

Body, Territory and Networked Performance

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON.

Abstract

This text connects two networked performance art pieces with an approach that conceives the internet as a territory and an uncertain technology. Using a theoretical framework grounded in body studies and debates about spatiality and territoriality, an analytical model was developed that conceives the internet as an assemblage, a continuum and a territory that generates complex experiences. We propose that the boundaries of digital territory are shaped based on the tensions between users' experiences and actions, the dynamics of platforms managed by companies or institutions, and the characteristics of networked technologies. Unlike the conception of the internet as an abstract intangible space, this article argues that what is experienced in the digital territory is not simply a metaphorical extension of reality but rather a process in which bodies and the infrastructures that characterise the internet interact. From an artistic and interdisciplinary perspective, we believe this approach can expand the conceptual and analytical tools in order to understand the processes through which bodies and subjectivities are shaped and transformed in the context of digital culture.

Keywords: body, corporeality, internet, space, territory, uncertainty, performance, digital culture

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Introduction

The widespread use of computers and the internet brought about a technological paradigm shift in the 1990s. The digital nature of information was implemented, which meant an expansion of communication media, opening up the possibility of publishing in one's own digital spaces and immediately. Since then, the internet has enabled the personal and personalised distribution of information in large quantities and at great speeds, produced and transferred by multiple users, in all directions. These conditions defined Web 2.0, a stage in the evolution of the internet, conceived for connected people to “create and share ideas and information” (Sibilia, 2008: 17).

As a consequence of this paradigm shift, the production of a collective imaginary about the internet, understood as a “new social space” (Echeverría, 2003: 15), began. With life on screens and cyberculture, new imaginaries around identity also began to take shape, and, with them, different ways of presenting or representing connected bodies individually or collectively. The internet was established as a mediated environment, a social place where communication “defines spaces for people with like minds or interests to congregate and converse” (Dixon, 2007: 463).

Various artistic practices — within the fields of electronic and digital arts, as well as performance art — have explored these technological and social transformations, and have found “a new panorama for representation and creation around the body and identity” (Baigorri, 2021: 17). In these practices, it is common to find a perception of the internet as an intangible, separate space, in contrast to the properties of the physical environment, whose nature is difficult to fully understand. While in this article we consider that, with these characteristics, the internet can open up a broad panorama for shaping other forms of identity and corporeality, we also consider that an abstraction of the digital space can create a significant distance from how technological, economic, and political structures shape the internet and the way we experience the world.

Based on a theoretical review that articulates concepts such as territory, uncertainty and bodily experience, in this article we construct a conceptual analysis guide applied to two networked performance artworks. In contrast to the definition of *space* — understood as “the extension that sustains all existing matter” (Real Academia Española, 2024) — or as an abstract and intangible space, this article proposes seeing the internet as a territory: a complex medium for exchanges and interactions, whose borders are determined not only by physical elements but also by social, political and cultural aspects. Furthermore, we will understand uncertainty based on what we can understand as real, when three aspects come into tension: bodily experience, technological institutions and the technologies that enable networked social interactions.

This article expands on the oral presentation delivered at the International Symposium of the journal *Estudis Escènics* 2024, organised by the Institut del Teatre in Barcelona, entitled “Live Art and Uncertain Technologies”. The presentation intertwined concepts from the anthropology of the body with notions of the internet as a space and territory from an artistic perspective through pieces with hybrid formats that combine languages of performance, the performing arts, and networked art. A fundamental part of it is my personal experience as an artist who in previous works explored the hybridisations of online/offline performance and uses the body as the primary medium of research.

Within this framework, this article includes an analysis of an artwork of my own making and another by a leading artist, both focusing on aspects related to networked identity, through experimentation in online and real-time digital environments. Guided by the aforementioned theoretical and analytical framework, we believe that these reflections can provide tools for analyses that seek to critically understand the ways in which bodies and subjectivities are shaped in the era of digital culture, from an artistic and interdisciplinary perspective.

Notes on the body and networked performativity

“Our identity is the result of our experiences in the world” (Muros, 2011); therefore, over time, the theme of the body has been examined and discussed through different theoretical and artistic approaches. While there is no single approach or theory to study it, “there are many responses to the embodied existence of subjects” (Muñiz, 2015: 9).

From the 1990s, what is now known as the “corporeal turn” in the social sciences took hold, which attempts to refer to the research “concerned with the bodily and situated experience of every living organism” (Csordas, 1999, cited in Castro, 2011: 2). This turn advocates an understanding of the body not only as a physical or biological object of study, but also as a tool and subject of knowledge in which cultural, social and political meanings are also embedded.

Within this framework, it is common to find reflections on the notion of the “construction” of the body, identity and the subject. In contrast,

philosopher Judith Butler suggests understanding the process of becoming bodies in terms of matter and performativity. Rather than conceiving the body as a cultural product or construct, Butler understands it as a continuous process of materialisation, of repetition of normative practices. In dialogue with this perspective, anthropologist Elsa Muñiz points out that this process is not neutral, since “sexual and gender relations, as well as those of race, ethnicity, class, and age, are involved; various discourses, practices, and institutions are also involved.” (Muñiz, 2010: 38).

Revisiting Foucauldian reflections on subjection and power, Butler introduces the concept of performativity to explain the process of subjectification: the constant repetition of discourses and social and cultural norms that assign specific meanings to bodies. In so doing, she makes clear that bodies and gender are marked by both power dynamics and discursive norms that also determine which bodies are valid or not in a given social context.

This view of the constitution of bodies and their meanings has been in dialogue with established debates within the framework of phenomenology, where the body is understood as a lived and embodied experience. The body is not only the effect of norms, but also a site of perception, agency, affect, “a knot of living significations” (Ponty, M., 1993, cited in Muñiz, 2010: 28). In this vein, the idea of the Dutch ethnographer and anthropologist Annemarie Mol (2003) is also of interest. From a perspective of medical anthropology, she suggests a debate on how realities are produced through multiple practices and perspectives, and through specific interactions between people, objects and concepts. She argues that medical practices, for example, not only describe the notion of pathology, but are also at its root.

In both Mol’s and Butler’s work, we can critically understand that bodily realities are neither static nor universal, but rather emerge from specific contexts through material, discursive, and power relations. We connect these reflections with the thinking of Donna Haraway, who, from a post-humanist perspective, advocates a diverse knowledge that can break with the traditional objectivity of science. In line with the author’s questioning of the hegemonic validation of knowledge, we argue that all knowledge comes from a particular body, in a specific historical, cultural and social context. Thus, we ask: how are bodies materialised in their connections and interactions with what we call “the internet”?

To extend these lines of thought to the context of digital culture and networked artistic practices, three significant aspects of the contributions of the corporeal turn and the extensive genealogy of debates about the body were considered, with the aim of offering a specific approach to this article.

First, the processes of subjectification are directly related to the active and performative nature of bodily praxis. Therefore, the set of practices, imaginaries, behaviours, perspectives, and shared attitudes that emerge in the digital space of the internet are part of the experiences of bodies and, thus, of the production of multiple realities and processes of materialisation of subjectivities.

Second, “the need to include the knowledge produced by the researcher’s own bodily experiences in the research process” (Castro, 2011: 4).

Hence, one of the most important guides for the research and analysis process of this article is based on personal experiences as a networked performance artist.

Third, there is a need to establish multidirectional connections between different fields of knowledge to develop a theory of the body with interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary analytical methodologies and perspectives. This article is situated within an artistic field that hybridises formats and methodologies from electronic art, digital arts, and performance. However, it also expresses a strong interest in translating the methodologies and concepts of body studies and artistic research processes, thus focusing on bodily experience as a framework for interdisciplinary thought.

Considering the above, it is crucial to recognise that performativity is not limited to the physical body in the physical space, but rather expands and is reshaped in what happens online. The multiple communication platforms, social media and interfaces then become spaces where bodies act, are seen, and take on meaning. In line with Butler, we can understand that subjectivities are constituted through repetitions in these environments, marked by the specific characteristics of what shapes the internet, including specific norms, technologies, and power relations. In this respect, what is online affects, provides symbols and ways of being: a territory where corporealities transit, are made visible, are regulated, overflow, and are fragmented in the characteristic ubiquity of the internet.

From cyberspace to territory

The imaginary on the internet has led to various debates, and one of the concepts that quickly emerged was that of “space”, a notion intended to describe what can happen online. One of the first descriptions in spatial terms comes, consequently, from the field of cybernetics, which, since the 1950s, has generally focused on feedback processes closely linked to the control theory and the systems theory. Recovering the conceptual basis of this field, the term cyberspace was first used by science fiction writer William Gibson in his novels *Burning Chrome* (1981) and *Neuromancer* (1984). In the latter, he referred in a shifting and ambiguous way to an environment with characteristics distinct from those of “real” space. The work describes a dystopian scenario, “visions of corporate hegemony and urban decay, of neural implants, of a life of paranoia and pain” (Benedikt, 1992: 1). At the same time, it looks at “the socioeconomic implications of this space and its postindustrial context” (Tomas, 1992: 32). To this day, the term is still used, and popularly refers to the internet as a place of communication and social interaction.

Moreover, through an approach guided by live art that relates to the internet, interdisciplinary artist Steve Dixon rejects it as a physical space. He argues that, when we communicate, the sensation of being elsewhere or at a distance is mental and metaphorical, since everything happens on the screen in front of us, wherever we happen to be at the time. He also recognises that understanding what happens online in spatial terms can be useful for referring to certain social situations. For him, what distinguishes the internet

from other media is its ability to enable collective encounters and gatherings, and therefore it allows for the creation of communities of various kinds.

While Dixon finds the metaphor of space useful in naming what enables social gathering, we would add that it also allows for a symbolic place to be assigned to the experience, whether individual or collective, of the body when connected. Although these experiences do not occur in a single physical location, we know that they are shaped through diverse infrastructures, such as screens, applications, websites, text boxes, interfaces, and complex data exchange protocols. These tools allow for synchronous communication, and although dispersed, they create a shared sense of presence and place.

From a bodily perspective, and through the thinking of Butler and Mol, we can argue that bodies and digital spaces mutually shape each other in a continuous process of interaction. We therefore consider that what we experience in the digital space is not simply a metaphorical extension of reality, but a process in which bodies and the infrastructures that characterise the internet interact. In this vein, David Tomas's reflections on cyberspace and in relation to historian Michel Serres suggest that an individual is constituted by the intersection of different spaces and, therefore, their existence cannot be considered solely in a homogeneous and unified space. At the same time, he offers an understanding of cyberspace as a "post-industrial work environment based on a new wired communications interface that provides direct and complete sensory access to a parallel world of potential work spaces" (Tomas, 1992: 35).

This approach leads us to consider that the digital space is not an abstract environment but a place made up of diverse spaces that are inhabited, practised, and experienced. In so doing, not only are bodies constituted but so is spatiality itself.

Authors such as Michael Benedikt and Javier Echeverría have also explored the spatial metaphor of the internet. Benedikt describes it as somewhat elusive and futuristic, yet to be fully shaped, but he also considers it a parallel universe that fragments and modifies the way we inhabit the world. A universe created and sustained by computers and communication networks. He wonders what types of operations define space, and what types of phenomena characterise it. For his part, Echeverría introduces the concept of the "third environment", which he differentiates from nature and the city, situating it within an electronic space. He argues that it has a very different spatio-temporal structure than the other two environments, being distal, reticular, representational, digital, and so on. He maintains that social interactions mediated by technologies modify bodily experience, transforming the subject-subject encounter into a subject-thing encounter. Both authors agree in conceiving the internet as a social sphere and distinguishing it from physical reality.

To link these approaches to the concept of territory, it is important to establish a distinction between *space* and *territory*, a distinction that, as geographer Horacio Capel notes, has been central to quantitative geography since the 1960s. According to this perspective, space is associated with a more abstract notion, a container in which physical or human objects are

situated, but which can also be affected by their arrangement. Territory, in contrast, takes on more social meanings. In physical and natural sciences, it is defined as the physical environment where living organisms live and interact. In geography, it is associated with the ecosystem, and in sociology, it is related to human ecology. For political geography and political science, the term is linked to power relations that determine what happens within and outside of it, and thus processes of inclusion and exclusion. He also mentions that, since globalisation, interest in the relationship between the local and the global has also affected the concept and has opened debates on the idea of networked places.

We see that in all these disciplines and definitions, territory is understood as a complex medium for exchanges and interactions, whose borders determine not only physical elements but also social, political and cultural aspects. We therefore propose constructing a prism that allows us to see the internet as a habitable and practicable territory. In this way, we can question its limits, forms of habitability, and the discourses involved. Beyond an abstract vision, we propose the internet as an assemblage, as a continuum, and as a territory that generates tangible experiences.

We take into account the reflections of Manuel Lechón and Elia Ramos, who in their article “¿Es Internet un territorio? Una aproximación a partir de la investigación del hacktivismo en México” (2020) ask whether the internet can be considered a territory in terms of habitability and, therefore, of individual and collective experiences. In line with this perspective, we can approach what happens online as negotiations that exist between bodies, digital technologies, collective interests, and the technological interests of those who participate in this territory.

In this article, we will use interdisciplinary research that allows us to apply these ideas to the field of networked artistic performance and how these practices raise questions about the interactions of bodies that inhabit the internet.

Three pointers to think about uncertainty

Without delving too deeply into the complexity of defining uncertainty, we will approach this concept from the interdisciplinary perspective of economist David Dequech. In his article “Uncertainty: individuals, institutions, and technology” (2004), he argues that in the debates surrounding uncertainty in economic literature there is a close link between ontology and epistemology. For him, understanding an ontology of the social world involves addressing uncertainty from three aspects: 1) individuals and their abilities to think and understand the world; 2) the institutions involved in knowledge production; and 3) technology, which has historically brought about significant social transformations.

If we connect these three elements with the aforementioned perspective of body studies and consider the internet as a territory that shapes our social interactions, we can reframe uncertainty from a digital perspective. Thus, we could consider three more specific dimensions: 1) the bodily experience

in digital contexts; 2) the companies and organisations involved in designing internet usage policies and ways of inhabiting the internet; and 3) the various technologies, infrastructures and interfaces that enable an online presence.

These three dimensions comprise the analytical framework we will use to examine performance artworks. We believe they can serve as analytical pointers for addressing the tensions between the body, technology and institutions, and thereby opening up spaces for reflection on identity, technology, and embodiment in digital contexts.

Possibilities in the assemblage: territory, technology and uncertainty

Building on the analytical guidelines above, we propose looking at a series of aspects that allow us to think about the internet as a territory and a technology marked by uncertainty.

- In the uncertainty of space and the body in the digital territory of the internet, social behaviour dynamics are formed that, by becoming references and being repeated, end up performing specific bodily practices of the Net.
- The bodily experience regarding uncertainty, in the knowledge or ignorance of what constitutes the internet, determines a specific production of individual and collective reality.
- Perceptions of the materialities and location of what makes up the digital space of the internet are diverse and are related to abstract and metaphorical aspects. Which materiality shapes the internet? Where is the internet?
- Understanding the internet as a territory involves extending the notion of spatiality to social interactions that also mark out limits and borders. These, in turn, in relation to the materialities of the internet, can be seen as diffuse and abstract. We suggest understanding that these are not shaped solely by physical aspects (technologies, infrastructures, and interfaces) but by the behaviours of their users and the policies that regulate their use. Where do the digital spaces of the internet begin and end? What determines the limits?
- The notion of reality, in social interactions that occur on online digital platforms, can be conceived as distinct or isolated from what happens in the physical environment.
- The construction of personal and collective identity relies on the separation of the physical materiality of the body from its online presence. The “virtual self” opens up possibilities for creating identities separate from those experienced in physical, everyday social interactions.
- The internet can be understood as an assemblage of technologies that are constantly evolving with technical features that are not always accessible and therefore not fully known by its users.
- In the digital realm of the internet, there is a constant negotiation of privacy, trust, influence, knowledge and entertainment based on platform usage policies, driven by economic interests.

- Content moderation on popular social media regulates the perception of what is real and therefore constructs a type of reality.
- Every bodily experience that occurs in the digital realm of the internet is likely to become a source of data, a resource of interest to the large companies that dominate the digital economy. Biometric data, social behaviour patterns, time management methods, geographic location, and both intimate and public aspects are all part of the Big Data business.

We will use these reflections as references to analyse and describe two performance pieces that take place on the internet and explore these aspects.

Artistic practices in the digital territory of the internet

Since the beginning of the so-called Web 2.0, the internet has gradually transformed into a medium designed for display and consumption. In this context, it is pertinent to investigate how, through the languages and experiments of artistic practices closely related to digital technologies, questions arise about our permanent connection, about the public and the private, the real and the virtual. Given the current panorama, we align ourselves with what other digital art researchers point out, as we see the need to “assess the challenge of developing these online identity practices that implement new creative processes in controlled environments as ever-changing as the internet” (Díaz, 2024: 66).

The following pieces offer insights that emerge from experimentation with the body and its techno-mediated interaction on online platforms. We will see how bodily experience, the institutions that mediate our communications, and the very characteristics of technologies together become a social ontology (in Dequech’s terms), in which the internet appears as an uncertain territory and an uncertain technology, as well as an agent constitutive of bodies, subjectivities and the social.

Alphanumeric bodies: who is Annie?

Dutch artist Annie Abrahams is considered a pioneer in exploring performance on the internet and the experimentation of online collective writing. The artist describes her own work as “an aesthetics of trust and attention” (Abrahams, n.d.) and where it is possible to find issues related to the meaning of *being human* and behaviour in the context of the internet. Today, she uses the term “networked performance” to refer to pieces in which her presence is mediated by an online communication platform and requires a relationship and interaction with the audience on the other side of the screen. Interactions can occur through typing in a chat system, where Abrahams can modify behaviour accordingly. Other times, performances take place as group video call sessions in which the entire group participates by activating their cameras and microphones, and where guidelines for group interaction are established.

In *I only have my name*, one of the first pieces in which the artist explored these possibilities, interaction occurred solely through a text box using the IRC (Internet Relay Chat) system, on a server called Newnet.telia.NO and on a channel called #pointproject. Both Abrahams and the participants were faced with a graphic interface without the ability to share video captured by a webcam or microphone connected to the computer. Interaction occurred only through the possibilities offered by a text box. Keep in mind that in 1999, emojis had not yet been incorporated into instant communication interfaces, much less the popular customised stickers or other graphic elements that appear today in various social communication interfaces and allow us to express those gestures that are part of bodily expression. In other words, in the piece, to make oneself present, one would have to resort solely to words or, at least, to the possibilities of creatively combining alphanumeric characters on a computer keyboard.

In the performance, the artist, working with three other people, proposed participating with variations of the word *annie* as a nickname in the chat; thus, there would be *anniea*, *annieb*, *anniec*, and *annied*. Other participants could freely choose their nickname and pose questions to the four Annies for 15 minutes, aiming to decipher which one was the real Annie Abrahams. Participants would then vote on IRC and in the gallery where the piece was also being carried out, and finally, the chosen Annie would reveal her true identity. The complete log (a term used in computing to refer to the sequential record or history in a database) is accessible on the project website.

The artist proposed to collectively confront an idea that was very present in the early days of widespread internet use: the possibility of extending, modifying, transforming, or perhaps distorting some elements that provide personal identity. Eliminating the face, gestures, and voice from an online interaction – both in the case of the artist's piece and in many social spaces in the early days of the internet – thereby allowed for the regulation of information about the bodies of those participating and opened up the possibility of playing with the presence and imaginary of the other, while also maintaining a constant tension with what was perceived as real. Abrahams provided an understanding of the online virtual space in which the uncertainty of reality offered possibilities for creating and materialising another online self, in this case through the appropriation of another person's name and the elimination of the visible body as an element of interaction.

Applying the Dequech-based uncertainty model, we observe that the main tension lies between: 1) the mediated bodily experience reduced to text, and 2) the technology, which in this case can be understood as a whole: language itself, the IRC interface, and the internet. In this case, the graphic interface delimits and mediates the usability, modes of expression, and presence of each participant. The body's perceptual modalities (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) are limited to what technology and one's own creativity can provide. In this relationship, the strings of alphanumeric characters seen in the log become meaningful, as well as useful for deciphering, without any certainty, aspects of the subjectivity behind each name and, at the same time, determining one's own.

kuva: why are you in the project?
 anniec: because i made it
 annieb: because i am it
 annied: it's part of my work on chaos
 jaceeee: multiple presence is chaos?
 LuciferFr: you are all of them
 anniea: the identity is what we can make with our presence on the network
 jaceeee: it sounds godlike
 anniea: we have to build it
 jaceeee: or satanic
 anniee: just to say we are part of all
 LuciferFr: I have people that are fast enough to be all the annie's
 anniee: and all part of me
 jaceeee: then you are part of me
 anniea: and to do this...we have to experiment the fragmentation
 anniee: but you have to recognize me
 jaceeee: I am you
 annieb: or me
 anniee: could you be me?
 jaceeee: well, that I am not sure of
 annieb: who am i ?

Screenshot of the log of the online performance: <<https://bram.org/ident/log.htm>>.

While in this case the artist's interest was not directed at questioning the role of a specific institution, we could say that its role was made present through the implicit and explicit norms of the digital space and the performance. Thus, the second analytical clue about uncertainty (2) appears here through the structure of the IRC channel, the limited duration of the interaction, the rules of the game to discover the real Annie, and the voting dynamics both online and in the physical gallery. In the same way that a digital communication service establishes its privacy and data use policies, in the performance the norms delimited actions, but also enabled the experience and collective exploration of identity, trust, and presence on the internet.

In the artist's full log of one of her experiences, we observe that both the interactions and the aforementioned norms constituted a form of digital territoriality by combining language, the bodily experience of participating, and the diffuse subjectivity expressed through text.

In her 2004 book *Internet Art*, Rachel Greene, researcher and director of the new media art platform Rhizome.org, comments that the results of the experiment suggest that normal aspects of subjectivity, such as personality and opinions, are neutralised in many online spaces. We can argue that, beyond neutralising subjectivity, we find that uncertainty in the digital realm of the internet can function as a tool to expand or explore other forms of identity, embodiment, and experience.

Mediated and random intimacy

However, if in addition to considering who is on the other side of mediated communication, we also consider who or what is in the middle of the conversation, aspects of control or power over the online digital space may emerge. As a technology, the internet has taken shape over time, but in the words of artist and researcher Mary Flanagan, "it has taken a given form

because of the desires of its creators, who have given shape to information and have created a body with it” (Flanagan, 2010: 44). The internet is not a single space: it is made up of a series of spaces, each delimited by what can and cannot happen, by specific infrastructures and interfaces, and, therefore, by ways of arranging or empowering individual and collective behaviours. Here we recover the notion of territory, which, from the perspective of law and political science, refers to the space dominated by a power structure or a social group (as mentioned above). From this, we ask ourselves: what kind of power is inscribed in the digital spaces that allow us to share fragments of our intimacy? What role do the institutions or companies in charge of operating the internet’s social communication infrastructures play in these subjectivities?

The performance *Órbita #0*,¹ which I made with artist Núria Nia in 2021, proposed exploring these issues using the website *Chatroulette*. The unique feature of this site, created in 2009 at the initiative of a 17-year-old Russian boy, is that it allows you to interact, via webcam, with another person chosen at random, without having any control over the choice. In addition, our joint intention was also to decipher the peculiarities of sharing intimate slices of life from personal spaces connected to public spaces on the internet, and to use the body as part of our research methodologies. By exposing ourselves publicly both online and in an audience, we wanted to explore, taken to the limits, the characteristics of living in the online/offline continuum of hyper-connected life, as well as the regulations that might exist around it. More questions arose: what kinds of behaviours are created in these encounters? What legal conditions or regulations exist in these encounters? Which bodies participate? What patterns of bodily behaviour occur in these spaces? Could we create different kinds of conversations than the usual ones?

In the piece *Órbita #0* Núria and I positioned ourselves in front of a computer and prepared to connect to the website for about 20 minutes. Our main objective, among others, was to interact with the person who appeared by reading excerpts from cyberfeminist manifestos, as well as other texts by authors² who question the notion of body and digitality. At each meeting, we would have to say “you are in a public performance” to inform the person on the other side that they were participating, along with each of us, in an artistic performance. Some people decided to stay, observe, or attempt to engage in dialogue, while others preferred to continue their random search. What was most evident was that those on the other side, mostly men, anxiously awaited a sexual response from us, often with a silent or verbally violent attitude. This latter point might lead us to believe that the website’s design

1. The performance is part of a larger artistic research project called “Cos Satel·lital”, undertaken during a residency at the Hangar arts centre in Barcelona in 2021, with the 6h Banco Sabadell-Hangar Art Research together with the Catalan artist Núria Nia. The details of *Órbita #0*, and the other events that make up the project can be consulted on the web repository <<https://orbita.hangar.org/>>.

2. The authors include: Remedios Zafra, Teresa López-Pellisa, Rosa Menkman, VNS Matrix, Olga Goriunova, Beatriz Muros, Enric Puig Punyet, Andrea Soto-Calderón, Rosi Braidotti, Aimar Pérez Galí, Jaime Conde-Salazar, Leonardo Xavier Brito Alvarado, Allucquère Rosanne Stone, William Fredy Aguilar Rodríguez, Silvia Tubert, Montserrat Boix, Emilio J. Gallardo-Saborido, Carmen Serrano Murillo, Paula Sibilia, Citlali Hernández, and Núria Nia.



Órbita #0, May 2021. Made by the author.

and dynamics largely reflect the subjectivity of its creator in 2009, who foregrounded intimacy and an interest in sexuality.

On a personal level, and following the various experiences carried out in *Chatroulette* as part of the shaping of the piece and the artistic research, in this article we can conclude that consent in this space is a complex and ambiguous aspect, as it depends as much on a simple click as on what each user decides to show of their body at the beginning of each interaction.

On the other hand, we can relate this aspect to the characteristics of the concept of territory in terms of power negotiation, of what can happen inside or outside, which in this case determine both the possibilities of the internet and the interface itself (browser, webcam, window) as well as the interaction dynamics carried out by users. In the early years of the internet, the situation of encountering male users pointing the camera at their genitals was quite common, which we can undoubtedly consider as “a statement that exercises power without consent through broadband infrastructures” (Kreps, 2010: 214).

Today, following the renewed boom in usage of the website due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the site has implemented some terms of use to avoid unwanted situations. To access, you must log in with an Apple, Gmail or Facebook account, and you must have your camera and microphone enabled. Facial recognition and other artificial intelligence models have also been implemented to moderate website activity and filter explicit content. Those involved in this regulation are companies dedicated to content moderation using artificial intelligence, such as Hive Moderation, as well as Amazon with its image and video analysis service called Amazon Rekognition. What we were able to experience through the development of the performance was that if, during interaction, the page fails to recognise faces or detects that there is too much skin in the screen pixels, for example, the communication is interrupted. However, we were also able to observe how users had found ways to trick the algorithm.

Through the performance *Orbita #0* it is possible to understand that anonymity, randomness, digitality and the ephemeral nature of online encounters are constitutive elements of the practices carried out with the body and, in turn, of the digital territory in which they occur. Uncertainty participates on different levels, starting with diffuse consent and ending with the lack of knowledge about what happens to images that pass through content moderation systems in terms of storage and personal identification. In this context, we propose to apply our expanded uncertainty model based on Dequech, considering: 1) how bodily experience and participating subjectivities shape both the interaction and the momentary, though recurrent, production of bodily practices specific to this territory; 2) the role of companies in content moderation, usage policies, and data privacy; and 3) the usability options determined by the system design and the website's graphic interface. These three elements shape a framework of uncertainty in this type of digital territory where, paradoxically, behavioural patterns emerge that demonstrate a need to navigate within the blurred boundaries of the public and the intimate, and where exhibitionism and voyeurism are recurrent.

Conclusions

It is common to refer to the internet as an intangible and distant space, whose materiality and form are perceived as abstract and difficult to describe. However, this notion can be challenged when analysing some artistic practices that show that, although the digital space of the internet can be perceived as uncertain due to its complexity, they also demonstrate that it undoubtedly produces individual and collective physical bodily experiences that shape specific ways of understanding and inhabiting the world.

Both *I only have my name* and *Órbita #0* lead us to reflect on the performative nature of the relationship between connected bodies and the diverse territories that make up the internet. In the same vein as Lechón and Ramos, we can stress that what happens on the internet is real and affects us: "people work and earn money, meet others people, buy products, share information, commit crimes, stream live, or carry out bureaucratic procedures" (Lechón and Ramos, 2020: 274). Bodies are not only connected, but also displayed, interacted, negotiated, and materialised in a space mediated by corporations and technologies. In the case of the networked performances analysed, we can say that reality is intrinsically linked to bodily experience, which not only makes up that reality but also shapes the territories in which it develops.

We believe that, in both performances, people participating with their own bodies is part of the research and creation methodology, in which the body is used as a tool to address, experiment with, and analyse these themes.

By incorporating the concept of territory into this article, we propose an understanding of the internet not only as a space for encounter or a container, but as a continuum of complex relationships that participate in the construction and negotiation of forms of interaction and meaning, producing experiences delimited by technological, social and cultural structures. From

this perspective, the internet is a place that enables interactions between bodies, discourses, technologies and institutions. In so doing, we have highlighted the performative nature of the bodily relationship with the internet, as we believe that the actions performed with the body also constitute territory and, at the same time, define the experience of the body in relation to that territory.

Finally, with this article, we have identified the need to expand the study of the body in terms of subjectivity, exploring how bodily practices are shaped or delimited by the specific characteristics of the internet, understood as both a technology and an uncertain territory. In this respect, we believe there is fertile ground for developing an interdisciplinary framework that can intertwine concepts from body studies, such as body anthropology and performance studies, with digital and electronic art theory. We believe this approach can create an analytical model that allows us to identify the specific forms of subjectification and materialisation of bodies that emerge in artistic practices taking place in this complex technological, social, and cultural territory.



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