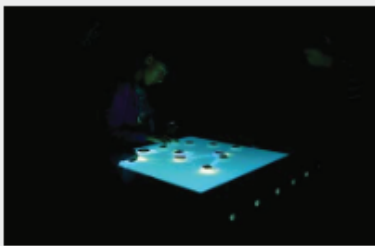


Group Show

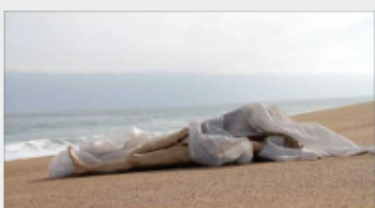
# 10th Video and Media Arts Biennial: Against the Dominance of Machines



Gustavo Romano. Mesa de habitación de guerra psicoeconómica, 2011. Instalación con mesa interactiva. Dimensiones variables.



Cuppetelli y Mendoza. Nervous Structure III, 2011. Interactive installation. Variable dimensions.



J. P. Langlois. Sadistic Papers, 2011. Frame to frame video animation series.

ArtNexus #84 - Arte en Colombia #130  
Mar - May 2012

Santiago, Chile  
Carolina Lara B.

The history of Chile's Video and Media Arts Biennial (BVAM, in its Spanish acronym) has faithfully reflected international shifts in terms of art and technology, as well as the characteristics of the local and Latin American scenes. It was established in 1993 as the continuation of the Franco-Chilean Video Art Festivals, veritable landmarks during the 1980s in a country suffering under a dictatorial regime and great political and cultural turmoil. The first edition was held in 1993, the country having already transitioned to democracy, as the Santiago Art Biennial. Directed by Néstor Olhagaray and supported by several protagonists of the 1980s festivals mentioned above, it was organized by the Chilean Video Corporation.

The changes in the event's name have been significant in themselves: in 1997 it was the Video and Electronic Arts Biennial, and in 1999, the Video and New Media Biennial. A growing access to technological advances, the rapidly spreading use of digital tools, and new reflections about the dizzying changes brought about by the Internet, were the socio-cultural context for an expanded presence of installations in the biennial and the expansion of video into multi-media experiences. Sustaining a single concept capacious enough to contain the myriad operations that are possible in such a constantly shifting terrain hasn't been easy in the international scene, either. Some recent debates point towards the importance of the medium and highlight, beyond the technological aspect and an interest in the "new", the "mediality" of a work of art: its materiality and its modes of construction and representation. It was in that context that the international biennial adopted in 2009 its current name: Video and Media Arts.

Olhagaray remains at the helm, leading a multidisciplinary cadre of young authors in Plataforma Cultura Digital, an organization devoted to the empowering and expansion of collaborative networks. Faced with resistance on the part of cultural institutions and private firms, Olhagaray —himself a recognized artist— has found support in



Claudia González. *Water Resistance*, 2011. Detail of the objectual sculptoric installation. Variable dimensions.



Andrea Wolf. *Little Memories*, 2011. Video installation. Variable dimensions.



Ernesto Klar. *Luzes Relacionais*, 2010. Fog, video camera, video beam, speakers, software system.

bi-national institutes, European research and creation centers, and his own contacts through festivals and individual artists in Latin America. An important source of support was also found in 2009, from the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes. Nevertheless, the biennial still operates in a precarious state, which it overcomes through excellent management to present on each occasion several shows and parallel activities.

This year, in order to optimize the available resources, exhibitions were concentrated in a short span of time: 12 days during the month of January, compared to the month and a half of previous versions. Also, the biennial expanded to more venues. Historically, the event had been held at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo; this time around, it included the Centro Cultural Gabriela Mistral, the Centro Cultural de España, and Factoría Italia, all in Santiago. The shortened duration and multiple sites played against anyone intent on taking in the 10th biennial as a whole. Besides a central exhibition with more than 20 proposals, the event included film, documentary, and video-art cycles, the presentation of the 10th Juan Downey Ibero-American Award for Audiovisual Authorship and Creation, audio-visual concerts, an international colloquium, technical and theory workshops, and a free fair for creative industries. The biennial sought to connect with a variety of audiences, with some presentations at the MNBA and the CCA remaining open through February.

The central exhibition, held at the MAC and Latin American in scope, emphasized reflection, a mandatory concern for any contemporary art event, and one that this Biennial offers as Chile's sole instance for the diffusion and construction of discourses on these particular practices. Under the banner of *Deus ex media*, it had for the first time an outside curator: Paula Perissinotto, director of FILE Brazil, the International Electronic Language Festival held since 2000 in São Paulo.

The slogan derives from the Latin expression *Deus ex machina*, the God in the machine (or "the God that intervenes as if by magic"), a resource in classical Greek drama wherein a deity appeared suddenly to resolve a seemingly impossible situation, coming down by means of a hidden mechanism. Today, the phrase refers to a miraculous solution, something that comes through unexpectedly to dispel a difficulty. The curator is signaling the problematic relationship between technology and the society of the spectacle: the machine, or the medial, implies the valuing of innovation over verisimilitude and a certain taste for effect; the biennial assumes a critical stance towards technolatracy, situating the artwork in the frazzled border between technological exhibitionism and the experience of art. This being a category whose legitimization is achieved only at a high cost, there is also a latent question in recent editions about

the aesthetic status of the work of media art.

The majority of the works on exhibit were interactive in character, proposing situations that the viewer was required to activate or realize in space and time.

*Sin título*, a sound installation by Pamela Cuadros (Chile) filled with Duchamp an echoes, invited us to open any of the drawers with sliding covers set inside a suitcase and discover significant objects, noises, and people stories that were modulated by our manipulation of de lids, thanks to a hidden system of light sensors and a micro-controller for the sounds. Also from an objectual stance, but with a low-tech kind of aesthetics, *XY*, by Boris Cofré (Chile), emulates a large printer where a pencil held by a mechanical arm traces horizontal lines as it detected motion around it, and vertical lines when no activity registered, thus generating patterns on the basis of absences and presences.

*In Authority*, a video-installation by Ricardo de Oliveira Nascimento (Brazil), extended his reflection beyond technology and towards systems of power and domination. The work presented the scaled image of a policeman yelling and asking questions, his size expanding or diminishing as the viewer answered through a microphone or remained silent. *PWRT (The Psychoeconomy War Room Table)*, by Gustavo Romano (Argentina), in turn proposed a light table where we could see the movements of a series of mechanisms representing various countries, visualizing their relationships as a function of economic and social variables. Romano's work used data from the World Bank to metaphorize "war room" tables around which tactical movements in a civilian or military operation and discussed.

In these works, technology expanded the experience of geometry, motion, and space provided by kinetic and neo-concrete art, moving them towards a phantasmatic terrain: in *Nervous Structure*, by Annica Cuppetelli (US) and Cristóbal Mendoza (Venezuela), a video camera captured the movements of the viewer and translated it into forces affecting the large-scale projection of a grid of light lines formed by a physical structure—made of elastic ropes—and a virtual one, the latter generated by a computer and projected onto the former. Meanwhile, *Luces relacionales*, by Ernesto Klar (Venezuela), subjected us to a multi-sensorial immersion experience. The installation, presented in the dark, included a personalized software system that made it possible for viewers to interact with constantly shifting beams of light. A floating mist gave them corporeal volume, and they assumed abstract configurations in dialog with the space or the viewer.

Given the markedly playful character of some of these works and the fascination with technology they aroused in us, the question of how they were made could prevail over questions of perception, the relationship of the body with the artwork-machine, or the new reality opened up by new media and the subjectivization of the medial.

A subtle turn, however, rescued these other proposals, found in a certain evidence of hand-crafting, in the appearance of simplicity, in a new objectuality, or in the "poetic" element. In *La fenêtre*, by Giancarlo Foschino, a frame was the video recording of an elderly woman watching the street through her window, the static passage of time, with minimal motion. In *Water resistance*, by Claudia González, a sculpture-sound installation in a DIY spirit, made with circuits, sensors, and synthesized sounds, connected water and electricity, conversing in the same room with *La vida privada del agua*, by Daniel Reyes León, a triptych where the frames on the wall were mechanisms for the reproduction of ice that projected images related to fire. The ambient sound was the crackle of machines and water in a kind of laboratory. In *Little Memories*, by Andrea Wolf, small wall projections of found home movies, in 8mm and Super8, connected with minimal stages in an interplay of mediations about personal memory. In *Papeles sádicos* and *Leda y el cisne*, Juan Carlos Langlois' paper bodies told stories of eroticism and death, moving thanks to rudimentary mechanisms or coming apart and dissolving, fragile and fleeting, under the stop-motion effect of Nicolás Superby's videos. And, in *Lengua local 1: interpretación / traducción / apropiación*, Rainer Krause and Luis Barrie invited us into an intimate experience of sound and an ancestral memory through a series of interventions that required us to approach the speaker in order to hear, in a whisper, a paragraph in the Kawasar language (spoken in Chile's far

south); a translation was provided in a text, and we attempted to connect its abstract meaning with the remains of materials and objectual signs attached to the wall. Interestingly, all of these artists—with the exception of Krause, a German artist working in Chile—are Chilean and, more than the situation of the body in front of the machine, what they brought to the fore was the construction of local and personal imaginaries, reflection on technology and mediality beyond market forms and fashionable discourses.

\* All images illustrating this review are courtesy of BVAM.