artist and simultaneous exploration of the latter on various spatial planes.

*Imaging Place* documents places that are historical for political, social, economic or environmental reasons or places whose culture is being displaced and eliminated by globalisation. Initially, it focussed on places where the forces of globalisation affect the lives of local communities, such as borders, posts, walls and fences, the limits of public policy.

On 5th January 2007, Gallery 2 in Ars Virtua saw the inauguration of an exhibition of a partial portion of the global project, titled “*Imaging Place SL: U.S. / Mexico Borders*”. For this work, Fremont spent 15 days at the border between Mexico and the USA in the Tijuana region, specifically in the town of San Isidro, researching and

carrying out his prototypical fieldwork (videos, maps, photos, etc.) that then go to the digital postproduction table.

In this particular piece, Fremont reflects on 3 issues related to the public and the political: first of all, the contradictions and intolerance of the USA's immigration policy towards Latin America; secondly, the environmental exploitation that is propitiated by the North American Free Trade Agreement and thirdly, slave trafficking, the deplorable working conditions in the "maquila" or in *yankee* territory and the sex industry.

The work is formally divided into two parts: a long border and an audio work with 360 image nodes. The formation is a replica of the border between Mexico and the USA in Sao Paulo Castelinho, a wall with electrocuted fences and threatening spotlights, a set that is intended to make the audience experience something similar to a border experience.

#### **4.2. MACHINIMA**

Another more successful type of artistic project in Second Life is Machinima. Machinima is the art of creating animation shorts and other kinds of audiovisual works using videogame processing engines. As this definition indicates, the origin of this practice does not lie in Second Life and neither is the experience exclusive to this medium, but for reasons of obvious affinities – which we shall now go on to explain -, it has found one of its best recording platforms/ sets in this virtual environment.

The beginnings of Machinima go back to the animated presentations and fragments<sup>18</sup> that videogames intercalate between going from one screen to the next. As a prize (and a pause) for when the player successfully completes one level, there is usually a linear animation that continues the narrative thread of the game. What would happen if we were to take over these presentations in order to create a new assembly, with a more personal reading and new meanings? And what if we were to add sequences taken directly from the action occurring on the interactive scenario of the game? The result is an animation created by ourselves, acting via the videogame characters - jumping, shooting, hiding, etc.. All of the other movements that are permitted in the game then become the tools of action that we can use to build a story. We can also add the possibilities that the game offers of controlling the cameras, the lighting and even the props and the costumes worn by the characters.

Machinima emerged precisely when a series of videogames, many of which were for multiple on-line players, such as Quake or Unreal, included these creative options (Mods)<sup>19</sup> in their menus and scenario-editing, camera control or recording and assembling games became commonplace to players. These restructuring attempts led some users to take control of the game and reinvent it in their own way. What originally started out as the sole objective of jumping platforms or killing soldiers to redeem whatever princess or treasure was up for the grabs, can become, for example, a SitCom<sup>20</sup> (situation comedy) like the ones on TV, or a statement on the racial uprisings occurring in the suburbs of Paris.

In Second Life, creative liberty is greater still. Far from being constrained by the aesthetic and functional factors of the script established by the game platform or by any problems with the copyright<sup>21</sup> associated to such appropriations, this space offers no barriers other than the limitations of its supporting software. Anyone may model the figure of the actor, transcending the make-up and costumes and defining biomorphic subjectivities that defy the laws of physics. The scenarios are built like on any stage, but the costs are laughable, there is no need for maintenance personnel and no inconveniences as regards transport. The fact is that one of the curious aspects of Machinima in SL is to imagine a group of avatars recording in real time<sup>22</sup>, while on the other side of reality, flesh and blood actors play their roles using the buttons of the mouse and movement cursors. Interaction becomes a peculiar third-party game that is governed by specific codes, for the most part derived from the communicative languages of videogames.

In this regard, because the development of the graphic and audio interface<sup>23</sup> has not yet reached its optimum heights, the actions betray an orthopaedic touch not unlike the silent cinema films. These meta-puppets do not have expressive faces and they do not emit any sounds – although dubbing or subtitling cover up an inconvenience that is already being addressed (there are already Beta versions of the programme for voice communication) - and communication is based on attention to gestures and the dramatic effects that are allowed by the machine. It is relatively simple to swing arms in rejection while we set our avatar on fire and vomit out a myriad of cats.

Lev Manovich, in his work “The language of the new media”<sup>24</sup>, is the person that has come the closest to defining this type of operations. He calls it “teleacting”, alluding to the power of remote control in real time. However, following the recent death of the master Jean Baudrillard, it is hard not to remember his definition for this type of

cases: “Cyborg”, as man and machine operating via the interface<sup>25</sup>. What would he have made of Second Life? And of its production, Machinima? This meta-drill based on the interaction between a human and his/her digital projection, with the rest of the avatars and a synthetic environment that does not exist on the earth plane? At this stage, he would have a tremendous offering ready for research. The production of Machinima in Second Life is overwhelming. There are several different proposals and one can go from video clips to virtual porn with the ease of the Internet in fancifully hosting all types of contents.

Although it is possible to highlight among all of these productions, some that are quality works, we have to differentiate between them according to the category of their sources of support and production. On the one hand, we have high cachet manufactures that are financed and disseminated by visionary companies awaiting future profits. In this group, we should highlight a “Machinima” work that is a pioneer in full recording in Second Life: the short “Silver Bells and Golden Spurs” (see images 44, 45 and 46), a western recorded in verse – yes, in verse - and produced by Bezzadle Studios and Linden Lab itself, the parents of the SL multiverse. Action, bullets and blood inspired by an old poem from the American Wild West, and drinks from the sources of cinema classics such as John Ford<sup>26</sup>.

Another producer backed by Linden Lab is “La-Interactiva”, the group directed by the Spaniard Richard Gras, a veritable guru in machinimas, who in his attempt to bring this art closer to the Internet and to SL, created the “Machinima Island” in the year 2005. A virtual island for exclusive use that is at the same time a centre for tests and meetings, as well as the set where the series by the same title is developed. The intention of “Machinima Island” is not to restrict itself to merely exercising the style and it encourages the audience to participate in the future of the series. For the second episode, which has not been published to date, comments in the form of posts, mails and even sms messages sent using mobile telephones are being taken into account, as they provide new layers for the basic script established by its creators.

In watching these recordings, one realises that although the examples are an unquestionable testimony to the Machinima movement, the narrative background does not rise above the conventional guidelines established for the seventh art. Moreover, neither the peculiarity of the scenarios or characters, nor the cooperative

script modes offer a lexicon that is exclusive to Machinima in Second Life. The absence of models and conducts that are characteristic of this type of virtual communities, such as, for example, the gift of ubiquity, gender transgression and the identity performing modes or the use of syncopated communication systems, is noticeable.

So far, the risk resides at the lower levels of independent productions. It is here, among the teeming millions, that little jewels like “My second life” appear: a definitely decent model of what in the future could become a typology of the Machinima produced in Second Life. The work is presented as a document that floats around the Web, like a bottle adrift, containing a message that hopes to be found by a user. By opening it, we watch the filmed diaries of Molotov Alba, a person that has gone missing from the “real” world and according to his narrative on his adventures, has been seeking to find himself again since the day on which he left his physical corporeity behind to start life again in the second life. In fact, behind the scenes of this immersive insight is Douglas Gayeton, who with the excuse of the false documentary, lifts the lid on a series of issues that are intrinsic to the Web and to Second Life. To start with, he deals with natural concepts such as the dichotomies between reality/ virtuality and fiction/ non-fiction; which explore the notion of existence via the adventures of a virtual ghost. A practice based on fraudulent notes, marked by precedents like the fictitious myth in met-art, “Mouchette”<sup>27</sup>, which had already carried out a study on existences in the web. Gayeton also approaches, albeit less successfully, the standards for adapting and modulating identity that are necessary in order to mediate in SL. His character, in her attempts at configuration, does not go beyond the merely anecdotic black-white, fat-thin, tall-short, etc. and fails to cross the morphological barriers of gender or species that are allowed by this environment. We only notice a hint of these possibilities when he appears drifting around with the appendix of his memory tied around his neck.

Formally, the sequences boast many of the advantages of synthetic production: air travel, fractal landscapes, effect-seeking immersions in the temples of Socratic memory and wisdom, alternation between synthetic images and real photographs, etc.. They vaunt the use of software in SL. Such processing is of greater interest still if we continue to bear in mind that it is an independent production. A synthesis of the new illusionism that leads us to ask ourselves, as one of the following main questions, what the ultimate possibilities of formalism in Second Life are and what links it establishes with its origins: the source code<sup>28</sup> and the real and virtual mesh that supports it.

### 4.3. SPECIFIC PRACTICES

#### 4.3.1. HYPERFORMALISM

“Hyperformalism” is the term introduced in Second Life by the avatar Dancoyote Antonelli, DC Spensley in the real world, in order to establish an art that, to quote his words, is defined by the unique relationship that connects the creator to his/her digital tools of work. On the basis of the fact that these tools are in themselves mathematical abstractions controlled by algorithms<sup>29</sup>, - which, so that nobody gets lost here, is the same as explaining that behind the cursor of the mouse lies a system of sequences and coordinates that allow it to work - Dancoyote emphasises that digital/ pixel-based creations are no more than code processes taken to a higher scale<sup>30</sup>. A cosmological thought that claims that everything is connected, from the micro to the macro, and that any phenomenon on a small scale implies the existence and the link to a higher equivalent. Not in vain, what is translated into our language as “hyperformalism” has also been called “Mathematical Art” by other members that practise this discipline, such as Bathsheba Dorn or Seifert Surface.

In any case, both neologisms point to the continuation of an art, practised on other occasions, inside and outside the computing field<sup>31</sup>, which combines the purely formal or abstract qualities of a work (structure, composition and colour) and the sequences of numbers and algorithms that define mathematical operations.

The termination “formalism” also alludes to the formal or axiomatic system that explained the use of a thorough mathematical method to represent a particular aspect of reality using linked symbols. In this regard, one of the closest precedents is “Fractal Art”, or the development of creative works using similar structures that are repeated on various scales, in which their own evolutionary dynamics may be identified.

A romanesco, a hybrid between broccoli and cauliflower, is an element of nature whose structure presents fractal geometry. Its similarity to hyperformalist sculptures, such as those of Bathsheba Dorn, is sufficiently revealing in order to explain the virtues and drawbacks to this artistic trend. Regardless of the effort invested in refloating the theory of mathematical-computational formalism, the ideals behind this trend have long been weighed up by the minimalist and conceptual movements<sup>32</sup>. The fact is that the best contribution that may be made by “hyperformalism” is the megalomania of its authors, who are determined to transgress in Second Life, the natural laws that limit the elements in everyday reality.

The virtual sculptures and interventions that they promote, by making the most of the environmental conditions of Second Life, i.e. by knowing the ins and outs of its IT codes, allow alterations of gravity, weight or size (improbable in reality), as well as unheard-of chemical achievements that bring together divergent particles like those of fire, water, acid or metal. These aberrations only comply with the laws of perspective and the masses on a tangential basis, in order to lend a certain degree of credibility to the consistence and metamorphoses of the sculptures.

This service involving the impossible in physics also eludes the problems of the real economy. Few artists could afford these colossal productions and their prospective buyers would also be few and far between. It is in this virtue of Second Life that we find the reason for the success of these practices: the lack of corporeity is compensated by the increase in spectacularity and the cheap financial cost.

Dancoyote Antonelli also stresses the importance of understanding that sculptures that have not been made by hand need not follow the same display modes as are used in reality<sup>33</sup>. This has led him to explore the terraforming limits of the Second Life environment, forcing the scripts/ code that establish its matter and space. In October 2006, at the virtual campus “NMC Campus Observer”<sup>34</sup>, he made a colossal intervention that altered none other than a SIM in the landscape; a dimension equivalent to a 16-acre plot, about 65 square kilometres in reality. What started out as a simple inscription of his personal signature – a six-fingered hand symbolising the human being’s primitive capacity to adapt, in this case to the virtual metaverse – ended up detonating a festival of unstable sites that were broken down into fluid and solid patterns and textures.

As may be seen in these works, the interest is maintained, mostly because of the grandiosity of the performance; and although the theories of the connection that Hyperformalism breaks down between small and magno processes, the moment we downscale, some works fall apart under their own weight. This is the case of the popular avatar Sasun Steinbeck and her also renowned work, “Morphing Sculpture”. This avatar and work are notorious because for a time, Steinbeck, with her work under her arm, visited all of the specialised media in SL until she reached a height of fame that almost eclipses that of the sculpture itself and that has won her a considerable number of front page reports. It is a metamorphic work, with sound incorporated, whose changes may be controlled using a control panel. The avatar uses it to change colours, textures and densities, which are combined in a harmonic set of variables. Part of the interest in the work lies in this interactive proposal,

but after a while, after many of its combinations have been tested, the sculpture becomes a superfluous exercise with no accent other than the one that is imposed by the formalist aesthetic. I am not disdaining the technical skill of the artist, much less her *savoir faire* before the media – as is apparent from the nudes obtained in the Second Life Herald<sup>35</sup>- but after all, if we are honest with ourselves, the only memory of her work we are left with is the three-dimensional Windows Media Player screensaver.

On this scale, we may state that there are projects of greater significance, such as the works “Come Together” or “Second Soup”, by the avatar Gazira Babeli, which, despite not strictly following the hyperformalist postulates, nonetheless are similarly related as regards the use of script/code as the essential plastic tool in restructuring forms and space. Babeli, like Steinbeck, also opens a door on interaction, inviting us to enjoy the metamorphosis. The difference is that the former, rather than incite us to the calm modulation of forms promulgated by Steinbeck, advocates the cruel deformation of what is known by means of the exaltation of abnormality and anomaly. In “Come together”, the avatars that climb onto the pedestal will end up being overlapped, on top of each other, forming a new symbiotic body that provides a new definition of physical and psychological relations in Second Life. In “Second Soup”, if we come too close to the Campbell cans, we will be persecuted by the Warholian heritage until we experience another transgressional exercise of fusion as we are swallowed.

#### **4.3.2. CODE PERFORMANCE**

Within the group of specific artistic practices, as well as Hyperformalism, what its own fans call “Code Performance” is also worthy of note.

This is none other than an updated variation of what we know as *performance*, with virtual additions. In *performance* as an artistic genre, various fundamental concepts, i.e. time, space and physical presence, come into play. In Code Performance, the aforementioned concepts are present in a diverse manner thanks to the Internet and the characteristics of the SL environment, real time – with an implicit delay due to the fact that the orders are sent from the artists’ terminals to the Internet <sup>36</sup>-, but virtual space and presence.

The specific procedure consists of writing a prior script, which is liable to be varied during the course of the work. Using their avatar as the performing medium, the *code-performers* send a series of *code-scripts* or encrypted orders, which make their

avatars behave in a particular manner – sometimes even the unsuspecting audience – and/or which modify the virtual environment in which they are located.

Second Front is apparently the pioneering artistic group of *code-performers* in SL, founded in 2006 and currently formed by 8 members<sup>37</sup>. According to themselves, they are influenced by numerous sources, including Dadá, Fluxus, Futuristic Synthesis, Situationism and performers like the New Yorker Laurie Anderson or the Mexican Guillermo Gómez-Peña, references on the basis of whom, as they claim, they “generate theatres of the absurd that challenge the concept of on-line performance and the creation of virtual narrative”.

This is a very active group, whose works include a review of some of the most significant artists in the 20th century, titled “Translations / Tower of Babelfish” (13th April 2007), a mobilisation in the form of a peace demonstration titled “Martyr Sauce” (2007) carried out in one of the conflict zones in SL, where some of the members of the group lost some of their lives<sup>38</sup>.

What is presumed to be SF’s first collective code-performance took place after the première of *Strange Culture*<sup>39</sup> in SL, an independent documentary by Lynn Hershman in which the arrest and pending case against Steve Kurtz, a member of the Critical Art Ensemble<sup>40</sup>, to which the SF were invited<sup>41</sup> is debated.

The story unfolded in 2004 when the artist’s wife, called Hope Kurtz, died of a heart-attack at their shared residence in Buffalo (NY) and the artist called the emergency number 911. At the time, Kurtz was working on a cross-disciplinary project on genetic engineering, titled *Marching Plague*, for the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, nowadays available on the CAE website.

The members of SF attended the event dressed in yellow overalls bearing the bio-hazard symbol on the breast-pocket in red and wearing gas masks, as a symbol of support to the Kurtz cause and to mock the U.S. authority, as despite the fact that the bacteria that were found seemed inoffensive and in spite of Kurtz’s credentials as an artist and associate professor of art in the Department of Visual Studies at Buffalo State College (NY), the police officers telephoned the FBI, fearing a possible bioterrorism attack. Given the presence in the home of biological cultures and other types of biotechnological research materials, the FBI cordoned off the home and seized equipment, books, correspondence and computers, dressed in anti-

bacteriological suits. The bewildered suspect Kurtz was then held in custody for 22 hours under the new Anti-Terrorist Act<sup>42</sup>.

The members of SF sat down and watched the film and after the screening, the attendants stood up and chatted together, while Kurtz himself, on an audio feed, answered the questions posed by the avatars and the SF carried out some mini-performances (e.g. the avatar Great Escape, as a corpse surrounded by buzzing flies, did somersaults around the place). Kurtz even commented amusedly at the appropriateness of the SF clothes and the iconic reminiscences to the graphic identity of McDonald's (yellow, red and compositional proximity to the biohazard icon). After the Q&A session, Gazira Babeli launched question marks and McDonald's logos – the majority of which were inverted - into the sky, while Great Escape showed off his "fires", albeit not fireworks.

On the other hand, on 17th January last, Second Front took part in the multimedia section of the *Art's Birthday Festival*<sup>43</sup> curated by Peter Coutermanche and organised by the Vancouver Western Front<sup>44</sup>, with a performance titled "Art's Day Birthday", which was broadcast by the Web and screened live at the centre.

This intervention may be divided in two parts. On the one hand, in the virtual space of the SL room prepared for the occasion, various members of SF carried out a performance, in which various characteristics of the group's *modus operandi* and iconography may be observed, such as the circular movements, the use of fire and especially, because it was "art's birthday", a cake with candles, drinks, food and firecrackers. While one of the members throws fire, another drinks from a glass and vomits on a cyclical basis. This performance bacchanal in the purest Roman style culminated with the other part of the action, the screening of a live mural titled "The Last Supper" (2007), a parodical review of Da Vinci's mural *The Last Supper*, in which the 8 members eat and drink to excess, throwing up everything they ingest, circling around and on top of the "sacred table".

*Spawn of the Surreal* took place on 11th February 2007, as part of the programme of the festival *Chaos* organised by In Kenzo for the NM Connect Campus (New Media Campus). It started after the audience took their seats, literally, assisted by some SF members equipped with torches posing as ushers, who insisted that the attendants should sit down, under the pretext that the performance was about to start. In fact, on the staircase chairs prepared for the spectators, some green cushions like the ones

in football stadiums that were “loaded” with a code that gradually converted them into mutating avatars, adopting formal configurations, had been conveniently installed.

The members of SF also took part in the physical mutation, varying at random the formal possibilities of the code. Unexpectedly – it was not on the initial script – part of the metamorphic choreography, in which extremities and bodies were transformed into bizarre forms, took place in the air, which disoriented the audience still more, if possible. Some even ran terrified off the stage, while others asked for more intensity in the mutations.

The idea of the mutating avatars came to them - according to their own explanation - when one of their members, Gazira Babeli, reported that one of her *code scripts* was behaving badly and deforming her avatars. In Second Life and in general, in other virtual worlds (e.g: *multiplayer online games*), there is a prevailing compulsion to create avatars that are physically attractive according to the stereotypes. It was then that they considered that the most effective way to question the stereotype of beauty in Classical idealism was to “infect” members of Second Life with their “bad” or “rotten” code, a.k.a. *Code Deforma*, the effects of which include elongation and contortion of limbs and inversion of heads, a magic potion supplied by the scripted staircase chair that was part of the installation.

According to SF, after several discussions, they titled the performance “Spawn of the Surreal” because they considered that it encapsulated the B-flick fantastic and horror films and the type of surrealist operations of confusion, disorientation and rupture that they planned to launch on their audience. During the closure of the first act, not only did avatars run off the stage, but others requested further deformation, which one member, in tribute to the SF programmer Gazira Babeli, called *gazzing*.

Really, more than a performance, it was a happening, because the work was made possible thanks to the involuntary “participation” of the attending audience, which became part of the work, involuntary mutating actors in the work itself. The unexpected nature of the occurrence was an escape for SF in what was an official, organised event, when the group is more inclined towards interventions without prior notification.

The sculptural group composed by barricades generated for the end of the aforementioned *Spawn of the Surreal* was used in the performance made by the

group for the inauguration of the exhibition *Imaging Place SL: The U.S./Mexico Border* by JC. Freemont at the Ars Virtua virtual gallery (2007) mentioned previously. Under the title *Border Patrol*, it consisted of a site-specific performance in real time, developed on the basis of Fremont's work on borders. Thus, they generated a situation of chaos and persecution, with sounds, shots, fire, barricades and helicopters and rangers in order to generate among the attendants a feeling of being persecuted at a border.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The content of this research project does not leave room for many doubts; it is undeniable that there is an emerging artistic culture in Second Life, a movement that responds to the taste and the demand of both users that are not knowledgeable about the field of the arts and of a series of users that are already informed about the arts and have decided to explore the plastic spaces offered by virtuality.

This has been made possible due to various factors, two of which are because of the needs and failings that human nature retains, unable to abandon even in the virtual universe: the ego and the "purse" (the economy). The ego, because Second Life is a young universe, with a lot to be explored and created and a lot to be declared as wealth. The purse, because in SL, everyone is free to exhibit, manage and assemble an artistic space without the political and financial shackles of the real world. In a sense, the user enjoys the *tabula rasa* that is represented by the novelty of a medium that is relatively accessible, in terms of connection and learning about its tools and systems and whose only drawback is, like in all of the arts, the need for specialisation and improvement in their use.

According to what we have explained, it is easy to discern that not all of the works that glitter in Second Life are made of gold. On the contrary, this lack of restrictions, this virtualised freedom, does not elude the lack of standards that many display in their creations. Internal criticism is scarce and despite the work done by the media mentioned herein<sup>45</sup>, what predominates is an "art" with no hesitations, of shaky inspiration, closer to the technical virtuosity or the casual discovery that facilitates play with the interface of the programme, rather than to art of real plastic coherence. Moreover, in the majority of cases, the artists decide to upload to Second Life works that they have created in reality. For example, by hanging in virtual galleries photographs of their oil paintings, drawings, etc. or low-quality reproductions of the latter, in order to market works that at no time participate in the evolution of a

proprietary virtual art and that, in the last instance, apart from the mere commercial transaction, only facilitate the individual promotion of the artist.

This brings us to the answer to another of the key issues governing this research, i.e. can these practices constitute a quality artistic reference? With the exception of the obstacles already commented on, we believe that it is possible for this to be the case.

Throughout this text, it has been proven that Second Life hosts an artistic production circuit that is interested in finding new plastic formulae that do not betray the spirit of virtuality, i.e. that use their language and systems to generate a proprietary art, willing to go deep enough in order to be consolidated. These attempts have not only overcome the status of the new genre, but have, with the enthusiasm of the artists that produce them, found a channel of interest that goes beyond the very borders of its metaverse of action.

The most interesting practices are thus grouped together in two spheres of action: one that seeks out friction between reality and virtuality in order to set up a field for reflection between the various levels and perceptions in the living environment, and another that refers to the specific artistic practices that have arisen in this medium and that, as their description indicates, do not function or make sense outside this area.

The first block, represented in this research by examples like the projects carried out by Eva and Franco Mattes or the work completed by JC Freemont, establishes a healthy plastic and conceptual exercise in favour of that of reflection, which offers the reflection of oneself and poses a series of interesting topics that have been raised by issues like virtuality and reality overlapping in a reflection, the distortion that one world causes to the other, the exchange of realities, etc.. All of these are issues to which the analysis of gender, migration, micropolitics, etc. may be applied in order to question both realities in order to understand them better and comprehend what the future has in store for us.

The other block is formed by the arts that have been assimilated by the environment or that have been inspired by references from reality and then established new forms of expression that are inherent to the medium. These practices<sup>46</sup>, with their accuracies and inaccuracies, may or may not convince the requirements of a higher art, but what is indubitable is the patent signature left by their authors that, in their constancy, have managed to define a new sentence in the virtual artistic circuit. The attempts of Machinima or those made by the hyperformalist authors cannot

avoid, for example, carrying a (paradoxically insubstantial) dead weight in their works, which provokes the suspicion of vacuity, often encouraged by critics in need of corporeal veracity.

In the case of Code-performance, the various exercises, sometimes with an aesthetic and sometimes with an activist slant, are lacking in the essential corporeity that inherently implies an accusation of declared lightness due to the evident lack of (physical) risk and by the comfortable shield of acting behind the virtual alter-ego of the avatar. This is the framework in which code-performances may be compared to their imminent predecessors. Artistic works like the actions articulated by Marcel. li Antúñez Roca<sup>47</sup> or Stelarc<sup>48</sup>, in which the teleacting involves painful physical exhaustion, or the surgical manipulations carried out by Orlan<sup>49</sup>, in which surgery may not be reversed, recreate a veracity that is hard to sustain in the *Second Front* performances. In non-virtual body art, the performer's body, his/her "real" physical interface is exposed not only to the public, but to pain; the skin, the flesh, is the artistic medium – in fact, Orlan himself calls it *Carnal Art*- and pain is a "natural" limit of this medium that may on occasion be mitigated by technology (anaesthetics). Therefore, we can affirm that one of the inadequacies of code-performance is the non-existence of risk, because the alter-ego interface is not exposed to any damage and/or public scorn.

It is interesting, in this regard, to comment on how there is nonetheless an evident iconographic connection between the type of actions perpetrated by the artists mentioned and Code-performance, which allude to the technological manipulation-transformation of the body (using home-made interactive torture and plastic surgery machines, in the case of Marcel.li and Orlan respectively) and to the concept of "zero gravity" in its more formal aspect (in the case of Stelarc).

Therefore, when looking for consistent artistic values in Second Life, we should view and assimilate these practices in their most transcendent facet, which lies, precisely, in the researching and construction of systems of knowledge based on laws of virtuality that may not only be extrapolated to other future virtual communication platforms, but that may also serve as a source for analysing a culture that is marked by the inertia of technology. The works generated in Second Life have created a point of departure from which a spectrum opens up, containing an awareness of reality, communication and emotion that is capable of reinforcing the alternative experiences of virtuality and its ways of living outside the body.

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#### NOTES

1 Several news items and dissemination texts have covered the recent origin and development of the Second Life universe. Since its creation and up to the present date, the quality of its proposal has been reinforced by the curiosity of an audience that had for years imagined the possibility of being able to enjoy an alternative world in the IT and virtual spheres. Millions of users, estimated at approximately 4,500,000 million residents, have by participating in this collective dream, attracted attention from various spheres of reality. In politics, no party has failed to flirt with the environment (unique cases like the speech made by Gaspar Llamazares, the main representative of the group Izquierda Unida (United Left) in SL, or the demonstrations of avatars in front of the virtual headquarters of the Socialist Party, protesting against the hunger strike of De Juana Chaos, were the first such appearances in the media); architects like N. Foster have already sized up the possibilities of this metaverse and artists like U2 or Suzanne Vega have also fallen prey to SL, providing live performances with their avatars.

2 “Virtual universe” may be understood to mean an interactive environment that is generated in three dimensions by means of IT resources. This definition includes all of the branches that are derived from this concept, from the VRML (Virtual Reality Modelling Language) scenes to the 3-D videogame scenarios and virtual reality films in QuickTime format.

3 MUD is the acronym for Multi-User Dungeon, which may be translated literally into Spanish to mean “mazmorra (o calabozo) multiusuario”. It is an on-line role game that is run on an Internet server. MUDs were created in the decade of the 70s, in the first era of the Web, when the majority of programmes were managed using text. Obviously, the genre evolved with time and games of a similar type, but increasingly advanced visual and graphic interfaces were created. These were known as MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games). Nowadays, there are many games of this kind, including Diablo, Neverwinter Nights, Lineage 2 and World of Warcraft. However, the subject matter is still the same: to improve a character’s physical skills and abilities, equipment and wealth.

4 CompuServe, (CompuServe Information Services or CIS), was established as the premier commercial service in the United States in the decade of the 80s, because of its offer to create information networks for companies. It produced and distributed its own web-based processors and wrote all of its software in order to sell connectivity at national level. Nowadays, it is still at the forefront of the most important services in the Web.

5 On the spectrum of the Internet, the term “on-line” refers to the connection that is established with the Web. In colloquial Internet user language, if a user is connected from a terminal, this means that he/she is “on-line”.

6 IRC (*Internet Relay Chat*) is a text-based real-time communication protocol that allows for debates in group or between two persons and which is classified under Instant Messaging. It is a chat system that is widely used by people all over the world. It was created by Jarkko Oikarinen (alias “WiZ”) in August 1988 with the purpose of replacing the programme MUT (multi-user talk) in a BBS called OuluBox in Finland. IRC is popularly used to chat, make friends and join groups of people with the same interests. Any person can start a specific channel in this regard. Moreover, an IRC channel is also used as a file-sharing site. Some of these are specialised in music or books, or other areas. Another modality that is very often used is the games modality, among which Cybergames are the highlight, with hundreds of channels on all servers.

7 Windows Live Messenger, also known as MSN Messenger, is an instant messaging application that was created by Microsoft. It is currently one of the most successful communication systems in the Web, particularly among the young audience. It is an evolution of the IRC systems, because it bases its functioning on similar parameters: Connection and textual chat and more downloading of files among affiliated users. The most recent versions already allow for communication via voice and video-conferences.

8 The term “metaverse” comes from the novel *Snow Crash* published in 1992 by Neal Stephenson and is often used to describe the vision of working in totally immersive 3D spaces. Metaverses are environments in which humans interact socially and economically as icons via a logical format in a cyberspace that is acted out as a metaphor of real life, but without the physical limitations.

9 Coordinates in Second Life: 153, 97, 100

10 Coordinates in Second Life: 118, 160, 32

11 Ars Virtua, New Media Center. Coordinates in Second Life: 11, 16, 52

12 [www.slartmagazine.com](http://www.slartmagazine.com)

13 Coordinates in Second Life: 38,154,26

14 Coordinates in Second Life: 217, 7, 40

15 [www.femmesheroiques.com](http://www.femmesheroiques.com)

16 The group “The Computer Band”, which is responsible for the project, focuses on the status and image of women and uses the figure of the superheroine as a metaphor. Thus, just as each of the goddesses in Greek mythology represents the forces of the universe, each of the heroines represents each one of the paths followed by women

over the course of the centuries to the present-day, “such as love, the transmission of life and knowledge, physical beauty, the relationship with work, family and power” – free translation from the French-. For example, *Esthetica* is the heroine of the metamorphosis that seeks youth and eternal beauty (!).

17 Recently, also in 2007, the Mattes took place in the collective initiative *Gameworld*, organised by the Art Centre at Gijón Industrial University, directed by Rosina Gómez-Baeza (30<sup>th</sup> March – May 2007)

18 These introductions, also known as “intros”, have been established as an art that is highly appreciated among videogame consumers. Apart from their leisure and narrative function, they also play an exhibitionist function that serves to display the productive skills of game creators. This has now led to an all-out competition to overcome the barriers in the genre. Several digital art festivals have also included a special category for this type of practices.

This is the case, for example, of the autochthonous festival *ArtFutura*, a pioneer in the field. Its *Full motion Theater* section includes the best productions carried out in the international videogame panorama on an annual basis.

19 In IT terms, a “mod” is a modifying programme that produces any type of change in a programme, in general to make it more complex, partially or wholly improving it or changing it from its original form.

In the world of videogames, a “mod” (from *modification*) is an extension that modifies an original game, allowing for new possibilities, surroundings, characters, dialogues, objects etc.. Practically all modern games incorporate tools and manuals so that they may be modified and thus create a mod.

The most popular mods are the ones that were developed for the *First Person Shooters* games and for the aforementioned Quake or Unreal Tournament, which allow to change the appearances of the characters, the sounds they emit or even the levels of violence in the game. Real Time Strategy games like *Warcraft III* or *Command & Conquer* also include several mods that allow to vary the game programme. It is important to note that although the programmes that are used to create mods may be official, the *modders* (people that create mods) are, in the majority of cases, amateurs that want to explore their favourite games further.

20 A *Sitcom* (Situation Comedy) is a type of television comedy that originated in North America and which usually includes an attending audience that livens up the series with their laughs. When the budget is tight, “canned”, i.e. previously recorded, laughter, supports the performance. Most of the action takes part on sets and they are usually self-conclusive, i.e. the stories start and end in the same chapter.

21 The characters in videogames or the engines with which they function belong to the companies that create them. The *Super Mario* character is owned by the Nintendo company, just as *Sonic* is owned by Sega. If the pieces of Machinima that use third-party productions are used to obtain financial profits, this gives rise to an infringement of the copyright code that is punishable by law. This means that at professional level, very few producers/ production companies can afford to create Machinima without skipping the copyright, which currently restricts this movement's capacity for options.

22 Name for a very short reaction time in the computer, less than is required for human perception, which allows for the sensation of immediacy between action and reception/ reaction. Commonly associated to “live” data transmission, but this is just an illusion, effective real time is not yet scientifically feasible.

23 According to the definition by Claudia Giannetti (*Estética Digital*) the interface is the “Connection between two hardware devices, two applications or between a user and an application, which allows for data to be exchanged by means of the adoption on common physical or logical rules”.

24 MANOVICH Lev, *El lenguaje de los nuevos medios de comunicación*. Paidós. Barcelona. 2005.

25 BAUDRILLARD, Jean, *Cultura y simulacro*. Kairós. Barcelona. 1984.

26 John Ford is considered to be one of the most important directors in the classical Hollywood period (between the late 1920s and the 1960s). His achievements include the consecration of the stereotypes of the cinematographic Western, with key films like *Stagecoach* (1939) or *The Searchers* (1956), which are masterpieces in the genre.

27 [Http://www.mouchette.org](http://www.mouchette.org). “My name is Mouchette. I'm almost 13 years old. I'm an artist or maybe an artistic

project. In the web, there is no difference between being an artist or a work of art. In the Internet, nobody knows exactly what “I” means and this word will probably take on new meaning”. This is the personality of Mouchette. An identity in full puberty that regularly threatens to commit suicide and that celebrates her last birthday every year (*My\_Last\_Birthday\_Party*), to which she invites her favourite net.artists to display their work. Her website may be considered in itself to be a multifaceted work of net.art containing a constant tone of erotic insinuation. Any Internet user may become a member of her fan club and write to her. Mouchette will write back.

28 Set of lines that make up a block of text, written according to the strict syntax rules of a programming language.

29 An algorithm is a finite set of instructions or steps that are used to execute a task or solve a problem. We use algorithms on several occasions in daily life to solve everyday problems.

Formally, it is a finite (mathematical or logical) sequence of performable instructions, which if performed will solve a problem.

30 This property is also known as *modularity*, a term that Lev Manovich (*The language of new media*) uses to define the “fractal structure of new media”. His propositions indicate that “just as a fractal has the same structure on different scales, a new media object has the same modular structure throughout”. In referring to the new media, Manovich alludes to the media objects (radio, TV, photography, etc.) that have passed through the IT filter and become *computerisable media*. Via this transformation, they become modulatable architectures that may be modified in any order and scale.

31 A great many artists support their projects on mathematical pillars. Michael Field uses mathematics to trace sequential pictorial representations. Mario Merz integrated the currents of Land Art with the mathematical concept of *Succession/ Fibonacci Series* in his interventions and sculptures. Moreover, in the album *Lateralus* by the U.S. band Tool, the drum patterns (Danny Carey) in the song *Lateralus* follow the Fibonacci Succession of the number 13 (number of tracks in the record): 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,1,1,2,3,5,8,13,1,1,...

32 These artistic trends, especially minimalism, tend to strip the ideas and techniques of everything but the essential. In this regard, minimalist art is a current that polishes the elements that are left over until just a trace of their creative structure is left. This search for the essential has taken many artists towards a geometric abstraction that eliminates the figurative imaginary and the pictorial space of illusion, in favour of a single purist image. The simplification of the works has often led to the use of mathematical compositions to discern the essential aspects of nature. For example, these words by the artist Sol Lewitt: “In conceptual art, the idea or the concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form, one must understand that he/she has previously gone through a whole process of planning and decision-making, so that the execution is merely a mechanical issue. The idea becomes a machine that creates art”.

33 KRASNER, ROSE *Hyperformalism in Second Life*. Slart digital magazine, see [www.slartmagazine.com](http://www.slartmagazine.com)

34 The NMC Campus Observer is an experimental platform that has been developed in order to educate and inform on the artistic possibilities and projects that are offered in the Second Life environment. Since the beginning of 2006, the NMC Campus has built a series of virtual buildings and sites to put these exercises into practice and open up to all kinds of formal and informal, traditional and non-traditional explorations that reinforce the possibilities of virtuality.

35 Regular media on the Second Life universe that functions mainly from its website, [www.secondlifeherald.com/](http://www.secondlifeherald.com/)

36 See in this regard the concept of “teleaction” coined by Lev Manovich, who has been mentioned previously in this text.

37 Jeremy Owen Turner (Vancouver), Doug Jarvis (Victoria), Tanya Skuce (Vancouver), Gazira Babeli (Italy), Alise Iborg a.k.a. Penny Leong Browne (Vancouver), Patrick Lichty (Chicago), Liz Solo (St. Johns) and Scott Kildall (San Francisco)

38 In order to carry out their march of protest against violence in SL, they came to the place armed with what they called the *peacenik* kit, composed of protest signs with written slogans like “Peace & Love” or “Martyr Sauce”

and drawings of peace symbols, SLSD (SL's LSD) code-scripts offered by the avatar Wirxli Flimflam, gigantic psychedelic flowers and floating marijuana leaves, etc.

39 According to the avatar Hazardous, a member of Second Front, the following were present: Gazira Babeli, Wirxli Flimflam, Tran Spire, Great Escape and Lizsolo Mathilde, Alise Iborg Zhaoying, and Man Michinaga (Tea Chenille was unable to attend because she had to comply with some RL obligations)

40 The CAE is a group of 5 artists from various disciplines that are dedicated to exploring the intersections between art, technology, radical politics and critical theory.

Its publications include the following: *The Electronic Disturbance*, *Electronic Civil Disobedience* (1995), *Flesh Machine*, *Digital Resistance*, *Molecular Invasión* or *Marching Plague*, all of which are available on their website <http://www.critical-art-ensamble.net> in pdf format.

41 The film was screened later on – that same week – at the Sundance Film Festival, which made this tape the first première in SL.

42 The investigation is being carried out by virtue of the new antiterrorist laws in the U.S., which are the cause for great concern among the artistic community in Internet. The accusation against Kurtz and another member of the CAE, Robert Ferrell, may lead to a custodial sentence of up to 20 years, which appears to be a form of veiled censure from the federal government, given their critical past. In July 2004, a grand jury refused to indict him on any “terrorism” charges, but did indict him on the charges grouped under the heading “federal crimes”, such as mail and wire fraud, due to his having obtained biological microbes by fraudulent means.

43 *Art's Day Birthday* was an initiative organised by the French artist Robert Filliou, who suggested in 1963 – in his ever humorous tone, characterised by the absurd -, that art had been born about a million years ago, on 17th January, to be precise, “when someone threw a dry sponge into a bucket of water”, and that the presence of art in our lives should be celebrated, for which purpose he proposed an annual public holiday. In recent years, Filliou's idea has been recovered, and for the most part channelled by the web - since the mid 90s -, because the central ideas are exchange and the development of telecommunications for art, becoming an annual event that is organised on a simultaneous basis by some individual centres and initiatives.

44 The Vancouver Western Front is a “real” centre that has been in operation since 1973, located at 303 East 8th Avenue Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

45 See the section on “Artistic dissemination channels”.

46 Hyperformalism, Code-Performance and Machinima in their specific variations for Second Life.

47 See in this regard, for example, *Epizoo* (1994).

48 See in this regard, for example, *City Suspension* (1985) or *Sentado/Balanceándose con unas rocas suspendidas* (1980).

49 See, for example, *Omniprésence* 1993.