

Weaving Encounters: Towards an Art of Participation

In the early 21st Century, with the phenomenon of digital convergence, the consecration of Web 2.0, the decrease of the cost of cameras and video recorders, the proliferation of mobile phones, laptops and wireless technologies, we witness the arising of a new wave of media, of an informal, personal and at times "minority" nature, facilitating social networks, a culture of fans, of sharing and remix. As digital networks become fully and deeply intricate in our experience, the idea of "participation" arises as one of the most complex and controversial themes of the contemporary critical discourse, namely in what concerns contemporary art and new media art.

However, the idea of "participation" as a practice or postulate traverses the 20th century art playing an essential role in its auto-critic, in questioning the concept of author, and in the dilution of the frontiers between art, "life" and society, emphasizing the process, the everyday and a community sense. As such, questioning the new media art in light of a "participatory art" (Frieling, 2008) invokes a double gaze simultaneously attentive to the emerging figures of a "participatory aesthetics" in digital arts and of the genealogy in which it is included.

In fact, relating the new media art with the complex and paradoxical phenomenon of "participation" allows us to, on the one hand, avoid "digital formalism" (Lovink, 2008) and analyse the relations between digital art and contemporary social movements; on the other hand, this angle of analysis contributes to reinforce the dialogue and the links between digital art and contemporary art, questioning the alleged frontiers that separate them.