Rosa Menkman
Xilitla

"Wrong Places" Inbetween One Code and Another
by Kristoffer Gansing

Contemporary art in the contexts of global economical and informational networks belongs to Janus, the god of transitions in space and time, such as between physical places or between past and future. Miwon Kwon, in her seminal *One Place After Another* (2002), investigated the transformation of the notion of site-specificity in contemporary art from one of "permanence and immobility" to one of "impermanence and transience". More recently, in the context of the algorithms guiding our computational everyday, the work of the Dutch artist and researcher Rosa Menkman continues our poetic education in ongoing transformations of time and place and in the paradoxes of the never-ending search for specificity and authenticity within transience.

For Kwon, the notion of site-specificity is intrinsically tied to our understanding of the identity, location and authenticity of art. In the 1960's, site-specific art, she claims, was related to an interest in the physical properties of a particular place, then with institutional critique this interest was expanded to the socio-economic structures governing art. In the global art market, Kwon identifies a move towards a nomadic model where site specificity is predicated on mobility. With the increasingly itinerant artist of the 1990's, going from residency to residency, or from biennial to biennial, the value of a site-specific artistic practice is no longer grounded primarily in a physical place or in a particular institutional arrangement, but in the particular set of skills that an artist is bringing in going from one place to another. Site-specificity may seem anachronistic in a world in which socio-economic structures are mobile and fluid, but site-specificity itself was effectively transformed in order to comply with network culture. It is in this context of specificity in transience, of "relational specificity" that Kwon puts her trust in the encounter with the "wrong place", as one that "may expose the instability of the 'right' place". Arguably, the aesthetics of the "wrong place" is since long an established artistic trope, spanning for example surrealism, situationism and net.art. Architecture is obviously also a stronghold for all kinds of seductively "wrong places", and in the context of Menkman's new work, Edward James' surrealist sculpture park *Las Pozas* located just outside Xilitla springs to mind.

In 1990's media art, the notion of site was dealt with in the artistic exploration of new media spaces seemingly dislocated from traditional notions of time, space and embodiment (the utopian promise of virtual reality). Equally however, with the rise of critical net culture there was an artistic interest in what Manuell Castells dubbed the "real virtuality" of a world increasingly defined through electronic mediation. Evocative of the idea of the "wrong place", the recent genre of "glitch art" seems to be ambiguously situated in between these two directions of media art: one devoted to the joyful creation of new hybrid realities and one devoted to critically exposing the borders and materiality

existing also within apparent hybridity. New art genres such as glitch increasingly function in a meme-like fashion, as Berry, van Dartel, Dieter et al. (2012) explore in their thorough analysis of The New Aesthetic (an Internet meme put forward in 2011). Inspired by Lauren Berlant's work on aesthetic genres, they write that "[a]esthetic relations take shape as trackable 'genres' or forms which enable contemporary subjects to attach to and at least inhabit the contradictions and ambivalence of this Now." But glitch, as artists such as jon.satrom or Rosa Menkman demonstrate, holds an edge over the technology obfuscating tendencies of The New Aesthetic which revels in 8-bit consumer nostalgia and a superficial overlapping of old and new. On the contrary, the best of glitch art is not afraid to manipulate the machinery and provoke the emergence of "wrong places" that disturb our sense of the real in computational culture.

If the sites of site-specific art have been progressively transformed from material to immaterial, then glitch art suggests a return to materiality. The structures that allowed one to move from one place to another were indeed never immaterial, not even when that movement took place in so-called virtual space. The transience of network culture is defined by codes in the form of algorithms that shift data around, be it money, audiovisual content or interpersonal communication. Standard file formats for text and image files and the associated compression codecs for text, image, audio and video data such as rtf, jpg, wav or mpeg belong to this domain of data shifting and they constitute the quintessential artistic material for the glitch artist. If there ever was a "relational specificity" then these highly transient informational sites revel in it. This relational specificity also defines the art of Rosa Menkman, as virtually everything in her work is generated out of something else, not in a serial progression, but precisely through constant feedback between one thing and something else, between one code and another. Appropriately, one of Menkman's earlier projects is called *A Vernacular of File Formats*, demonstrating the research component of her work, as it was disseminated through workshops and published as a guide to databending compression.

It was the scarce information available at the time of writing on Menkman's new work, *Xilitla*, an interface for her *Videoscapes* series, that prompted me into the detour of exploring site-specific art. Currently, Menkman is developing this as a new tool for audiovisual live performance using the glitch methodologies with which she created earlier acousmatic video landscapes. In her prototyping we see a surreal 3D character "dancing" over a vast plane of live analogue video feedback. Everything about this place seems "wrong" in the deconstructive way associated with Menkman's work and it is clear that we are here situated in a site with things existing in a multilayered relation to one another. It takes Menkman's work of deconstruction to a new level, this being a software that will eventually be used for the generation of new kinds of "wrong places" by others than the artist herself. But rest assured that it will not be a straightforward software tool where all is transparent. The font for the interface of the software has already been released on Menkman's website, a very hard to read lo-fi version of a Charles Rennie Mackintosh font common on buildings in Mexico City. It is these kinds of subtle displacements of recognizable standards that ultimately allow us to respond to the glitchy and wrong places of Menkman's work. They are not simply demonstrations of technical feedback but also attempt, however contradictory, to take on the shape of characters and narratives that seem to explore the negotiation of misplaced identities

and loss of self, searching for relational specificity, regardless if it is a technical or a human one. This was clearly an issue in Menkman's performance The Collapse of Pal, a piece commissioned for live TV by Linda Hilfling and myself to commemorate the death of analogue transmission. In that work, technology was clearly Janus-faced as PAL, the outgoing television format, was filtered through Benjamin's Angel of History: There is a nostalgia for what was lost but at the same time the past is forming a debris relentlessly pushing forward the acceleration of the increasingly chaotic future. In this work the narrative definitely involved the moving from one code to another, from PAL to MPEG, but it also refused to think this shift linearly, as the glitch methodology jumbled the analogue and digital audiovisual feedback together. I am intrigued by the possibilities of Rosa's new work to further "wronging" of past, present and future media scapes.

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