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VOL 18 NO 3 VOLUME EDITORS **LANFRANCO ACETI, JANIS JEFFERIES, IRINI PAPADIMITRIOU /** EDITORS **JONATHAN MUNRO** AND **ÖZDEN ŞAHİN**
Touch and Go is published in collaboration with Watermans and Goldsmiths College in occasion of the Watermans' International Festival of Digital Art, 2012, which coincides with the Olympics and Paralympics in London. The issue explores the impact of technology in art as well as the meaning, possibilities and issues around human interaction and engagement. *Touch and Go* investigates interactivity and participation, as well as light art and new media approaches to the public space as tools that foster engagement and shared forms of participation.

TOUCH AND *GO*

Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012

Touch and Go **is a title that I chose together with Irini Papadimitriou for this** LEA **special issue.** On my part with this title I wanted to stress several aspects that characterize that branch of contemporary art in love with interaction, be it delivered by allowing the audience to touch the art object or by becoming part of a complex electronic sensory experience in which the artwork may somehow respond and touch back in return.

With the above statement, I wanted to deliberately avoid the terminology 'interactive art' in order to not fall in the trap of characterizing art that has an element of interaction as principally defined by the word interactive; as if this were the only way to describe contemporary art that elicits interactions and responses between the artist, the audience and the art objects.

I remember when I was at Central Saint Martins writing a paper on the sub-distinctions within contemporary media arts and tracing the debates that distinguished between electronic art, robotic art, new media art, digital art, computer art, computer based art, internet art, web art... At some point of that analysis and argument I realized that the common thread that characterized all of these sub-genres of aesthetic representations was the word art and it did not matter (at least not that much in my opinion) if the manifestation was material or immaterial, conceptual or physical, electronic or painterly, analogue or digital.

I increasingly felt that this rejection of the technical component would be necessary in order for the electronic-robotic-new-media-digital-computer-based-internet art object to re-gain entry within the field of fine art. Mine was a reaction to an hyper-fragmented

and indeed extensive and in-depth taxonomy that seemed to have as its main effect that of pushing these experimental and innovative art forms – through the emphasis of their technological characterization – away from the fine arts and into a ghetto of isolation and self-reference. Steve Dietz's question – *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* [1] – remains unanswered, but I believe that there are changes that are happening – albeit slowly – that will see the sensorial and technical elements become important parts of the aesthetic aspects of the art object as much as the brush technique of Vincent Willem van Gogh or the sculptural fluidity of Henry Moore.

Hence the substitution in the title of this special issue of the word interactivity with the word touch, with the desire of looking at the artwork as something that can be touched in material and immaterial ways, interfered with, interacted with and 'touched and reprocessed' with the help of media tools but that can also 'touch' us back in return, both individually and collectively. I also wanted to stress the fast interrelation between the art object and the consumer in a commodified relationship that is based on immediate engagement and fast disengagement, touch and go. But a fast food approach is perhaps incorrect if we consider as part of the interactivity equation the viewers' mediated processes of consumption and memorization of both the image and the public experience.

Nevertheless, the problems and issues that interactivity and its multiple definitions and interpretations in the 20th and 21st century raise cannot be overlooked, as much as cannot be dismissed the complex set of emotive and digital interactions that can be set in motion by artworks that reach and engage large groups of people within the public space. These interactions

generate public shows in which the space of the city becomes the background to an experiential event that is characterized by impermanence and memorization. It is a process in which thousands of people engage, capture data, memorize and at times memorialize the event and re-process, mash-up, re-disseminate and re-contextualize the images within multiple media contexts.

The possibility of capturing, viewing and understanding the entire mass of data produced by these aesthetic sensory experiences becomes an impossible task due to easy access to an unprecedented amount of media and an unprecedented multiplication of data, as Lev Manovich argues. [2]

In *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* Timothy Murray writes that "the retrospective nature of repetition and digital coding—how initial images, forms, and narratives are refigured through their contemplative re-citation and re-presentation—consistently inscribes the new media in the memory and memorization of its antecedents, cinema and video." [3]

The difference between memorization and memorialization may be one of the further aspects in which the interaction evolves – beyond the artwork but still linked to it. The memory of the event with its happening and performative elements, its traces and records both official and unofficial, the re-processing and mash-ups; all of these elements become part of and contribute to a collective narrative and pattern of engagement and interaction.

These are issues and problems that the artists and writers of this LEA special issue have analyzed from a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, offering to the reader the opportunity of a glimpse into the complexity of today's art interactions within the contemporary social and cultural media landscapes.

Touch and Go is one of those issues that are truly born from a collaborative effort and in which all editors have contributed and worked hard in order to

deliver a documentation of contemporary art research, thought and aesthetic able to stand on the international scene.

For this reason I wish to thank Prof. Janis Jefferies and Irini Papadimitriou together with Jonathan Munro and Özden Şahin for their efforts. The design is by Deniz Cem Önduygu who as LEA's Art Director continues to deliver brilliantly designed issues.

Lanfranco Aceti
*Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Director, Kasa Gallery*

1. "Nevertheless, there is this constant apparently inherent need to try and categorize and classify. In Beyond Interface, an exhibition I organized in 1998, I 'datamined' ten categories: net.art, storytelling, socio-cultural, biographical, tools, performance, analog-hybrid, interactive art, interfacers + artificers. David Ross, in his lecture here at the CADRE Laboratory for New Media, suggested 21 characteristics of net art. Stephen Wilson, a pioneering practitioner, has a virtual – albeit well-ordered – jungle of categories. Rhizome has developed a list of dozens of keyword categories for its ArtBase. Lev Manovich, in his Computing Culture: Defining New Media Genres symposium focused on the categories of database, interface, spatialization, and navigation. To my mind, there is no question that such categorization is useful, especially in a distributed system like the Internet. But, in truth, to paraphrase Barnett Newman, "ornithology is for the birds what categorization is for the artist." Perhaps especially at a time of rapid change and explosive growth of the underlying infrastructure and toolsets, it is critical that description follow practice and not vice versa." Steve Dietz, *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists? Web Walker Daily* 28, April 4, 2000, http://bit.ly/QjEWlY (accessed July 1, 2012).
2. This link to a Google+ conversation is an example of this argument on massive data and multiple media engagements across diverse platforms: http://bit.ly/pGgDsS (accessed July 1, 2012).
3. Timothy Murray, *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 138.

Touch and Go: The Magic Touch Of Contemporary Art

It is with some excitement that I write this preface to Watermans International Festival of Digital Art, 2012. It has been a monumental achievement by the curator Irini Papadimitriou to pull together 6 ground-breaking installations exploring interactivity, viewer participation, collaboration and the use or importance of new and emerging technologies in Media and Digital Art.

From an initial call in December 2010 over 500 submissions arrived in our inboxes in March 2011. It was rather an overwhelming and daunting task to review, look and encounter a diverse range of submissions that were additionally asked to reflect on the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Submissions came from all over the world, from Africa and Korea, Austria and Australia, China and the UK, Latvia and Canada and ranged from the spectacularly compli-cated to the imaginatively humorous. Of course each selector, me, onedotzero, London's leading digital media innovation organization, the curatorial team at Athens Video Art Festival and Irini herself, had particu-lar favorites and attachments but the final grouping I believe does reflect a sense of the challenges and opportunities that such an open competition offers. It is though a significant move on behalf of the curator that each work is given the Watermans space for 6 weeks which enables people to take part in the cul-tural activities surrounding each installation, fulfilling, promoting and incorporating the Cultural Olympiad themes and values 'inspiration, participation and cre-ativity.'

Some, like Gail Pearce's *Going with the Flow* was made because rowing at the 2012 Olympics will be held near Egham and it was an opportunity to respond and create an installation offering the public a more interactive way of rowing, while remaining on dry land, not only watching but also participating and having an effect on the images by their actions. On the other hand, Michele Barker and Anna Munster's collabora-tive *Hocus Pocus* will be a 3-screen interactive art-work that uses illusionistic and performative aspects of magical tricks to explore human perception, senses and movement. As they have suggested, "Magic – like interactivity – relies on shifting the perceptual rela-tions between vision and movement, focusing and diverting attention at key moments. Participants will become aware of this relation as their perception catches up with the audiovisual illusion(s)" (artists statement, February 2011). Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi and Emeka Ogboh are artists who also work collaboratively and working under name of One-Room Shack. *UNITY* is built like a navigable labyrinth to reflect the idea of unity in diversity that the Games signify. In an increasingly globalized world they are interested in the ways in which the discourse of glo-balization opens up and closes off discursive space whereas Suguru Goto is a musician who creates real spaces that are both metaphysical and spiritual. *Cymatics* is a kinetic sculpture and sound installa-tion. Wave patterns are created on liquid as a result of sound vibrations generated by visitors. Another sound work is Phoebe Hui's *Granular Graph,* **a** sound instrument about musical gesture and its notation.

Audiences are invited to become a living pendulum. The apparatus itself can create geometric images to represent harmonies and intervals in musical scales. Finally, Joseph Farbrook's *Strata-caster* explores the topography of power, prestige, and position through an art installation, which exists in the virtual world of Second Life, a place populated by over 50,000 people at any given moment.

Goldsmiths, as the leading academic partner, has been working closely with Watermans in developing a se-ries of seminars and events to coincide with the 2012 Festival. I am the artistic director of Goldsmiths Digital Studios (GDS), which is dedicated to multi-disciplinary research and practice across arts, technologies and cultural studies. GDS engages in a number of research projects and provides its own postgraduate teaching through the PhD in Arts and Computational Technol-ogy, the MFA in Computational Studio Arts and the MA in Computational Art. Irini is also an alumni of the MFA in *Curating* (Goldsmiths, University of London) and it has been an exceptional pleasure working with her generating ideas and platforms that can form an artistic legacy long after the Games and the Festival have ended. The catalogue and detailed blogging/documentation and social networking will be one of our responsibilities but another of mine is to is to en-sure that the next generation of practitioners test the conventions of the white cube gallery, reconsider and revaluate artistic productions, their information struc-ture and significance; engage in the museum sector whilst at the same time challenging the spaces for the reception of 'public' art. In addition those who wish to increase an audience's interaction and enjoyment of their work have a firm grounding in artistic practice and computing skills.

Consequently, I am particularly excited that the 2012 Festival Watermans will introduce a mentor-ing scheme for students interested in participatory interactive digital / new media work. The mentoring scheme involves video interviews with the 6 selected artists and their work, briefly introduced earlier in this preface, and discussions initiated by the student. As so often debated in our seminars at Goldsmiths and

elsewhere, what are the expectations of the audience, the viewer, the spectator, and the engager? How do exhibitions and festival celebrations revisit the tradi-tional roles of performer/artist and audiences? Can they facilitate collaborative approaches to creativity? How do sound works get curated in exhibitions that include interactive objects, physical performances and screens? What are the issues around technical sup-port? How are the ways of working online and off, in-cluding collaboration and social networking, affecting physical forms of display and publishing?

As I write this in Wollongong during the wettest New South Wales summer for 50 years, I want to end with a quote used by the Australia, Sydney based conjurers Michele Barker and Anna Munster

> *Illusions occur when the physical reality does not match the perception.* [1]

The world is upside down in so many alarming ways but perhaps 2012 at Watermans will offer some mo-mentary ideas of unity in diversity that the Games signify and *UNITY* proposes. Such anticipation and such promise!

Janis Jefferies
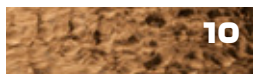*Professor of Visual Arts*
Goldsmiths
University of London, UK

23rd Dec 2011, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia

1. Stephen L. Malnik and Susana Martinez-Conde, *Sleights of Mind: What the Neuroscience of Magic Reveals about our Everyday Deceptions* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010), 8.

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UNITY, One Room Shack, 2012, interactive installation, Watermans Gallery, London.

UNITY: In Pursuit of the Humanistic Spirit

by

One-Room Shack Collective

In January 2011, we (One-Room Shack Collective) began to discuss the merits of the Watermans' gallery's "Call for Proposal" for new media projects in respect of the London 2012 Olympics. The Open Call specifically targeted interactive projects. We decided to create an installation project that embraces phenomenology as an aesthetic experience, as articulated by the French theorist, Paul Dufrenne. Our idea was to create a project that fully implicates the viewer as the co-producer, and as one whose presence defines and completes the installation. In other words, without the viewer the art work is not complete.

UNITY is an intricate architectural installation based on the word UNITY. It is configured as a transparent maze-like angular and rectangular structure, navigable from two ends, that is to say, from the letter U, which serves as the entrance to the structure, and letter Y, which is the exit out of the maze. The five letters of the alphabets which make up the composite structure are wired with LED strip lights of five different colors.

Each letter is wired with a different colored LED strip lights to represent a particular color of the Olympic rings. The structure is susceptible to human presence and is lighted up due to installed motion detectors. As viewers navigate one alphabet after the other, the lights come on in the color of the Olympic ring of which the individual alphabet is wired to represent. All five alphabets are fully lighted simultaneously when viewers crowd the entire installation all at once. Each single alphabet that spells UNITY represents a circle of the five Olympic rings. The installation is interactive and makes for a total immersive experience for the audience, and also becomes a colorful embodiment of the Olympic spirit.

We are interested in understanding the implication of UNITY on humanism in a neo-liberal world where hyper-capitalism and love of excess trump the ability to be compassionate and selfless. By bringing peoples together into the maze-like structure, UNITY speaks the language of *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu*, which is a classical definition of humanism in South Africa, affirms human interconnectedness in the social sphere. In its basic conception, it is the idea that one is human through other human beings or that one is human because he/she is surrounded by fellow humans. *Ubuntu* mirrors Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical idea of "being for the other." Levinas' idea allows us to consider the value of thinking about other people's interest in relation to ours. In providing an immersive space, UNITY invites the viewing public to consider the values of being together and being for the other in the spirit of the Olympic Games. *UNITY* allows us to harp on the symbolism of the Olympic Games, as, arguably, a significant singular unifying factor in the world.

As a celebratory piece, UNITY proposes the possibility of human fraternity rather than the destructive forces which highlight our racial, political, economic, social and individual differences. The Olympic Games embrace of 'unity in diversity' is highly reflective of the Igbo maxim that says, "Egbe belu, Ugo belu, nke siri ibe ya ebe na, ka nku kwa ya." This maxim loosely translates as "let the eagle perch, let the hawk perch. If one refuses the other the will to perch, let that one lose the use of its wings." The adage speaks of human interaction based on egalitarian values, and the likely penalty when the values are violated. The Igbo proverb, just like the South African *Ubuntu*, is found, arguably, in all the different world's cultures. Given that the Olympics Games promotes human fraternity, defined by tolerance and mutual respect through sports, we explore the merits of such universalism through UNITY.

Yet, in celebrating the spirit of the Olympic Games, UNITY also draws attention to those 'difficult' aspects of our human existence, masked by the symbolism of the Olympics spirit. In the main, it is the idea that we live in a world of inequalities. It is important that we stress that the Olympic Games is foreshadowed by a politics of location and visibility, in the sense that hosting rights and the Games different sports are determined by a few, just to mention some of its problems. We can therefore say that the Olympic Games is not exactly democratic even when it is, supposedly, a global event. Our approach in conceiving of *UNITY* is to create a maze that could symbolize the complex nature of the human condition.

As One-Room Shack Collective, we are interested in the ideas and structures of power, politics and economics of means, and forms of sociability in a globalized world. *UNITY* engages the subtleties that underpin human relations, what Evelyn Owen describes as "contradictory realities." In a globalized world, which is sustained by visions that would include the spirit of the Olympic Games, it is necessary to address the unvarnished human reality even as we celebrate the Games beautiful symbolism. We infuse wit and irony into our work to mellow down the serious nature of our subject matters, and to allow our work to be read with multiple lenses. For instance, the nature of a maze is playful, almost like a puzzle, and is also a complex network of passages. We draw upon the various interpretations of a maze in creating *UNITY*. ∎

ONE-ROOM SHACK COLLECTIVE; UGOCHUKWU-SMOOTH NZEWI AND EMEKA OGBOH

UNITY, One Room Shack, 2012, interactive installation, Watermans Gallery, London.

in conversation with

Evelyn Owen

PhD candidate, School of Geography, Queen Mary, University of London

Evelyn Owen: UNITY has been created 'in the Olympic spirit.' Is UNITY a critical as well as a celebratory piece? And what is the role of art and artists in engaging with the Olympic Games?
One-Room Shack Collective: Yes, it is a celebratory piece because it seeks to engage with the spirit of the Olympic Games, and this would be humanity's better angel. *UNITY* therefore celebrates the possibility of humanity's inherent goodness in the face of those destructive forces that highlight our racial, political, economic, social and individual differences. We are

under no illusion about the wheel of inequality which determines how the world goes round. The Olympic Games is one institution that brings that out in bold relief if we are to consider the nature and history of sports that are given visibility, and, in addition, those who determine the structure of the Games. Yet the ideal that underpins the Games is one that should be celebrated. As artists, it is important that we are able to critically explore the meaning of the Olympic Games as well as other compelling human issues that it yields, which are never discussed because of the beautiful seduction of its symbolism.

What do the Olympic Games symbolise to you? Can you comment on the significance of the Olympics to Nigerians, and to Africa more widely, or does it really depend on the context? Do the Olympic Games have a universal meaning? How can art help us to hold on to the promise of unity in diversity?
Well, the Olympic Games is intended to celebrate the idea of unity in diversity through sports. We would be hard pressed to speak for all Nigerians on its significance. From our own perspective, the Olympic Games provide an opportunity for Nigeria, nay Africa, to fraternize with the rest of the human race. No other institution brings that about on a much broader global scale. We think that the Olympic Games' notion of unity in diversity is reflective of the Igbo adage that says, "let the eagle perch, let the hawk perch. If one refuses the other the will to perch, let that one lose the use of its wings." The adage speaks about respect, love, compassion and good neighborliness, and what would be the penalty if one should go against such an egalitarian relationship. We can find similar aphorisms in the different world's cultures. In that sense, the Olympic Games' quest for human fraternity based on mutual respect and tolerance, through sports, has a universal underpinning. As artists, we explore the merits of such universalism.

UNITY is an interactive installation, which comes alive with the movement of viewers through its maze-like structure. How important is it to you to incorporate your audience's embodied responses into your work? How do the possibilities opened up by participatory, responsive art works relate to your interests in social, political and economic power and their distribution across space?
When Watermans initially advertised its call for participation, it specifically mentioned that proposed projects should be interactive and with full participation by the audience. We decided on a project that not only engages with phenomenology in terms of how the work yields itself to the viewing experience, but more importantly, how the audience helps to produce and complete the work. Our project is not complete as a piece until it interacts with the viewing audience. It cannot alight without a participatory audience walking its labyrinth. With respect to the second part of your question, *UNITY* does not necessarily or directly engage with our interest in social, political and economic power, and their distribution. However, as we have already mentioned, in celebrating the spirit of the Olympic Games, *UNITY* also conceptually speaks to those 'real' aspects of our human existence that the symbolism of the Games masks. We have termed those 'real' aspects as destructive forces. It is also important to reemphasize that the Olympic Games is undergirded by a hegemonic structure that determines the nature of sports that it is invested in and where the Games are hosted. The Games is yet to come to Africa. The potential argument would be that no African county has the structure and economic power to host the Olympic Games.

I'm interested in what you say about the hegemonic structure of the Olympic Games, and the highly specific (perhaps even exclusionary) sports and geographical locations it is invested in. On the other hand, as you also emphasize, the vision and wider

symbolism of the Games is one of all-embracing egalitarianism. This tension – between the specific and the universal, between the exclusive and the inclusive – seems to me to be an important paradox that UNITY addresses, as you say, through its invitation to peer beneath the mask of the Games, whilst also celebrating what that mask represents. Thinking about your work as artists more widely, what is your strategy when dealing with such complex ideas? What tools and tactics do you use to explore subtle concepts and contradictory realities, and make them accessible to your audiences? Are you more concerned with developing particular arguments, or with opening up spaces within which different points of view can be articulated?

We would rather not call it a tension but a fact of reality. In a classical structuralist sense, there is always the idea of binary opposition governing reality. What we do in terms of strategy is to locate a consensual ground from which we engage with reality. It is a consensual ground because we are more invested in grey areas rather than establishing the good or bad. This is not to say that we do not call a spade a spade when it is necessary. In UNITY, our approach in examining what may be considered to be the politics of the Olympic Games is to create a maze that approximates the complex nature of both the human and Olympic realities (the good and the bad) using simple yet loaded symbolism, and legible iconographies. These are the five letters of the English alphabet which spell unity but which are also representing of the five Olympic rings. It is a really convoluted position but that is the nature of reality so to speak.

Yes. I think that your focus on grey areas and on locating a consensual ground is similar to how I would interpret engaging with 'tensions' – that is, thinking about the conceptual and material relationship between two (or more) positions which may be contradictory or at odds with one another,

but are nonetheless in conversation. This idea of a conversation between different positions leads me to think about your practice, as two artists, working collaboratively under one name. How do you work together to create art as One-Room Shack Collective? Can you talk about the practical and conceptual challenges and opportunities of being mobile artists working in different environments, across borders and cultures? Do these experiences feed into your creative work?

Our paths crossed the first time as art students at the University of Nigeria Nsukka almost fifteen years ago. We realized that we shared common interests, similar attitudes and perspectives to life, and were driven by the same ambitions. One-Room Shack Collective was inspired by our shared dream to tell human stories and to engage with universal issues and ideas that can be both local and global. Distance has not really been much a problem for us in terms of our work. Our ideas are often articulated and clarified in series of e-conversations, phone calls and physical meetings. We get together as much as possible when time and space permits although it was better when the two of us were mainly operating out of the same abode in Nigeria. Mobility has a tremendous role in our work given our interests in globalization and its effects in creating the illusion of an integrated world. As we move constantly through spaces and deal with myriad contexts we are able to experience both the merits and political correctness of globalization, which we then engage with in our work.

I'd like to talk more about globalization, how it has affected you, personally, and as practicing artists, and your reasons for focusing on it in your work. Can you give some examples of its merits, as well as its drawbacks, for artists working in Nigeria? How do you identify and address the impacts of globalization in everyday life, as distinct from (or perhaps in relation to) the impacts of other contemporary social, political and economic trends at different scales?

Globalization is one interesting concept that suggests competing or conflicting ideals, depending on what part of the world one is from. With regard to the international art world, Gerardo Mosquera talks about globalization as flattening, reifying and manipulating cultural differences to suit a global hegemony built
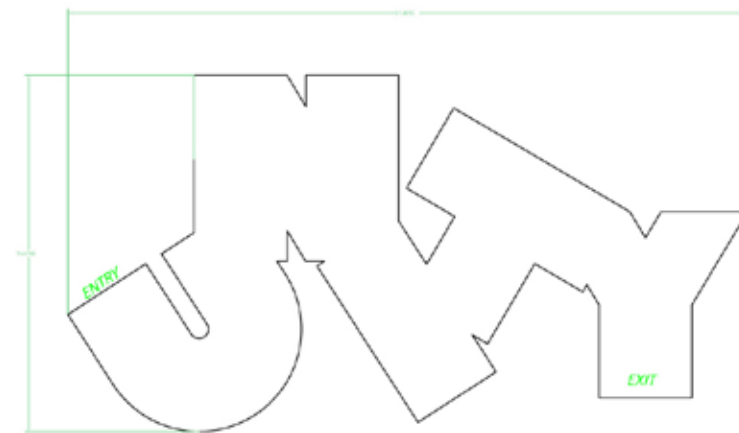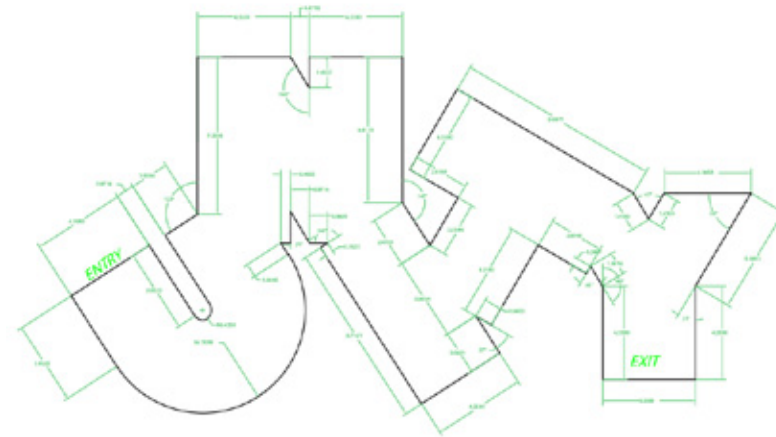
UNITY, One Room Shack, 2012, interactive installation, Watermans Gallery, London.

on Eurocentric foundations. For Nicolas Bourriaud, his concept of altermodern in the age of globalization suggests the recognition of a decentered art world, the materialization of multiple nodes of power especially in non-Western centers, and a more even-handed form of global exchange. That is to say, a utopian international art world that resonates with Leopold Senghor's idea of universal civilization, where cultures contribute equally to a global cultural pool based on mutual respect. But we all know that there is no equalization or parity in global relations. For example, with an American or British passport, one can easily navigate international borders. With such a passport, one is stamped in at most international airports without having to deal with the headache of visa applications and rejections, provided you do

not stay beyond the 30 day, or is it 90 day, ceiling in most of the countries. As practicing artists from the so-called developing world who may be considered as global nomads because of the itinerancy associated with contemporary artistic practice, easy mobility or its lack thereof, is an issue we constantly deal with. It is one issue that brings the rhetoric of globalization closer to home. Without over flogging it, globalization as a political, but more importantly, an economic idea, is only interested in opening up economic borders, especially for Western multinational (a very seductive neologism) corporations. Economic migrants, mostly from the so-called developing world, continue to seek the promises globalization claims it offers, with limited success.

Our projects walk the fine line of addressing issues associated with how we see and/or are emplaced in the world as postcolonial subjects. Through projects such as Unity Maze, we are more interested in locating grey areas in both Mosquera's and Bourriaud's positions. Perhaps that is what you see as a tension, but it is what we describe as the discourse of globalization opening up or closing the discursive space.

I find your critical reading of globalization really helpful, especially in the way that you draw attention to unequal geographies of mobility. As I think your comments suggest, it is important not to let seductive ideas of global connection and equalization distract us from the continued relevance of location within the wider systems we are situated within. By location, I mean geographical location, but also the implications of this for the political, economic, social and cultural contexts that artists experience; without being defined by these contexts, artists may certainly engage with them. What influence do Nigerian and/or African contexts have on your creative enterprise, in terms of both form and concept?
The fact that we are of Igbo ethnicity, Nigerian nationality, and from the continent of Africa, colors the way

we see the world. We cannot deny or run away from these facts even as we claim cosmopolitan citizenship. Our work tends to be political and/or sociological because of our circumstance as postcolonial subjects and also the issues we are interested in. For example, we do not shy away from examining the structures of power not because it may be considered 'cool' to do so but because we are convinced that there is a lot at stake that needs to be dealt with. We look at how the structure of power reveals itself at a global level, and Africa's place in that complex matrix. Who gets spoken for when the conversation is about poverty, and who is most likely the focus of attention when it is about inequality, etc.? At the same time, we also examine how power is brokered at local levels, say, in Nigeria. An example is local arguments with regard to political and economic patronage, what is described in the Nigerian parlance as sharing the national cake. We are interested in how the sharing of the national cake and also its crumbs reveal a badly contrived political system that continues to destabilize our very existence as a country. It is important that we bear the different contexts, the local and the global, in mind when we conceive of our projects and also be critically reflexive.

> *Our projects walk the fine line of addressing issues associated with how we see and/or are emplaced in the world as postcolonial subjects.*
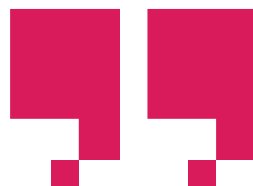
And what's next for One-Room Shack Collective? How do you plan to develop your interests in discourses of globalization, and what sources are you currently drawing on for inspiration?
We have a couple of projects still in the oven. We have been articulating the parameters of some, such as *Dinner for Two* and *Aesthetics of Low Food*, in the last five years, while others are still at the ideas level. Like we have already stated, our projects deal with the various aspects of human experience that can be discussed under the broad banner of contemporary globalization.

Can you talk more about *Aesthetics of Low Food* and *Dinner for Two*? What is the significance of food and eating in your creative practice?
Food is universal but it can also be revealing of social class and structures if we consider the different kinds of food outlets such as restaurants, hotels, mobile food vendors, etc., and the kinds of individuals that patronize them. That is the main reason we employ it as our point of departure in engaging with power and hegemony.

Aesthetics of Low Food, which we began in 2006, was inspired by our experience of eating at a buka (temporary food cafe), which was a walking distance from our one-room abode when we were living in Abuja, Nigeria's political capital. The buka was in the heart of the city, close to the three arms zone where our national assembly is located, and the national secretariat. However, it was patronized by security guards, clerical officers, and drivers who work at the big government organizations. It was very interesting to us to consider the paradox at play, given the proximity of the buka to the seat of 'high' government, and those it served. We conceived the Ikoyi project to extrapolate on the Abuja experience when we moved back to Lagos.

There is some connection between *Aesthetics of Low Food* and *Dinner for Two* in the sense that food and food places are inserted as iconographies. However, the narratives are not the same, and the subtexts of the visual messages are conveyed differently. *Dinner for Two* examines the relationship between the so-called First World and Third World, using the G-8 meetings as a conceptual framework, and the physical setting of a dinner date as a visual metaphor. The notion of a dinner date between two individuals suggests a measure of conviviality or friendship. Yet, regarding the relationship between the G-8 and Africa, this is hardly the case. Behind the sweeping gesture of civility and philanthropy lies the paternalistic politics of an adult (G-8) dictating to a child (Africa) on what is best for him/her. Hence, *Dinner for Two* offers a platform for us to chew on the many ideas of moral capital (historical and temporal), how it frames or is framed in the relationship between the 'global few' (G-8), who control the global political economy, and the 'global many' (Africa in particular, but also the rest of the developing world). When we conceived *Dinner for Two* in December 2009 there were no Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Our project becomes very germane given the spate of 'Occupy' movements that are generating excitement in the West.

It is important to end the conversation by saying that in our work, we also play with humor and parody as a counterbalance to a potential fixation on the serious nature of our subject matters by a potential audience. This has a way of opening up our work to multiple readings on many levels. ∎