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## **TRANSART. Transactions, Transferences and Transitions in Participatory Art**

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# TRANSART. Transactions, Transferences and Transitions in Participatory Art

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## Abstract

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This article centres on the exchange of necessities, projections, ways of behaving and of establishing relations, of people involved in participatory art projects and collective artistic practices. For that, we explore how these exchanges happen, thinking about the transactions (from the point of view of the Transactional Analysis), the transferences and counter transferences (from Freudian Psychoanalysis), the concept of “habitus” (of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology) and the transitional phenomena (from Donald W. Winnicott’s theory). We cross these concepts with the artistic fact and specifically with ways of doing art usually appointed under labels such as Participatory Art, Collaborative Art, Relational Art, Dialogical Art, Community Art, Social Engaged Art, Artivism, New Genre Public Art and Useful Art. We pay attention to artistic practices that specifically put the focus of interest on exploring different possibilities of sociability that let people and collectives make transitions (ideological, practical, emotional, material, relational ones...) from one situation or position to another. We call “Transart” to this kind of artistic practice that works under the idea that art is a human creation that experiment with ways of exchange, that facilitate transits and that can contribute to processes of transformation.

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**Keywords:** participatory art, transactional analysis, transference, habitus, transitional phenomena



# TRANSARTE. Transacciones, Transferencias y Transiciones en el Arte Participativo

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## Resumen

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Este artículo se centra en el intercambio de necesidades, proyecciones, maneras de actuar y de establecer relaciones, de las personas envueltas en proyectos artísticos participativos y prácticas artísticas colectivas. Para ello exploramos los modos en los que estos intercambios suceden, reflexionando sobre las transacciones (desde el punto de vista del Análisis Transaccional de Eric Berne), las transferencias y contratransferencias (desde el Psicoanálisis freudiano), el concepto de “habitus” (de la Sociología de Pierre Bourdieu) y los fenómenos transicionales (desde la teoría de Donald W. Winnicott). Cruzamos estos discursos provenientes de la psicología y la sociología con el hecho artístico, específicamente con prácticas artísticas que suelen designarse bajo etiquetas tales como: Arte participativo, Arte colaborativo, Arte relacional, Arte dialógico, Arte comunitario, Arte socialmente comprometido, Artivismo Arte público de nuevo género, o Arte Útil. Prestamos atención a prácticas artísticas que de manera específica ponen el foco de interés en explorar las distintas posibilidades de sociabilidad que permiten a las personas y los colectivos hacer traslaciones (ideológicas, prácticas, emocionales, materiales, relacionales...) de una situación o posición a otra. Llamamos Transarte, a esta clase de proyectos que trabajan bajo la idea de que el arte es una creación humana que experimenta con modos de intercambio, que facilita tránsitos y que puede contribuir a procesos de transformación.

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**Palabras clave:** arte participativo, análisis transaccional, transferencia, habitus, fenómenos transicionales



**I** open my mouth and pronounce words whose meaning I do not understand, but which the person in front of me receives with pleasure. Surprisingly, the person ahead replies something that I manage to understand but that equally generates strangeness in her.

*Happy enough with the situation, we continue interacting with each other, puzzling and pleasuring each other.*

*At some point, one of us perceives that this game is not only our game but that it is orchestrated by someone else or something else, somewhere else.*

*The words in our mouths become jammed and some letters start coming out of our jaws: “T” for tooth, “R” for roar, “A” for alphabet, “N” for naked, “S” for snake... They slither like a sibilant rope among us, going through our skins, crossing our holes, soaking through the ground, vanishing in the air.*

*—Suddenly, we pass off screen  
and the quality of the exchange swaps as well—*

*I know he has something for me. That makes me happy. That makes me curious. That is going to be something special for me.*

*I know he has something for me. Firstly, I wonder if I should accept it. Secondly, I doubt if I want or need it. Finally, I accept it, just to be polite.*

*I know he has something for me. It is an excuse to keep us in touch. It is going to strengthen our bonds. It will bind me to him.*

*I know he has something for me. I have something for him, too. I have tried to make it the best I could offer. I have expected him to do the same for me.*

*I know I have something for him. I don't know if he will like it. I don't know if it will be enough. I don't know if I am enough.*

*I know I have something to give. I know it has its own agency. I know it needs to be exchanged. I know it will return to me somehow.*

### The Keywords Begin with “Trans”

Transaction, transference, transition... transformation. “From one side to another”, “crossing”, “across”, “through”, “over”. “Trans”: that which flows among us, which passes limits, which goes further, which affects. Etymologically we find the following meanings:

Transaction: *trans-* (from one side to other), *actus* (to accomplish) and *-tion* (action and effect). Act of driving through, bringing to an end, settling.

Transference: *trans-* (from one side to other), *ferre* (to carry, to make). Act of carrying from one side to other.

Transition: *trans-* (from one side to other), *itus* (*transitus*, past participle of *transiere* = “to go”) *-tion* (action and effect). Act of passing through a place without staying.

Transformation: *trans-* (from one side to other), *-form* (*shape*), *-tion* (action and effect). Act of changing of shape.

There are infinite ways of understanding art, and they are no less infinite if we refer to contemporary art: art understood as an autonomous activity, art as a creation in intimate relationship with the context in which it is created, art as an educational instrument for indoctrination, art as a tool of representation of power, art as inner self-expression... One more among these diverse approaches is to understand art as a human creation for experimental exchanges. We will call this approach to art “Transart”. This does not mean that any artwork *per se* would not potentially imply an exchange with a hypothetical receptor (in fact it does) but rather that there are artworks that specifically focus on that exchange.

This way, we refer to the “trans” characteristic of art as the possibility that it gives us to exchange knowledge, ideas, desires, lacks, necessities, materials, love, regards, values... with other beings or environments. This exchange provokes transformations to the system in which it is performed and in the concrete agents of it: in the artist, the public, other artistic agents and the context.

In a more abstract and suggestive way, “Transart” is something that flows among us (people, objects, environments). It is a creation in which what is really at stake might be hidden, even to the people involved in its creation.

### Relational Art as a Set of Transactions

On a normal day, we are used to making many kinds of exchanges: we swap greetings with a neighbor, trade money for a piece of bread with the baker,

share information in a meeting, exchange gestures with the bus driver for her to wait for you to catch the bus at the last moment, exchange body movements while dancing in a party, swap fluids while kissing... If we look at them focusing on the actions and the subjects, we will speak of interactions, but if we focus on the object of these interactions (no matter whether they are more or less tangible) we will refer to transactions. Transactions are basic in our everyday life and a factor of social interweaving. We have needs (of many kinds) and we try to satisfy them through our social interactions.

Transaction is a reciprocal operation between two or more parts. It is a double-way or a multiple-way interaction. The idea of transaction relates to verbs such as use, exchange, barter, swap, switch, trade, share or contract. However, the concept of transference is a one-way action and we connect it to actions such as give, provide or pass. Putting the emphasis on transactions as exchanges of there and back, in this part, we will analyze participatory art projects in relation to the concept of social transaction. To do so, we will first mention some discourses from sociology and anthropology in relation to the “gift exchange” theories, and secondly, we will focus on Transactional Analysis from social psychology. Taking these theories into account, we will cross their concepts with examples of participatory and collaborative art projects.

We will use the term “relational art practices” to refer to art projects in which the relations among people and the use of participatory and collaborative processes are the nuclear aspects of the creation. We won’t use the term “relational art” just for the artworks referred to by Nicolás Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics* (2006). This publication meant the beginning of looking at participatory manifestations with special interest, though the artworks analyzed by the author share characteristics that do not reflect the variety of present-day manifestations. They were also created and read in a concrete way due to the moment in the art history when they came out. Nevertheless, one of the most relevant aspects that Nicolás Bourriaud pointed out in his book was the emergence of a kind of art that proposed alternative “models of socialization”. We will examine them concretely as transactions.

“Transaction” is a word that acquires different meanings depending on the field in which it is used: transaction in laws, in finances, in computer science, in anthropology, in social psychology, in art...

The sociologist Marcel Mauss’ book *The Gift* (2002) is considered the foundation of social theories of reciprocity and exchange. He reflected on the social function of gifts in indigenous cultures. Many authors from different

fields (anthropology, philosophy, art and politics) have been influenced by it. In turn, Lewis Hyde has related the concept of “gift” with the world of art and creativity in his book *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (2007), latterly published as *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* in which he considers artwork as the creation of a gift and reflects on the ways in which its qualities as ‘gift’ can be preserved in its contact with the market economy. More in relation to the kind of art projects that we are pointing to, Roger Sansi connects discourses on the gift with cases of relational art in *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (2015).

When analysing participatory art, art critics have commonly centred the debate about transactions in terms of economy (the capitalisation of relationships and experiences). This is how Kaira M. Cabañas refers to this fact:

With the recent debates about ‘relational aesthetics’, contemporary artists receive criticism or praise depending on to what extent these interactive spaces represent leisure and spectacle, or division and antagonism. What matters here is if, in the contemporary context of globalisation, a ‘relation’ is no more than an economic transaction. (2009, p. 192)

We will move away from looking at transactions in participatory art as economic transactions (and its collusion with cognitive capitalism, which also needs some review), and move towards looking at them from the point of view of psychology (putting the focus on the exchange of emotions, latent instructions and messages, moral prescriptions, expectations and ethical instructions).

In psychology, ‘transaction’ is defined as the minimum unit of social relation. Eric Berne (1910-1970) is the psychiatrist who founded Transactional Analysis, a theory based on the analysis of communicative exchanges, to be applied in individual and social psychotherapy and in other fields such as education, organisations, literature, theatre and audio-visual narratives.

Berne refers to “transaction” as the unit of social action: one stimulus and one answer, verbal or non-verbal. They are called transactions because in this exchange the participants are expecting to earn something (deliberately) and that is why they get involved in the transaction.

We take as a starting point for our reflection the consideration that art is a kind of transaction or a multiple set of transactions, depending on the nature of each art project. We will try to argue this consideration throughout the text.

Therefore, we will briefly explain some basic considerations of Transactional Analysis.

Transactional Analysis is a theory that interlaces a Theory of Personality, a Theory of Communication and Script Theory. It has an integrative focus combining ideas and techniques of classic psychology and other psychological currents. We will centre at this stage on the Theory of Communication and on the Theory of Games.

From the communicative perspective, Bern takes as the starting point for human transactions the existence of some basic “hungers” that people try to satisfy in their communications and relationships with the others. These “hungers” would be classified as “hunger for stimulus”, “hunger for acknowledgement” and “hunger for programming.” “The hunger of stimulus or relationships” is the need for relations that excite and provide us with security, closeness, physical contact... even negative stimulus, as they are preferable to no stimulus at all. “The hunger of acknowledgement or position” is the need for being recognised and reaffirmed in certain basic existential positions. “The hunger of structure or programming” is the need for organising our time in ways that lets us have certain transactions with others.

In the artistic experience, the artist, public and other art agents, are trying to satisfy their necessities in terms of stimulus through, normally, producing, accessing or mediating something inspiring, creative or surprising, but it could also be something disturbing or abject. Acknowledgement could relate, for example, to being recognised as an interesting creator, a cultured spectator, an altruist supporter or a sharp and efficient professional... but also to reaffirming yourself as a misfit, an eccentric or a loser, depending on your basic psychological position (“I am OK, you are OK”, “I am not OK, you are OK”, “I am OK, you are not OK” ...). The need for structure leads us to look for situations in which we can perform isolation, rituals, activities, games, or intimacy, through which we can get our hungers fed. All these hungers are not something exclusively attended to in the art field but interesting to analyse within it, as they determine the kind of transactions that are made effective through the artworks and that the initiator of the communications (normally the artist) is putting into play. This will also lead us to reflect on stereotyped relations for instance between artists and public.

### **Ways of structuring time**

Before passing to concrete examples, we will explain the different ways of structuring time that Transactional Analysis typifies for the short time:



withdrawal, rituals, activities, pastimes, games and intimacy (from less to more intensity, degree of psychological risk and unpredictability of ‘stroking’); and the life script in the long term.

*Withdrawal* is the absence of social transactions, avoiding psychological risk and only getting ‘self-stroking’. Withdrawing is sometimes a rational adult decision, a copied behaviour or a trained result. This kind of behaviour might happen in retreating to the art studio.

A *ritual* or *ceremony* is a set of stereotyped and complementary transactions in which there are certain parts that everybody knows how to perform as they are socially codified. Art openings, for instance, would be rituals in which people behave in a stereotyped way. In the action *Behavioural choreographies*, the collective EPLC played with some of the stereotyped procedures in an inauguration, trying to rarefy them. On another level of analogy, the walks by Hamish Fulton made with participants (for instance *Walking on and off the Path*), the walk becomes a kind of ritual in which people’s behaviour and movement are prearranged.

*Activities* or *procedures* are concerned with achieving material goals and using rational procedures. They are part of a material programming of the social exchange of ‘stroking’. In participatory art projects, we could connect it to the parts in which people organise to get a work off the ground. For instance, in *The Theorem of Maslow 1. 3 ‘133’*, Fermín Díez de Ulzurrun and Peio Izkue propose a participative action consisting in “the manufacturing of 24 *chorizo* sandwiches, covered in tinfoil”. Two teams compete for covering the demand in terms of organisation, time frames, efficiency and security. Each team is evaluated in relation to these parameters and the winning team receives a €100 prize. In a first stage, participants are concerned about the “manufacturing” of these sandwiches. However, we find out afterwards the transactions are not only material, as there is a reflection on doing this work as an artistic proposal.

*Pastimes* happen in familiar ways to the participants, but participants have more space for their own improvisations. Pastimes are useful for unconsciously matching with people with whom you will be able to play other games afterwards. You can find *pastimes* such as “Ain’t It Awful?” (to talk about artists’ economy), “Why Don’t They” (proposing someone else, such as institutions, doing something about it), “Sunny Sun Up” (explaining how well things are going for you) or “Do you know” (matching social relations).

*Games* are sequences of transactions in which what seems to be happening openly is not what is really at stake. There is one communication on a social level and another on a psychological level. For instance, in a piece like *Public*

*Domain* by Roger Bernat, there are also two things happening on different levels at the same time: people wearing earphones are given instructions to move in a certain way depending on their answers to some questions, but as a group they are guided to shape a concrete choreography in the space, whose narrative they do not control.

*Intimacy* is a state in which social and psychological levels are congruent, there is intense ‘stroking’ and each person accepts their own responsibility over their own necessities and the necessities of the other and it is an unpredictable way of time structuring. The word intimacy should not be taken in its dictionary sense but in a more technical way. If we try to find this kind of relation promoted by some artwork, we could find it in *Guided Visit* by Elena Alonso. In this piece, the artist places a sinuous handrail in the manufacturing space of *Abierto por Obras* of Matadero Cultural Centre of Madrid. The artist proposes a sensitive walk guided by this handrail of different textures, which is installed in a space where some uncovered holes in the ceiling light up, producing a semi-dark space.

A *Life script* would be a preconscious plan of life with which longer periods of time are structured, filling them with rituals, pastimes and games. *Hamaika Urte Dantzari (Dancing 11 years away)* it’s a project of compiling biographical and professional material and trying to find lines of coherence, visual similarities and patterns of strategies in it, and somehow, trying to find some latent script in it.

## Psychological Games

Until now, we have taken a panoramic view of ways of structuring time in order to get different kinds of transactions according to Transactional Analysis and we have tried to relate them to participative art projects of different characteristics. Let’s enter now more deeply and specifically in psychological games. We will try to contrast them with possible sets of transactions in artworks.

Eric Berne’s best-known book is *Games People Play (2007)* and it is related to the afore-mentioned psychological games in which something seems to be happening on a social level while on the psychological level another thing is trying to be achieved. The names given to the explained games are colloquial and illustrative titles of the type of the exchange performed in each case, which make us feel they are familiar to us.

The games are classified into several types: life games, marital games, party games, sexual games, underworld games, consulting room games, and

good games, as these are the most frequent fields in which they are found but not exclusively. We will just mention some of them for revealing patterns of transactions in art.

The most frequent transaction in art is under the scheme in which the artist creates something special, and the public is amused, delighted or shocked by it. This set of transactions (looking for reaffirming a position “I’m OK” doing something exceptional and receiving a returning stroke of “you are OK” or at least any other stroke) could be matched with “Look Ma No Hands”. This is not properly a game but a pastime but let us easily see the scheme of hungers and strokes to overcome the possible initial position of “I’m not ok.”. “Look Ma No hands” could be exemplified in Olafur Eliasson’s *Waterfall* or Chillida’s *Tindaya* project in a hyperbolic way.



Image 1. Renzo Martens. 2009. *Episode 3: Enjoy Poverty* [online, film still]. Recovered from [http://www.artterritories.net/?page\\_id=3031](http://www.artterritories.net/?page_id=3031)

It is also interesting to reflect on socially engaged art in relation to schemes in which the figure of “rescuer” has a significant role in the transactions. Socially engaged art projects can be made following a structure of activity of complementary transactions or under the form of psychological games such as “I’m only trying to help you” (if the results are not the ones expected), “Peasant” (when the artist is set in an enthroned role but his indications are not followed) or “Busman’s holiday” (a situation in which the person does something beneficial for herself at the same time that is beneficial for others but this latter one would be presented as the main one when probably it is not).

“I’m only trying to help you” is a kind of game in which the person in the social scene tries to help, but at the same time there is an ulterior objective that impedes her from achieving the social goal, which could be not having success (as it could enter in conflict with parental introjected demands) or reaffirming that you cannot rely on people (such as when a well-intended action is answered with rejection). This game could be exemplified for instance by Renzo Martens in *Enjoy Poverty*, where cynically he is supposed to try train Congolese photographers to be able to make profit from the poverty of their own country by giving them advice on what to shoot, and which contacts of the NGOs and media companies to offer their services to, but clearly what he is doing is a conceptual paradox in the shape of a vindication. “Busman’s holiday” is again more a pastime than a game, which can become a game if the work is secondary to another ulterior motivation and if it is tackled only to achieve another thing. An example of this kind of game would be literally some “artist in residence” projects in foreign countries.



Image 2. Hito Steyer. 2013. *Is a Museum a Battlefield?* [online image]. Recovered from <http://www.cornucopia.net/blog/13th-istanbul-biennial-highlights/>

Finally, another example of a psychological game that we frequently see in art is “Schlemiel”, when artists play the role of *enfant terrible*, for instance complaining about art and leaving the art system in a bad position but at the same time living off it. “Schlemiel” is a game in which the initiator inflicts damage on another person, and the other person either forgives them (giving a pleasurable exhibition of their suffering self-control, and the initiator has

enjoyed these “naughty” actions and then has been forgiven) or they show their anger and then the initiator reasserts themselves by showing their resent. In the case of art, one example could be Basquiat painting about his relationship with his art dealer to whom he referred as “big pig”, for instance, in his picture “Man from Naples” or Hito Steyer giving a performative talk on the collusion of art biennials and weapons commerce while participating in The Istanbul Biennial 2013.

### **Transferences in Relational Art Projects**

The word “transference” also has different meanings depending on the field in which it is used. We will use the meaning given to the words “transference” and “counter-transference” in Freudian Psychoanalysis, and we will also refer to the concept of “habitus” by Pierre Bourdieu, as something that is transferred from one individual to another and that is also operative in art. Then, we will look for transferences in participatory and collaborative art projects and determine what transferences happen and how.

### **Transferences and Counter-transferences in Freudian Psychoanalysis**

For Psychoanalysis, “transference” is a psychic function by which a person unconsciously transfers and revives old feelings, affects, hopes or repressed desires of childhood in their new bonds. Countertransference would be the reactions, attitudes, thoughts and ideas that the other person involved in the communication produces in response to the transference-phenomena. In Psychoanalysis, the relation is set between patient and psychoanalyst, but as Freud affirms referring to transference (1992, p. 47), “It is produced spontaneously in all human relations, in the same way as in the relation between the patient and the doctor”.

In participative art projects, unlike other artworks in which the receptor of the piece doesn’t enter in direct relation with the artist, there is a personal transference phenomenon. How is this transference and counter-transference situation played out by the artist and the participants? It depends on the case. If we refer to a significant case such as Santiago Sierra and the artworks in which he hires people to do something normally seen as denigrating, receiving some money as counterpart (*20 workers in a ship’s hold, 11 people paid to learn a phrase* or *160 cm line tattooed on 4 people*) a pattern of behaviour is repeated: inducing some people to do something from which they will achieve a reward, something that puts them voluntarily in a situation in which they are

subjugated and something that others will see as denigrating. The transference to the participants is: “I use you as if you were a disposable person” or “I have the power and you are subdued”, as there is no further relationship with the participants that might change the interpretation of the events. We cannot deduce what the participants counter-transfer to the artist, but we come up with the idea that the artist might be repeating a type of relationship that he had also experienced previously, and that by repeating it, he might be trying to elaborate somehow. Because of some of the materials on the artist’s website, we wonder if he feels attracted by the idea of the participants finding things that might not be foreseen in the beginning (like having a good time in an apparently degrading situation —such as when people jammed into the hold of a boat are having some kind of party inside—, or a participant asking for a percentage of the income of the artistic piece —and therefore understanding what the strategy was all about—). That could make us think that the artist may be trying a kind of inverse psychology on the participants, for them to have some kind of “wake-up call” but that surely would be going too far in the suppositions from the information we have.

### **Transferences in Art from a Sociological Point of View. The “Habitus” Concept by Pierre Bourdieu**

Not everything that occurs in an interaction between people can be explained by paying attention to the structure of the interaction in a particular situation. According to Pierre Bourdieu, what has to be taken into account as well, is...

the present and past positions in the social structure that biological individuals carry with them, at all times and in all places, in the form of dispositions which are so many marks of social position and hence of the social distance between objective positions, that is, between social people conjecturally brought together (in physical space, which is not the same thing as social space) and correlatively, so many reminders of this distance and of the conduct required in order to “keep one’s distance or to manipulate it strategically, whether symbolically or actually, to reduce it. (1995a, p. 82)

In this sense, apart from what can be happening on a psychological level, we can read the transferences between artist, participants and audience as happening in relation to their social position and hence to their *dispositions* (the tendency of each individual to assume a certain position in any field,

which organises the ways in which the individual perceives the social world around her and reacts to it). These *dispositions* make up a system that is embodied by the person and that is the *habitus*, one of the central concepts in Bourdieu's sociological work.

The *habitus* is something that a person shares with other people from a homogeneous social environment and that leads them to share similar lifestyles. It also creates a "distinction" from others that do not share that same *habitus*. It is, therefore, a structured structuring structure, meaning the product of a structure of relations that at the same time structures relations. The *habitus* operates in a way that the social order is progressively inscribed in the mind of the people, and the person is not usually conscious of the way in which the *habitus* conforms and limits their way of thinking, acting or interacting with the world that surrounds them.

How is the *habitus* transferred from one individual to another? And more specifically in relation to our theme, what are participatory artists transferring to participants and to the public through their artworks?

We will specifically reflect on how the *habitus* is transferred through art to subjects of the same class and conversely how it can be used to produce a separation among people from different classes. Finally, we will suggest intentional actions to counteract certain transmissions in art.

*Habitus* can be analysed in relation to three kinds of capital (the resources and power that one can use): cultural capital, economic capital and social capital.

In every artwork, there is something "thematic", more or less explicit, and there is something more latent, that transmits as much as the most obvious and intentional part, which we will also refer to as *habitus* even at risk of being not completely correct. An example of these embodied features in the artwork are: the attitude that the artist shows through their work, the verbal and visual language used during the process and in the communications, the ways in which things are displayed, the quality and connotations of the materials that are used, the quantity of time and resources that have been needed for doing it, the places for which the work has been designed... All these things finally shape a kind of "style". This *habitus* has been adopted by the artist through diverse ways:

- by contagion from other artists with whom they share a background or relational experiences.
- by education: where there is a whole range of references, (by inclusion and by exclusion) that facilitate knowledge and predilection for certain things over others.

- by conscious adoption of the characteristics of the qualities of the artist’s reference.

These ways of adopting the “artistic” *habitus* are influenced by the mechanics through which the dominant classes (those who have the resources and the economic, cultural or/and social capital) finally establish the legitimate taste, style, way of doing things in art, which inevitably goes with the interests of these dominant classes through a feedback movement.

Apart from the *intrinsic or immanent value* of the piece itself (whatever this might mean if it exists), the social mechanics of creating value and models of reference in the contemporary art field in the capitalist system are similar to how it is created in other social structures (such as the university, commercial companies or sanitary services...):

- through a meritocracy ladder. The trajectory that an artist must pursue for her artwork to win validation.
- through legitimacy containers. The places where an artist’s artwork must be displayed (exhibitions, publications, galleries or museums) to be renowned.
- through figures of accreditation. Agents for whom the artist’s artwork must be of relevance as they have at the same time constructed their role as figures of accreditation.
- through the creation of networks of shared interests and secure values. Reinforcement of some agents’ decisions (for instance galleries) by other agents’ decisions (for example museums) to establish a reliable value, which is more or less steady and controllable by the agents in the network.

These factors finally determine a “desirable model” of reference for achieving a status of validation in the specialised field of art. And those general cases of success usually match the tastes and needs of the dominant classes. This is due to the factors mentioned before (containers, agents and networks of shared interests) which are structured by the economic and cultural resources of the dominant classes, which, at the same time, structure the tastes of what is legitimised art for the rest of the population. Art is, therefore, another way to reinforce the *habitus* of the dominant classes (whether they are culturally dominant classes, economically dominant classes, socially dominant classes or a mixture of them). Transferring the *habitus* of a determined class as the “desirable one” strengthens that class, as it will be playing in “its own field” which makes it easier. When talking about strategy and tactic, Michel de Certeau explains that playing in your own field gives you advantages in comparison with playing in a place that is not yours: “the establishment of



ensorship between your own place and somebody else's place is followed by considerable effects" (2000, p. 42), that is, legitimising your own place in comparison to other people's. The mentioned effects would be: "the victory of place over time" (when playing in your own field, it is easier to capitalise the acquired advantages whatever circumstances happen), "a panoptic practice" (when you establish the point of view, you transform the outside forces into "objects" that are easier to control and include in your vision in a favourable way for you) and "the power of knowledge" (power is a pre-condition for the creation of knowledge and not only its effect, and therefore power imposes its characteristics on knowledge in this way).

Another factor to be taken into account is that the *habitus* is transferred among members of the same class but tends to mark a separation among members of a different one. This is also what Jacques Ranciere explains in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (2003): in the traditional education system, the distance between the person who keeps the cultural capital and those who want to get it is maintained, although some knowledge is transmitted, as the aspirant doesn't know the quantity of knowledge that is still lacking, and the teacher maintains their role of lawful holder of the knowledge. In our case, this is also the way in which the distinction between classes is preserved. In consequence, certain *habitus* (embodied in artwork) are perceived as "desirable" but are commonly not acquired, as there is a distance that is always preserved.

The distinctive characteristic of "Participatory Art" precisely tries to affect that distance: creating artistic situations where people are part of the creative process helps to bridge the gap between artist and public. This might mean avoiding or at least minimising certain more obvious hierarchies in the usual artist-producer and public-consumer pattern. Although that doesn't mean that the separation disappears as roles are maintained, there are different ways of playing those same roles. It is also true that there are plenty of ways to perform "Participatory Art", and that some of them also satisfy the dominant classes, entering into collusion with their interests, but it is no less true that structures are not innocuous and are not simply waiting for one ideology or another to use them. It is similar to what happens with technology: technologies are not exactly neutral artefacts that become instruments for one ideology or another, depending on who uses them. The train of motives and decisions that lead to the construction of a certain machine structure that machine, which therefore embodies a certain tendency. This is something that can be easily seen in the case of a gun: a gun can be used to kill a person (which is normally ethically reprehensible) or to prevent someone from committing a crime (which is socially "desirable"), but it is also clear that the gun itself has a tendency

towards “having an extra power over the life of others” which is not ideologically neutral. Something similar happens with a participatory artistic format and representational artistic formats. Artistic formats as technologies are not mere instruments (instrumentalism) and nor do they completely determine peoples’ use (determinism), but they have a certain inbuilt tendency. As a consequence, we assert that some artistic formats favour certain *dispositions* and that others favour others. However, there are cases of exceptions or uses that can turn intentions round, both in participatory art projects and in other art projects too.

If we look at the other side of the coin, “Art for the art’s sake” (which is frequently given as the opposite of “Socially Engaged Art”, “Participatory Art”, “Dialogical Art” and “Community Art” forms of art, which are considered too intentional and aligned with concrete moral positions or ideological intentions) reinforces the *habitus* of the model in which the economy (our current economic system) puts everything that is the contrary of the economic strategy in art. This functions as a kind of smokescreen, as it is presented as an unintentional, free and ideologically non-positioned activity and far from economical motors. Bourdieu explains this paradox as follows:

To these forms of legitimate accumulation, through which the dominant groups or classes secure a capital of ‘credit’ which seems to owe nothing to the logic of exploitation, must be added another form of accumulation of symbolic capital, the collection of luxury goods, attesting the taste and distinction of their owner. The denial of economy and of economic interest, which in pre-capitalist societies at first took place on a ground from which it had to be expelled in order for economy to be constituted as such, thus finds its favourite refuge in the domain of art and culture, the site of pure consumption— of money, of course, but also of time convertible into money. The world of art, a sacred island systematically and ostentatiously opposed to the profane, everyday world of production, a sanctuary for gratuitous, disinterested activity in a universe given over to money and self-interest, offers, like theology in a past epoch, an imaginary anthropology obtained by denial of all the negations really brought about by the economy. (1995a, p. 197)

Therefore, we think that art always has a function and intentionality whether it is more or less hidden for some of the very agents of the field, who might be fulfilling a certain agenda even if they are, or want to be, more or less conscious of it. If art inevitably has an aim and a function in society, even

if it is a blurred one, we prefer it to be the “emancipation” of the people and not the reinforcing of the submission to powers that one has not voluntarily chosen. Eric Bern says in relation to sex “Sex best fulfils its purposes by being an end in itself” (1976, p. 48) referring to reproductive social aims. If we apply it to art, we would say “Art fulfils its objectives better by being an aim in itself”, and it looks quite true, but the matter is whether artists really want to become aware what those social aims are. Bourdieu asserts that art doesn’t exist, (1995b) that what exists are diverse types of productions legitimised and accepted by the politically hegemonic groups that are trying to maintain their position in the field through aesthetic and intellectual accumulation (1995a). This would be part of the symbolic violence established by these groups.



*Image 3.* Emma Wolukau-Wananbwa. 2003-2005. *A short video about the Tate Modern* [online video stills]. Recovered from <http://vimeo.com/48089216>  
Password: ew2

Following this thread, it is also interesting to note the conscious attitude of not wanting a transmission to happen. That is the case when some parents decide not to transmit their mother tongue to their children, or when an artist decides not to attend a certain workshop to avoid a divergent “contamination” from the path they are taking at the moment. A concern about “the politics of attention” (intentionally deciding what you pay attention to and what you do not pay attention to) is another way of counteracting some unwanted transferences. This would be an intentional counter-transference, which in terms of transactional analysis would be the antithesis of the game that is proposed.

### **Art as a Transitional Object**

There are objects and phenomena that we use for making a transition from one state to another. Art can also work as an object or phenomenon for making a transition, for travelling a “distance” from a situation to another, for being able to carry out a transformation; firstly, a psychological transformation, which can finally generate effects in a context.

### **Object Relations and Relational Objects**

There are several psychological theories that work on relations and objects. The most significant one referring to this issue is the “Object Relations Theory”. In this theory, objects are understood as “images of people and events that are turned into conceptions in the unconscious of the person and that remain there during adulthood, affecting the person’s social behaviour”. When talking about “relational objects” in contemporary art, the term “object” is used in its most common sense as “thing” or inanimate matter, although the meaning of “object” as “matters, subject or issue” in a more intangible, broad sense, could also fit in most works.

We will pay attention to these two concepts and try to compare and interweave knowledge and experiences in some of these psychological currents and contemporary art practices to talk about relational issues.

**The object relations theory.** The Object Relations Theory is a psychological theory derived from Psychoanalysis, which focuses on the process of developing our mind in contact with others during childhood. This theory suggests that the way in which we have related to the primary figures (mother, father, primary caretaker or even parts or symbols of them) determines the way we behave during adulthood. An object is that to which a

subject relates. An object can perfectly be a subject, as in this theory subjects are also understood as “objects of drives”. A person’s unconscious carries these objects into adulthood and in this way, it is possible to predict people’s behaviour in social relationships and interactions. Therefore, the personality and schematic form of an adult person’s behaviour in the world would be rooted in unconscious representations of the objects surrounding the child, and the meaning they acquire for the child in its interaction with them.

The “Object Relations Theory” grew out of an initial line of thought in 1917 in the work of Sándor Ferenczi (a close associate of Sigmund Freud), and it was developed during the 1940s and 1950s by psychologists such as Melanie Klein, Donald W. Winnicott, Harry Guntrip, Scott Stuart, Michael Balint, Ronald Fairbairn and others... each of them following different approaches.

**Relational psychoanalysis.** Relational Psychoanalysis is a current of the psychoanalysis that focuses on the real and imagined relations of the people with others. This school has had special relevance since 1980, trying to integrate interpersonal Psychoanalysis ideas and “Object Relations Theory”. Among its representatives are Lewis Aron, Jessica Benjamin, Owen Renik, Philip Bromberg, Daniel Stern, Robert Stolorow, on one hand, and Thomas Ogden, Christopher Bollas and Patrick Casement by other.

The turn of “Relational Psychoanalysis” in comparison to traditional Psychoanalysis is that the former gives primary importance to real interpersonal relations, rather than to instinctual drives. As a consequence, the primary desires and motivations that appear during childhood would not be matched to instinctual drives as in the Freudian approach (sexual and aggressive drives), but to the way in which the child’s relationships have happened in order to satisfy their needs. Therefore, this current asserts that motivation is determined by the interaction of a person and their relational world during childhood. This manner is systematised and re-enacted again during adulthood, no matter whether the situation and the people involved have changed. In relational psychoanalysis, along with the interaction established between the therapist and the patient, those previous interactions and emotional experiences are re-enacted and re-actualized between the therapist and patient, as well.

In this current, it is also interesting that the Cartesian division of thought and substance is dismissed, and this is noticeable in the fact that when a person gets ill, it is considered that it is not a mainly internal event, but in relation with the familiar and social context in which the person is. This matches the approach of Contextual Art, which considers the production of art practice in

close relation to the place in which it happens and considers that the way in which art is integrated into society is a matter for the artist and affects the nature of the very artwork itself.

**Relational objects.** “Relational objects” is a term that has been used in art on several occasions to refer to objects that some artists create and through which they hold significant relationships with other people.

For instance, Lygia Clark has a series of objects under the title *Relational Objects*. She started creating these “relational objects” in 1966 and then in 1976 she began to use them in sensorial experiences, in a kind of individual “therapies”. For her, these objects did not have a special interest on their own, but in relation to the fantasy of the person that attended the session with the artist. It’s the person themselves who loads the object with one or other meaning.



Image 4. Lygia Clark. 1980. *Relational objects* [online image]. Recovered from <http://www.continuumlivearts.com/wp/?p=1198>

As another example of what we could call “relational objects”, we can consider Michelangelo Pistoletto’s *Walking sculpture* (1967), a performance based on a giant ball made of newspapers with life-events over a two-year period, and that he and Maria Pioppi rolled through the streets of Turin congregating people who rolled it together with them.



Image 5. Michelangelo Pistoletto. 1967. *Walking sculpture* [online image]. Recovered from <http://wsimag.com/art/14591-walking-sculpture-1967-2015>

Ricardo Basbaum, as well, on his behalf, with his project *Would you like to participate in an artistic experience?* (1994-onwards), gives the possibility of spending time with an object, the NBP, encouraging participants to have an artistic experience with it, and to share it online.



*Image 6. Ricardo Basbaum. 1994 onwards. Would you like to participate in an artistic experience? [online images]. Recovered from <http://www.nbp.pro.br/>*



What these objects have in common is that the objects by themselves are not the “artistic reality”, but they are simply “triggers”, for an art experience to happen.

These would be examples of taking the word “relational objects” in its most literal sense as “things”, but as mentioned in the beginning, we can also take the concept of “object” as “subject” or “phenomenon”, and therefore, there would be also many other examples taking the object as “whatever is the matter of our actions”. The catalogue *Relational Objects. MACBA Collection 2002-2007*, seems to be using this wider sense of the word “objects” for compiling a diversity of artistic manifestations in their collection. From 2000 to 2008, MACBA-Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona was exploring other possible relations between the institution and the citizens, and as a result of that, several art projects took place, such as the workshop *Direct action as one of the fine arts* (2000), the project *The Agencies* (2001), several exhibitions such as *Antagonisms. Case studies* (2001), *Documentary processes. Testimonial Image, subalternity and public sphere* (2001), *Relational poetics* (2004), *How do we want to be governed?* (2004) and the seminar *The construction of the public* (2003).



Image 7. Las Agencies. 2001. *Pret à Revolter fashion show and presentation* [online image]. Recovered from <http://www.sindominio.net/fiambrera/web-agencias/paginas/show-bus/desfilebus/desfilebus6.hhtm>

As Jorge Ribalta, responsible for Public Programs in the MACBA from 1999 to 2009, explains (2009, p. 229), it was an experiment for provoking a change in the way the Museum was designed “from a logic of the hegemony of the expositive dispositive and the representational paradigm as main method or public discourse space of the museum” to a logic in which the publics are not limited to the exhibition space nor over-determined by the imperative of visibility. A public, that is not considered as people “waiting passively for the cultural merchandises”, but rather acquiring an active role as a producer that allows new articulations, other ways of sociability.

Finally, through the explanation of the psychological theories above (Object relations Theory and Relational Psychoanalysis), we have drawn attention to the way in which we established how we relate to others during childhood and then how we repeat that scheme during adulthood. Then we have analysed artworks that experiment with diverse ways of relating to art objects and alternative ways of relating to citizens through art.

### **Transitional Objects and Art as a Transitional Object**

Now we will reflect on how the transitions from one psychic situation to another can be made. To do so, we will set out the ideas on “transitional objects and phenomena” during childhood described by Donald W. Winnicott (paediatrician and psychoanalyst), in his book “Reality and Game” (1993, p. 17). Then, we will argue about artworks functioning as transitional objects in adulthood.

From a psychological point of view, when a child is born, it is thought that they don't have the perception of being a separate unit from the rest of the elements that surround her. They consider themselves one indivisible entity together with their mother. But as they perceive the world around them during their first year of life, they have other experiences that modify this perception. Transitional objects and phenomena are things and actions that the child uses to create the change that they experience from considering themselves part of their mother to seeing themselves as somebody apart. A transitional object can be a small soft toy, of the edge of a sheet, a piece of wool... any object that the child uses for calming themselves down when for instance their mother is not present. Examples of transitional phenomena are movements of mastication accompanied by sounds like “mam-mam”; babbling; anal sounds; the first musical notes; tearing a piece of wool and winding it into a ball or taking or sucking a piece of fabric. However, Transitional space would be the abstract territory in the mind of the person that is neither external nor internal

and that lets us use our creativity to perform a transition between conceptions.

Transitional objects theory is central to the labour of D. W. Winnicott (1896-1971), who worked on the object relations from this approach. This author, instead of explaining the motivation of the self through the Freudian drives (sexual and aggressive drives that at some point must be repressed or sublimated for the individuals to be part of the civilisation), centred on the creative capacity of the child to “create” objects outside themselves by giving significance to elements that appear close by. This creative act is performed through play, and for Winnicott, this is a similar process to that used within the arts, and religion during adulthood.

Winnicott also tries to find a “place” for this game, for this creative act, which is neither inside nor outside the child or the adult and he calls it a cultural experience, to widen the concept of the transitional phenomenon. He uses the term “cultural” in relation to the common human heritage that is transmitted between generations in all civilisations. He launches the thesis that...

the place of location where the cultural experience exists is the potential space that exists between the individual and the ambient (in the beginning the object). The same can be said about games. The cultural experience begins with creative living, whose first manifestation is the game. (1993, p. 88)

For the author, this is a space where the game is played between the position of feeling one with the ambient and feeling yourself out of control of the context. He also explains that playing takes you easily to the cultural experience. We wonder whether precisely the concept of culture can be understood when one begins to drift apart from the context and therefore the separation between culture and nature is possible in our mind.

For the author “there is no doubt that the cultural aspects of human life, including art, philosophy and religion, refer to a great extent to those (transitional) phenomena” (1993, p. 101).

### **Relations and Transformations**

We have been reflecting on transactions, transferences and transitions to find out how different psychological and sociological theories explain human interactions and understand how they happen in participatory art. We have reviewed Transactional Analysis, Transferences and Counter-transferences in Psychoanalysis, the notion of *habitus* in Pierre Bourdieu’s thinking, Object

Relations Theory, and the Transitional Objects approach.

Being able to perceive how interactions happen is a basic part of being able to recognise how they evolve. Interactions are not disconnected events. They happen in a time and space that do not determine but frequently condition these relations (as we have seen in Michael de Certeau's disquisitions on strategies and tactics). Interactions are part of a system. As Bourdieu explains through his concept of field, interactions happen in camps: structures of objective relations between positions that work under concrete rules and which those participants of the field occupy. If we look at interactions on their own, they are also less unique and hazardous than we often think: they can frequently be identified by certain behavioural patterns that are performed by people with slight variations (as we have seen in the patterns of games in Transactional Analysis).

In some of the previously mentioned theories there are propositions of ways in which certain acts can cause the interaction to take a different path from what it normally would, for example, implementing the antithesis of the thesis of a psychological game, putting words to latent matter (as is psychoanalysis), processing or modifying characteristics of the context (in a more sociological sense). This tells us about the dynamic characteristic of relations.

Facing participatory art practices, we realise that artists and participants play in a field crossed by all these factors. We realise that art can reinforce certain models of relations, can indicate situations that are not perceived in an obvious way or can work on new articulations for experimenting with alternative forms of sociability, as a testing ground.

*Transart would be art projects that work on this intermediate space, a space between the real and the illusionary, between you and me, between the self and the context, between the determined and the alternatives, between the real and the potentially possible, between the intentional and the unconscious.*

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