

Doctorate Research Proposal

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Title:

Interaction Between Artists in Collaborative Art And New Media

Introduction & Justification

My interest in art and interactivity started in 1994 as an undergraduate student. At the time, the digital media technologies were in their infancy. From the field of communications I arrived at my study theme: interaction mediated by the new media technologies. I chose artists as a study object because their experimental practices push the new media to their limit, exploring new and emerging ideas before other groups. This opened to me a fruitful opportunity for reflection and insights into the new media, their role and potentialities.

For the master study thesis I conducted at PUC-RS from 1996 to 1999, I dedicated myself to understanding how the interaction between artists in collaborative projects in new media occurred. At the time, I chose for my case study one of the pioneer and most instigative groups in this field, SITO.ORG. It was a very rewarding process for me to conduct a reflection about interactive art in a moment in which the concept of interactivity in new media was just beginning to be addressed by researchers and thinkers around the world, and pioneering experiments pointed to a vast landscape of possibilities.

Since that time, the field of art and new media expanded fast, with many new experimental art groups appearing around the world, together with legitimizing spaces like museums, exhibits and specialized festivals, following an explosion of new applications and experimentation fields, like wearable technologies, smart mobs, geotagging, robotics, data mining, game art, surveillance/privacy, tactical media, telepresence, artificial life, locative media, digital graffiti, biotechnology and open source, among many others.

It became clear to me, since I started my research in the field of art and new media, that it is important to become an active observer – not just to observe from a distance but to participate actively and experience the interaction in the first person. Many technologies, because they are so new and break existing suppositions and paradigms, can only be understood in depth by active participation and immersion. This is a methodological choice that provided me with excellent results in the past, leading to a masters thesis that achieved a unanimous highest grade by the department's examination board.

For my PhD research, I want to expand my object of study to include the main art groups with active projects in the field of collaborative art in new media, in order to arrive at a wider panorama of the interactive forms occurring in the contemporary scene. At the same time that new technologies and their uses evolve, so does the research about them become richer, and today there is a more substantial and deep bibliography available on the theme, addressing many new and different topics in the field of interactive technologies and new media.

Nowadays, the contemporary scene has enough maturity to support relevant, in-depth studies in the field of art, technology and interactivity. My object of study is situated in the frontier between communications and art, and a PhD program in the art field would be extremely valuable for my education, reaffirming and consolidating the multidisciplinary nature of my study.

The idea is to continue to complement my theoretical research with active participation, in the format of short residencies with new media art groups. I have had the opportunity in the past to do two art residencies in Europe: one in 2000 at Caiia-Star (today called Planetary Collegium) in Plymouth, England, as part of the UNESCO-Aschberg bursary program, and another in 2005 at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, thanks to their Media Art Award program. Besides those two three-month-long residencies, I also spent one week at the STEIM center in Amsterdam as an invited artist in 2006.

After finishing my Masters studies, I became a teacher at Unisinos. There I participated in the planning of curricula, syllabi and pedagogical proposals for their new undergraduate programs in the field of information and culture technologies. I could create and now teach courses related to my field of study, art and interactivity. I was very gratified to see that my research bore much fruit when I returned to Brazil, and I am sure that the same will happen when I complete my doctoral studies.

Goals

The goal of this study is to identify the ways in which artists involved in collaborative art and new media art projects interact during their creative processes. This will be accomplished by studying projects considered representative of the contemporary media art scene, using the Grounded Theory as the work methodology. In this way, this study aims to expand the research developed during my Master's degree program, when I identified and described the levels of interaction in a case study of one of the pioneer collaborative art groups on the Internet, SITO.ORG.

Specific goals:

- Collect information about new media art projects, describing, systematizing and analyzing the interactive processes observed, using the Grounded Theory.
- Reflect about the current moment in new media art, the contemporary scene's characteristics and the implications of same, based on the study of the selected art groups.
- Contribute to the theoretical and practical body of reference material that can be used by researchers and artists in future studies in the fields of interactive art and new media.

Methodology

For this study I plan to use the Grounded Theory methodology. This methodology was already extremely valuable to me in my Master's studies, and it fits this object of study particularly well, considering it is a field in which constant change is happening and the research ground is not yet extensively mapped. Phyllis Noerager Stern points out, in his 1994 text in a book called *Critical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods*, that "the strongest case for the use of Grounded Theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted water, or to gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation."

The Grounded Theory appeared as an attempt to shorten the distance between theory and empirical research in the social sciences. Developed by Glase & Strauss in 1967, it aims to offer an empirical ground for theories based not in hypothesis but in data, suggesting a specificity and logic to those theories and legitimizing qualitative research.

The main characteristic of Grounded Theory is that the problem emerges from the data, which is defined by the actors involved in the situations studied. Contrary to the methods that preconceive the world starting from predefined hypothesis, in the Grounded Theory the main concern is with the meanings, definitions and interpretations that arise from the systematic study of the investigated object. The goal is to describe the context and the priorities based on the object, without preconceived visions of what it should mean, starting from general questions and interrogations related to the experiences being explored.

The Grounded Theory suggests as methods for data collection interviews, observations and documents obtained during the observation process, among others. It also proposes as part of the analysis method the triangulation of data from different sources. The below choice of the sources for this study is based on the successful experience from my previous Master's research:

1. "official" information made available by the group to the public
2. statements from active participants in the group
3. personal-experience accounts from the author in the role of participant in the group

In the field of art and new media, it is important to become an active observer, not just to observe from a distance but to participate actively and experience the interaction in the first person. Many technologies, because they are so new and break existing suppositions and paradigms, can only be understood in depth by an active participation and immersion.

One of the vortices in the necessary Grounded Theory triangulation will be represented by the immersion and experience account. The immersion will take the form of art residencies from one week to two months long, inside the groups chosen in the second part of the analysis.

Activity Plan & Schedule

The forecast schedule for this study is:

Bibliography review – 6 months

Preliminary data collection – 6 months

Analysis and interpretation of preliminary data – 3 months

Work plan and questionnaire design for Part Two – 3 months

Field research – 6 months

Analysis and interpretation of data from Part Two – 6 months

Final text writing and revision – 6 months

The analysis process and the selection of cases for study will be performed in two parts:

Part 1

- based on the bibliography review and research of pertinent sources, identify the main collaborative art and new media group projects currently active.
- according to research-defined criteria, collect basic information about the groups identified in the previous step.
- starting from the database with basic information, define a smaller sample of groups considered representative and meaningful for further investigation during the second part of the research, and check their interest and availability in participating in the study.

Part 2

- build, test and apply a questionnaire on the groups selected for the second part of the study. The questionnaire will provide the participants' point of view, as well as further information to add to what was already obtained in the first part of the research.
- plan the characteristics and duration of the art residency immersions for the groups selected, based on their projects and the availability of both the group and the author. Elaborate a schedule for the residencies and execute it.

After all the data is collected, the next step is the final analysis of the results and the writing and revising of the final text.

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