

## Lozano-Hemmer and Social Simulation

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In the late 1960s spirit of counter-culture and revolution, at a time of "experiments in art and technology," artists took up the new-to-the consumer-market portable video camera with its crude editing system for their "alternative" practices. They made difficult to collect art best suited to seat-of-the-pants-style, artist-run, rough and ready venues that were sprouting up in urban centers everywhere. Some artists produced linear videotapes that paralleled "independent" filmmaking. Others developed room-scale installations, often with a "live" video camera, designed specifically for the particular exhibition space (preferably not a white cube.) Back then "performance art" was not even a term yet. In New York Joan Jonas called her work "pieces" or concerts, in which she performed with a video camera and a "real time" image of herself on a monitor. Critics called Bruce Nauman and Vito Acconci "body artists." Yvonne Rainer created dance as the most minimal of actions, before she turned to film. Richard Foreman extended time in his theater productions and worked with the sparseness of Beckett.

Coming on the heels of 1968 student unrest and the rise of the woman's movement, installation started out with an "experimental" edge. Artists intentionally provoked and challenged the status quo with the new form. Many intentionally turned their backs on television, and considered the broadcast networks the enemy. The notion of selling or of collectability did not enter anyone's mind then. Artists lived from moment to moment with their projects, which were made for "now." If they presented an installation a second time, they drastically modified – improving upon or adapting to a new situation. Computers were room-sized, and video equipment was not always easy to come by. Artists went on the road to produce and install new video-sound pieces at international festivals, or by doing residencies at art schools. Museums wrestled with how to adapt to the ever evolving, mutable installation form to their galleries.

As a new form with a clean slate, female and male artists were on equal footing. They approached installation from a wide range of disciplines, in particular painting and sculpture. Many turned at least for a while to media and worked either with small format video and sound, Super-8 film, slides, or camera obscura to illuminate and activate a space.

Over the years technology has advanced considerably. Equipment has become less expensive, more versatile and ubiquitous. Projectors are now a common display format, with brighter, larger and sharper images for home and industrial use. "High resolution" digital flat screens are replacing boxy analog monitors. Sound as an essential component is more malleable and spatial, and interactivity is an option. Institutions and collectors are more comfortable and better equipped to handle a work's technical aspects and preservation requisites. Museums integrate work into their contemporary galleries and construct particular spaces, as projects require. Biennials as a matter of course devote a large portion of their exhibition spaces to installation.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is a “fusion” media artist, who has had an interdisciplinary approach to art since childhood. He grew up in Mexico City in a dynamic household that revolved around salsa musicians, poets, and visual artists. His parents’ nightclub was called “Los Infernos” (plural for “Hell.”) At eleven he moved with his mother to Spain, where filmmaker Luis Buñuel became a big influence. At seventeen he headed off to university in British Columbia, Canada, as far away from family as he could go. He embarked on a B.S. in chemistry. His first experience with computers was at the molecular recognition laboratory where he did his thesis. He became more involved with technology doing performance art with an inter-disciplinary group of students (a composer, a writer, a choreographer, an engineer) and made “technological theatres,” where computers would have sophisticated crashes and failures. Around the same time a group of students had a radio show at CKUT FM (1988-1991) called the “Postmodern Commotion” (shortened to PoMo CoMo.) They did “radio art,” sound experiments and interviews with such artists and theorists as Dick Higgins, Jean François Lyotard, and Frederic Jameson, who were passing through Vancouver. For several years PoMo CoMo also went on the road to do performances, concluding at the renowned media art festival Ars Electronica in 1992, in Linz, Austria.

Based in Montreal since the 1990s, Lozano-Hemmer emerged as an artist at a time when the dot.com era infused media art with a heady energy. What distinguishes him and his global peers – hackers, programmers, and tinkerer-revisionists – is a sense of humor and an almost ambivalence to art. Their work can be disarming, even absurd in its subtle use of the latest hardware and software.

A theme recognizable to many of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s projects is the socializing of humans and their technological creations. Even at an extremely large outdoor scale, the interaction has an intimacy. The interweaving of humans and machines was amusingly portrayed in a famous scene of *Star Wars* in 1977. Luke Skywalker and Alec Guinness search for a space jockey in a bar frequented by humans and androids. This kind of total acceptance of proto-humans occurs in Venice at the 2007 Mexican Pavilion. In a relaxed setting, visitors will be able to engage with a chorus of in-motion office chairs. The difference between humans and the android chairs is as blurred as that between the strange denizens in the bar of *Star Wars*.

As a media artist, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer sees his challenge in breaking stereotypes and in developing new creative languages. In the twentieth century, a sense of intimacy was foreign to much technology-based art. The Futurists, for example, placed technology on a pedestal, and in effect distanced it from the human sphere. In Lozano-Hemmer’s work, technology appears more as a participant, and thus his work signals a change. As part of the radical rewiring of society now underway, this vision merits serious attention.