'Brandon' by Shu Lea Cheang navigation alive and online: event transcription

Intermediae, Matadero, Madrid. 12th of February, 2016.

With the participation of Shu Lea Cheang, Remedios Zafra, Elena Tóxica (Toxic Lesbian), undergraduate students, students of the Master's Degree in "Research and Creation" offered by the School of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid and students of the Master's Degree in "Arts Practice and Visual Culture" coordinated by the University of Castilla La Mancha and Reina Sofía National Museum Contemporary Art Center in Madrid.

Elena Tóxica: Hello to everybody, today we are making the first open public presentation of "Brandon", net.art work by artist Shu Lea Cheang. It is a project coordinated by Toxic Lesbian that deals with the research entitled "From the feminist upheaval to public art and cyberspace: the Far West of opportunities", by Toxic Lesbian.

First of all, I would like to thank Intermediae Matadero, who welcomes us again inside this research framework. As you well know, Intermediae is a space for contemporary creation that is a part of Matadero. I also want to say hello to Shu Lea, author of the work "Brandon" from 1998. She is an artist, movie director and networker. She produces installations interconnected on the web and participative performances for various agents.

I also want to invite you to take part or participate with us on February 25th-27th. During those days, Shu Lea will come to Intermediae in person to collaborate with other Spanish artists on their "HomeEconomics" project. If you want to meet her during those days, you will have a great chance to collaborate and work with her.

I also want to give a special thank you to Remedios Zafra that will guide the reading and interpretation of "Brandon". As you know, Remedios is a writer and professor of Art, Digital Culture and Gender Studies in the University of Seville (Spain).

The initiative that we will carry out here today is part of an artistic project coordinated by me, Elena Tóxica. This project is Toxic Lesbian, between present art and political action art regarding gender.

The presentation will be attended by undergraduate students, students of the Master's Degree in "Research and Creation" offered by the School of Fine Arts at the Complutense University of Madrid and students of the Master's Degree in "Arts Practice and Visual Culture" coordinated by the University of Castilla La Mancha and Reina Sofía National Museum and Contemporary Art Center in Madrid.

I want to thank our technicians from Teatro Español, who have helped us accomplish this project. And thanks to Esther Moreno, the interpreter who will help us have Shu Lea with us today and Ana Chinarro as production assistant.

All this event has been designed to create some bilingual files and videos that will be available under a Creative Commons license.

I now give the floor to Remedios, who will maintain a 50 minutes-long open dialogue with Shu Lea to interpret the work, dialogue that will be followed by an open debate so everyone can participate. Thank you very much.

Remedios Zafra: It is a great honor and a true challenge for me to cooperate with Toxic Lesbian to walk through "Brandon", which is an iconic and emblematic net art work by an artist I admire and I'm especially interested in: Shu Lea Cheang.

What I propose to do is first, to set the work in a context and to provide an introduction to it followed by a partial and thoughtful navigation through this work of art, which was produced in the late 1990s and commissioned by New York's Guggenheim Museum. It currently belongs to this institution's net.art collection.

The navigation will travel through most of the work, but we will not reach the many creative corners that it contains. In order to discover them, assuming there is an open access to this work or that you're able to navigate through the online project yourselves, I encourage you to search, to probe individually and to create your own drifts through this complex work of art, sprinkled with various narratives and scenes.

I think we can see "Brandon" as a fascinating cultural artifact which, to my understanding, talks about two of the most singular features of a time period right at the end of the past century. On the one hand, criticism and identity political positioning or its political stance taking bodies, gender and sexuality as a starting point. On the other hand, the beginning of a world that since the advent of Internet has changed irreversibly, also in the scope of art practice.

My navigation will be preceded by a brief introduction where I want to highlight three different perspectives or gazes that, in my opinion, are very relevant in this work. "Brandon" as a net.art work, "Brandon" as a cyberfeminist work and "Brandon" as a polyphonic work, created and participated by a community of artists, with the cooperation of researchers, scientists, activists and users.

Also, though briefly, I would like to add to these approaches a minimum reflection on the implications of this piece of art in as much as work that is reconciled with the Institution-Art binomial. Presented as one the first net.art works that was commissioned by a museum in the late 1990s, we shouldn't forget that that was a time in history when net.art was holding a dialectical confrontation and discussion on the road that the Institution-Art played in the context of the Internet age. From the speculation about the democratization that many thought that the web would bring, allowing art to finally merge with daily life, suggesting that Internet would dissolve and delete the borders that separated the museum from the rest of the world, and that the screen would act as a fantasy framework; that is it was thought that all this would favor the democratization of art. However, the reality has been very different as well as complex since the online drift hasn't really prompted an artistic positioning in this sense, but far from it, the dissolution of the creative aspect in a universe full of ownable symbolic practices which are nowadays so typical of the Internet, as well as a certain lack of interest in net.art by most of the institutions and specially by the market, particularly from the beginning of this new century. Therefore, I believe that the commitment shown by the Guggenheim Museum is a remarkable and singular

case that is worth pointing out and value due both to the political interpretation that "Brandon" has in as much as art and activist project as well to the fact that is supported, promoted and preserved a net.art work, which a crucial action to understand that time period.

But let's move forward. Let's take a look at Shu Lea's work main entrance. This first image is powerful because it deals with the wounds that power creates upon people, taking as example the real story of Brandon, a transgender person who was murdered in the early 90s in the US and whose life will be used as link and conductive wire to provide a narrative whole that brings together the real and the fictitious, the documentary aspects with the possible ones, the hypertextual drift with theoretical reflection, the virtual components with the physical installation...

The iconic cover picture reflects and positions itself in a fully dynamic conception of the subject (a "may be" that flows and that never stops). This dynamic can illustrate the desire of all those people that are mistreated, humiliated and excluded from the social game by a power that is patriarchal, heteronormative, homophobic, transphobic and racist. A power that is obsessed with classifying what we are, based only on preconceptions. Consequently, I believe that the first question that "Brandon" raises is what can Internet do for the subject that shapes itself, when the body is put aside and postponed, and the relationship with other people is mediated and potentially made artificial by the screens?

As the dualism exploded and turned into something mobile, non existentialist, this first image (a child/adult body more or less male-like or female-like, constantly mutating)... so this first image has been Brandon's icon and in the late 90s became the symbol of what bodies were to become in Internet's framework.

This entrance image already demands an initial stance, relying on duality as something that can be problematic: image and text. In fact, each hyperlink will lead us and make us drift through this work in a different manner. On the one hand, we have a structured drift and on the other hand, a drift in the sense of a trip, with numerous unforeseen events and stops.

Thus, the text, which is static, will take us to an information page that acts as table of contents, credit page, and provides context and a summary (so there is a more logocentric approach). But that screen also acts as entrance door to the different interfaces that "Brandon" comprises, which have been turned here into static images: a navigation map, a cartography that provides guidelines to those who want to navigate the work without frights and surprises.

For instance, through Roadtrip's link, we come across a description of some of the episodes that we can navigate, making use of the more dynamic interface, and the list of all the icons that will act as road signs guiding us along this trip that awaits ahead of us. This signaling is conceived by Shu Lea as something that could be further extended to other pieces or episodes in the future.

"Brandon"'s work contains a dual entry system (text and image). With it, it seems that the author wants to make clear that this is a work "to be read" and valued in the full complexity that it embraces. We shouldn't forget that in the 90s, it was common to criticize the linearity of the net.art works. It was typical to see works of art lacking a context that will allow the viewer to set them in context, navigate them. However, in

Brandon's case, given the diversity and the fragmentation of the itineraries awaiting us, when we choose the visual and more dynamic entrance door, this alternative and more textual path will allow us to approach the work as a structure, letting us assess the various dimensions that it expands.

Just an additional comment. In as much as a net.art work, "Brandon" hosts and embraces some of the discussions that were characteristic of the 90s, when net-artists become key players in criticizing the way that Internet was being socialized and colonized. In this sense, they claimed their work as a necessary exercise of imagination and speculation of an online world that didn't want to repeat and mimic the offline patterns, a world rebelling against the symbolic oppression that characterizes all the media. New readings, new interpretations of the authorship concept which "Brandon" tackled, because it's a multi-artist, multi-institution, community-based piece or art; or new ideas on the need to avoid any limits to a self-definition that would stop in advance the creative power of this practice. All this was characteristic of the so called net.art, which can be considered an approach and a practice that turned the net and the net world into thoughtful and reflective entities.

But "Brandon" has specially been a symbol for cyberfeminism (cyberfeminism understood not only as a political practice, but also as an artistic expression, which developed at the same time as net.art did. In fact, cyberfeminism and net.art were both present in many discussions, such as those criticizing the self-definition system mentioned before). In fact, cyberfeminism confronted those definitions through rejection, antithesis and by claiming a being that is fluid and that can be appropriated by and owned by all the people. Along these lines, I think that cyberfeminism and its criticism to the existentialist self-definition managed to incorporate and managed to overcome the critics aimed at the person Brandon thanks to transsexual, lesbian and feminist groups. In this context, I would like to point out two features of cyberfeminism that are, in my opinion, clearly present in "Brandon":

The first would be digitalization as feminization and criticism of the hegemonic domination principle. Network positioning for a more egalitarian world.

Secondly, speculation about different approaches to post-body subjectivity. The scenario where material aspects are put aside by the screen and where the being turned out into a "may be", a priori free from the bodily limitations and handicaps, and from its meanings and oppression.

In a visual manner, both features are present in the first dynamic interface that we come across in our trip...

The first interface is "Bigdoll", very much in tune with the cover image, but devised in this case as a dynamic social body; a body made of fragments that constantly change, move around and disappear. Made as an ever changing elusive multiplicity and supporting a representation that follows and that in this precise moment differs from what we saw the previous or the following moment in time, it suggests an idea of identity construct that is subject to endless modifications, multiple and fragmented identity. Here we see that each fragment comes from a different iconography: partial pictures showing bodies, anatomical drawings, unfinished messages, prosthesis images. It is a scene that changes only upon our intervention. This positions the viewer as a subject that produces, not as a subject that observes, which is in line with Levinás's idea. He suggested that subjectivity always culminates in the person in front

of us, in the viewer, which implies that we can be many different beings depending on how we are being looked at by the person placed in front of us.

In a metamorphic manner, when we go through these images (without clicking on them), simply caressing them (as a gaze would do), this fragmented being or entity mutates and becomes a different one, similarly to what happens to a liquid when it is moved to a different container. This makes it difficult to have a tangible image that stays steady. Similarly, this reminds me of these puzzles or pieces games where you need an empty cell for the player to be able to move the rest in order to complete the puzzle. Here as well, sometimes you have one or more empty cells. It is worth pointing out that these empty cells, which are required for any change of awareness or for any positioning to happen... so these empty cells are linked by quite a few philosophers as an analogy of subjectivity.

This subtle game between words, bodily image, object and scheme go beyond the complex relationship that exists between the subject's presentation and representation in this purely visual and interactive interface. Here, the question could be as follows: What does it entail touching, watching other people? Any intervention modifies us in terms of our social skin, garments, tattoos, piercings, but it also changes us internally: the change, the anger, the stance, the pose, especially when we are forced to deceive and to pretend that we are someone that we are not. Among those choking messages, we notice that Bigdoll claims that "she is a he", that Teena Brandon is and wishes to be "Brandon Teena".

We will have the suspicion that if we go beyond brushing, if we really touch the screen, if we repeat this gesture, we will attain something, we will get somewhere from this "Bigdoll" interface. There is here a clear analogy with the repetition of sentences or gestures whose reiterations sets the foundations of an identity-based settlement... We insist and keep on insisting. We cycle several times through the whole screen and we get to the core, to the heart of "Brandon"'s dynamic navigation:

"Roadtrip" interface is one of the key interfaces of this work and was conceived as the core interface. Its design refers to the Nebraska road that is so prevalent in Brandon's life. It was devised as a path that can lead us, at its own pace, to any interface within this work. But it's also a path with obstacles along the way. You can see that its endless loop movement seems to allow us to patrol the road, but the truth is that we cannot bring it to a halt. Return trips that offer us an unexpected access to windows that question us and to the remaining interfaces that are awaiting behind the many icons that we come across, which act as road signs. Some of them will take us to other roads and paths, and some others won't.

In this road in constant movement, we find a triple analogy, at least to my understanding.

First, we have the analogy that links the Nebraska road with one of the key places in Brandon's death, as though it was pointing at an obsessive trajectory: up and down, searching for justice, which is represented here in a symbolic manner by those ghosts that dwell circularly in those places where they died until it is acknowledged that theirs was an unfair dead.

Secondly, we have the trip's metaphor as an identity drift: following paths made up of dashed lines and containing lots of interruptions and wake-up calls pushing the

traveler to leave the path. This drift reminds me of that idea of pilgrimage that the anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner had in mind when they replaced the line that joins origin and target destination (up and down, in this case) with an ellipse, meaning that when the target destination is very transforming for us, even if we follow the same path back to the origin, we will be inherently different when we get back.

The third interpretation of this road will point at the opportunity that such a drift offers, allowing us to come across all the people, and make Brandon and us have a conversation with mostly real characters linked to this tragic life story. That is, making the most of this road and use it as a conductive wire for possible narratives that enable to deconstruct and dismantle ideas about the way we experience our bodies and their meanings, ideas that let us imagine a different and hopefully a better future for their lives.

I propose to you that we begin our trip in the road sign that will take us to reality. Brandon (according to Google and to both the old records that are available about him and the new ones that are being produced) who has he, really? Who is he? Well, Brandon Teena, born Tina Brandon, was a transgender person. From an anatomical perspective he was a woman, but he lived like a man. For this reason, he was raped and murdered at the age of 21 in 1993 in Nebraska, a state of the US. These events were turned into a novel and later became a Hollywood feature film, while at the same time, "Brandon" became in the Internet realm an icon of cyberfeminist and transgender activism. This reality framework that the search engine provides adds to the power of the doubt about what we will be seeing next. If this was real, how real are those stories that we will come across in this fantasy framework?

The proposals made by those artists invited by Shu Lea are hyperlinked by means of text in this drift along the road trip. They propose fictitious possible lives that Brandon could have led when coming across documented characters that have certain similarities and shared suffering and marginalization situations with Brandon. The first four drifts are devised as dynamic episodes that are built upon the various characters and plots.

For example, through this window here, we access a possible story involving Herculine Barbin. Herculine Barbin was a French hermaphrodite born in the 19th century. Her memoire book is kept on the records of the Department of Public Hygiene of the French government and it was later published by Foucault. Barbin committed suicide in 1868 by suffocating herself with the fumes from a cold stove in a theatre. The narrative within suggests a love affair between Barbin and Brandon before their bodies raised (either dead or liberated by a spacecraft), speculating on the possibility that Brandon managed to get a penis transplant in another space, in another time period...

Among the various episodes hidden along the road, we come across an interface with remarkable value, "Moonplay". We can access it through these other road sign here.

For me, this interface is particularly interesting and I encourage you to explore it and to discover hidden corners that won't be visited during this navigation. From a conceptual point of view, it is a very suggestive setting for cyberfeminism. It is full of plural voices, fantasy, and it has a cyberpunk touch. It was a result of a collaboration with the following artists: Pat Cadigan, Lawrence Chua and Francesca da Rimini.

The way the text is built inside these stories was often seen in many net.art works from the 90s, where the power of language that had been specialized through hypertext on the one hand, and the opportunity to reify the language and turn it into image (through a simple and almost innocent game of size, color and fonts), all this gave added value and placed additional emphasis on the story by customizing a voice that yells or whispers.

Articulated in such a way with the aim to further explore the narrative fusion between fictitious, real and interactive game that the work suggests, this "Moonplay" interface stands from or diverges as escape lines from hyperlinks that are strategically located within the sentence "currently known as". It takes us to stories narrated by Cadigan, Chua and Da Rimini about various characters that can also be unfolded, continued and intervened.

The cyberfeminist aesthetic power can be found not only in its discourse and in the community creative practice, but also in its writing, which is poetic, free, and it has a cyberpunk touch, it is cyberpunk-like. In fact, inside the text, we discover references to other cyberfeminists such as the activist DollYoko and to ways of expressions that remind me of the manifests entitled *for the 21st century and also from the mutant vixen*, both by the VNS Matrix group. The constant analogies between bodies and machines, between binary nature of the digital code and the genetic code that so much inspired cyberfeminism by suggesting that the cultural dichotomic readings of the chromosome code composed x y (and its variations) would explode and lead to a diversity of possible identities based on the binary code (zeros and ones) and that it would open to all endless possible combinations.

Here, Cadigan writes things such as: *I insisted, now I was a different person.*
due to the generalized bodily game, the biological aspects didn't count anymore.
the inside,... it was like the first draft of Frankenstein's monster.

Also, Chua says: *Known as Mr. Monster. People look at me they way they should be looking, and then they look elsewhere (...). Maybe it has something to do with surgery. 21 years ago, I was born being a woman. When I was locked up in Rikers, I was a man. Now I am well beyond that. Now I'm an addict, addicted to theory.*

Da Rimini said: *She will be tormented by a past that is forever the future / become, become, always turn into something different / she becomes the river / she is the guy / and he is the ghost / (...) weeping code tears.*

(...) remembering that she is an orphan vixen, a ghost, forever a doll
(...) And always becoming somebody else

On the other hand, you can see that throughout the navigation, we are being constantly disturbed and they make us feel uncomfortable by means of small windows. These intrusive windows rely on an iconography that combines sexual and pharmacological aspects, reminding us that we have to take medication, that we are treatable and imperfect bodies, bodies that are subtle to modifications. Take 1, take 2, take 3...

These overlapping windows and which, depending on each specific browser settings can be visualized differently, talk about ways to transform the other person: medical and technological transformation of us as posthuman beings (technology and hormone

pill intake), transformation through subjugation and violation, a constant and repetitive reminder that a power interferes with what you are, with what you want to become and with the concept that the world has of an acceptable person. Such interferences make use of an interesting resource: repetition, repetition as the performative foundation of any given process of identity construction.

Let's go back to our road. Let's probe into other episodes or possible drifts. For instance, this road sign will allow us to meet Venus Extravaganza, a transgender person that took part in the documentary "Paris is burning" and who was killed in 1989 in a low class hotel in Manhattan. The scene suggests that Venus Extravaganza holds an online sex website where Brandon logs in and starts a chat.

On this other drift, through a different road sign, we are introduced to Jack Bee Garland, also known as "Babe Bean". He was anatomically a woman when she was born in 1869 and was named Elvira Mugarietta, daughter of the first Mexican consul based in San Francisco. Babe Bean dressed as a man and led a peculiar life. He lived in a floating house in California during the 80s. For many years, he refused to speak and communicated only by writing. In this social environment, people were very fond of him. He devoted his life to small charity actions. His female anatomy was only unveiled after his death in 1933.

The scenario of these episodes refers to a hypnotic spell that the husband of Babe Bean threw to him while threatening him not to cancel it until he dressed as a woman. To put the encounter between Brandon and Babe Bean into context, Shu Lea relies on Lacan's essay entitled "On a question preliminary to any possible treatment of psychosis", which enables her to bring the two characters together in the same crisis center.

Let's go back to our road, the road that constantly reminds us of the crime scene and place and links it to all the possible lives and narratives. Let's go adrift to "Brandon"'s "Panopticon" interface, it is one of the interfaces that I personally am most interested in.

For it to be correctly visualized, we shouldn't be in full screen mode. It is set as a circular panopticon flanked by two columns. The structure will take us to many different cells that can be zoomed in. This interface reminds me of those eyes that Focault mentioned, eyes that are built by an endless superposition of layers. At least, that is my perception, because it is built upon several reflective layers that will be listed as follows:

1st: We have a clear instrumental and conceptual reference to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon (from the 18th century), which is a prevalent work in Focault's writings. In fact, the panopticon has been a symbol, not only for a prison, but also for ocular centrism and the control of the scene and of what is being looked at as a power exerted upon people and bodies, specially those bodies that are sick, untamable or despicable. Let's not forget that quite a few transgender people ended up locked up in mental institutions or in prison, simply because they were different from the rest, from the tamed and artificialized homogeneity that complies with dichotomic and heteronormative principals (two genders, two sexes), in accordance with the

patriarchal principal of women subjugation and to their use of science and religion to consolidate those foundations of power.

Bentham's panopticon formally consisted of a central eye that dominated the whole architecture's space and that may be possible to see without being seen and to watch those people that were locked up in their cells. It was set up as a space organized into hierarchy levels and split up into compartments from those beings that were controlled and, in essence, turned into objects. This "Brandon"'s interface refers to the panopticon as being a close circuit of cells that holds prisoners and sexually deviant people. These cells act as hospital wards, prison cells and temporary spaces made for surveillance.

From a formal and a conceptual point of view, Shu Lea Cheang's panopticon seems to me to be tightly linked with her anatomical theatre. I will come back later to this point.

In this panopticon, the suggestions made by the scenes and the storytelling are yet again utterly brilliant and are the result of an excellent research work. In this sense, we find visual and theoretical references to various subprojects or scripts that describe scenes about body control through scopic surveillance instruments. Gaze is overtaken and overwhelmed by the interference of doctors, psychologists, moralists, authorities, prison officers and the power embodiments that speculate and decide on how to modify the bodies of those arrested subjects. For instance:

Cell 1 contains a fragment of an apparently medical conversation about the case of a hermaphrodite they had been following up for the past two years. This person had female genital organs, but male traits and behavior. They highlight his outstanding intelligence and they tackle the fact that the appendix-clitoris causes him great discomfort. Consequently, he has to wear underwear all the time to prevent the other kids from seeing his genitals. Besides all this, he's in the lavish habit of masturbating, probably due to the non-conformity with who he is. The subject that speaks asks: "Would you advise its removal?"...

Cell 2. Cell 2 portrays anonymous prisoners. The text recounts: "In 1907, the governor of Indiana passed a law that said that sterilization was compulsory for any rapist or confirmed idiot criminal that had been sentenced by the corresponding doctors as being unable to improve by any means. In this context, the work suggests the words uttered by Dr. Lydston in 1906, who claimed that the criminal actions of the non-eligible people are one of the key components or triggers of the diseases of the social body, and that therefore these actions should be punished or criminalized.

Cell 3 refers to a change in US immigration policies that occurred in the 1950s. They changed the legal definition of homosexuality turning it into a medical definition, that is, homosexuality became a pathology. That year's Immigration and Nationality Act specified that "foreigners that have a psychopathic personality should be banned from entering the United States".

Cell 4 mentions the fact that at the end of the 1950s, the US Center for Research and Addiction, the Public Healthcare Service of Lexington, Kentucky and Dr. Hans Isbell carried out a series of experiments with drugs in patients treated as prison inmates or vice versa, that is, inmates treated as patients. 90% of the LSD based experiments were carried out in black men

(regarding this stop within the project, Shu Lea mentions that in 1998, she visited the Koepel Arnhem prison, built under the panopticon's influence).

The walk through the various cells can be very stimulating at a documentary and critical level, but it can also be moving or terrifying due to the harsh stories that are being told.

For instance, cell 7 shows hospital beds and tells the story of the study of a substance devised in the US to suppress sexual desire, that is, some sort of chemical castration. It was argued that the initial intention was to use it to treat a bisexual transvestite patient who was thought to have an incestuous sexual activity with his very son.

Cell 8 mentions a newspaper article published in 1998 about a doubly imprisoned man. He was a prisoner in a woman's body and then he was a prisoner in a women penitentiary.

In cell 9 we find one of the most emblematic cases, very much related to today's technological life. It is about Alan Turing, who was punished due to him being homosexual and was sentenced to choose between a prison sentence or chemical castration.

In cell 10 it is worth listening to the inmate's voice. He recounts the confession of a castrated sexual offender who claims that he wants to find a good woman to make her his wife because love differs from sex.

Cells such as cell 11 talk about experiments carried out in gay people using androgen-like substances that had been supplied by pharma companies, either as a result of an imposition by court orders or by using somebody's legal guardianship. These experiments were a complete fail.

In cell 12 we can hear again the inmate's voice. He recalls his childhood, how he was beaten before and after a gang rape that turned him into a eunuch.

Similarly to what happens in other areas of "Brandon"'s polyphonic work, this section was the result of a collaboration with researchers. In this case, it was Beth Strykerand and Jason Livingston who took part in this project's information and data gathering phase.

Lastly, from our road, we can get into the "Anatomical Theatre".

It is the interface that has tried the most to expand into the physical and social realm through installations and quite a few discussion and conversation projects around "Brandon", supported by life events that brought together experts from different fields of science, law, medicine and theory and which also included open spaces so as to establish an online conversation flow. One of the most emblematic physical contexts is the one located at the Society for Old and New Media in Amsterdam. It is a centre lab that explores technology in the public space.

What is most striking about this interface is how Shu Lea manages to invert the panopticon's eye that sees everything as a closed circuit and turns it into an expositive scenario made of concentric circles (loaded with iconographic meaning) that is open to any eye that wishes to take a look. It is a scenario that reminds me of the public spaces where in the 17th century, corpses from criminals that had been executed were

dissected and anatomy lectures were given for the medical society and the rest of the audience. In this case, both the physical stage and the web acted as fully public and participatory interfaces. From an aesthetic perspective, the on/offline interface was inspired by and relied on the Anatomical Theatre drawings made by Jonas Zeuner in 1773. The interface and also the installation reflect upon different show and audience levels in some sort of lecture hall or amphitheatre.

For one year (between 1998 and 1999), and in parallel with the online project, three events were staged in different offline contexts:

The first one was an open forum resulting from the collaboration of the Waag Society, Amsterdam and the Guggenheim Museum Soho, in New York.

An online forum on the topic of digital gender, social body and intervened body was the second of these events

An third, an odd Virtual Court that tackled the idea of crime as a Net Show.

In this web, you can see several references and aesthetic drifts about these events.

In this page, which has more document-like approach, we find information on two of the main installations and online forums.

First, the one that took place in 1998 in New York and Amsterdam, which focused on the discussion about social body and gender in Internet. It was an invitation to reflect upon the surgical procedure and textual interventions within the theory and the construction of the social bodies. Prominent cultural critics, researchers specialized in queer studies, gender or biotech took part in this event. The audience was also invited to participate in online conversations.

The second of these forums was the May 1999 forum, which relied on the idea of crime and punishment as shows that are also present in the web. The participants, in their texts (which are available online), questioned themselves about the complex relationships between technology and the bodies, be it a digital technology, surgical ones and so forth. They discuss violence and body, attacks and pain, artifacts and the techniques for manipulation and social significance of bodies and of sexes.

In those texts, we also come across questions that rely on this project and on Brandon's "life". For example, why nowadays do we take into account "the techno-social body". We shouldn't forget that after his murder and death, Brandon became a true symbol, like one of those martyrs that receives a lot of media attention. Brandon became an image, bringing together all the political claims made by people that hold similarities with Brandon or by those who were not brave enough to rescue him. This symbolic value acts as shock treatment for our conscience. In this sense, Brandon led to profound discussions between transsexual, lesbian and feminist movements.

In fact, for many transsexual and transgender people, Brandon was some sort of heroic figure who lived according to what he wanted and wished to be and who didn't submit to the limitations imposed by his genitalia. Brandon suffered the harsh jokes, the insults, rape and death by a group of guys who couldn't stand the difference and the affront to the normative gender codes that this society promotes, that is, that people with vaginas have to live like women and those with a penis have to live like men.

For the feminist and the lesbian community, the fact that Brandon was biologically a woman added a feminist public denunciation component to the subjugation and the appropriation by men of the female body. This aspect emphasizes the lesbian interpretation, the fact that Brandon was able to be a woman who loved women and who before living in a threatening and homophobic context, he decided to live like a man, pointing at everyday violence and victimization suffered by women. On the other hand, Brandon also achieved such an impeccable manliness for his girlfriends that it challenged the hegemonic and established framework with other approaches to manliness that maybe would please many women and would frighten quite a few men.

Misogyny, homophobia and transphobia all came together in Brandon's life. I think one of the most relevant contributions of Shu Lea's work is speculating and creating the necessary conditions for reflections about these issues, precisely there where the body stops being a sentence and becomes code, artifice, representation and facticity on the screen.

In this sense, I think "Brandon" cannot be considered to be simply a net.art work, but a complex speculative and narrative project that explores the fusion between gender and cyber-body, both online and offline. It is also a wonderful entry point to the end of a century that witnesses several levels of dialogue between power, body, technology and identity, between art and life, in a society that is irreversibly connected.

I will finish by saying that this tour I have suggested was thought as a motivational walk, as an invitation for you to dwell and analyze this work of art based on what has been said about it or, if you have the chance, by navigating it from your computer or device, in your own bedroom and in your own time, making the most of what net.art offers, that is, the possibility to take it with you, to reside in it during our daily lives, and one of cyberfeminism's greatest powers is taking the question about equality of people to those places where we live in an increasingly normalized manner with the net and with technology. Thank you very much.

Elena Tóxica: Thank you very much, Remedios. Perhaps Shu Lea wants to say something before starting the questions.

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, sure. Thank you, Elena. Thank you Elena and Remedios for navigating the public navigation. Of course, it's quite a difficult work to navigate through, I think we probably got through half way throughout this one hour, but congratulations. You did go through the whole Roadtrip somehow.

Remedios Zafra: The Nebraska road is full of hidden places and I encourage you to look for them. For someone who is devoted to theory and writing, the problem is that this road never stops and we were limited by time, so that's why we couldn't navigate the whole work of art and I decided to do all the basic stops and the ones that suggested most. So we have navigated through a first, second and third level, and what it's missing is navigating down to a fourth level of each one of the episodes, each one of the cells and hyperlinks contained in the panopticon and also those containing the anatomical theatre, so...

Elena Tóxica: Let's start the debate. The first question is for Shu Lea. Brandon's death, when it happened at the end of the 1990s, brought a division that split the

LGBT community, who didn't see him as a member because surgery was really his last option. This community saw him as a homophobic lesbian, because Brandon separated himself completely from that identity. Also, feminism and the queer academy debated intersectional aspects, which were not taken into account during the trial against the perpetrators of the homicide, they were not considered aggravating circumstances. The aggravating circumstance would be the fact that Brandon was not raped as a woman but as a FTM transgender person. In this case, his rape was a patriarchal corrective measure with the aim of setting the established order of things, always from a true man's will, i.e. the rapist. I wanted to ask Shu Lea, how did all these debates and conflicts inside the LGTB community –which occurred during her production of Brandon, a few years after Brandon Teena's death, and which at the beginning prevented a real support to the case- _transcended to forums established by the communities? Were these debates taken into account? Does the work aim to find a common ground, a bond within the LTGB community facing an attack or on the contrary, did it want to establish reference aspects regarding the construction of a queer identity?

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, OK, I'll try to explain. Actually, during the work research period in 1998 I was pretty much based in San Francisco and also in Amsterdam. Both cities have a huge transgender and transsexual community. Around 1998, there was also quite a lot of debate for the trans community in terms of the crossing over, you know, if you can really cross over. Two of my major advisors for the piece, actually one is a female to male person, Jones, and another advisor is a male to female transsexual person, Susan Stryker. So of course I also filmed certain surgery of female to male and I followed the trip with Susan Stryker to Mexico to try to get a trans surgery. So throughout the whole project I was very much deep into the debate at a time I think there was quite a division in terms of the trans-politics in a way. I would say that there was a lot of trans-politics particularly at that time and I think it continues to go on until today.

Participant 1: I would like to make a question. What happened with the work of art, with the net.art work of art once it was purchased by the Guggenheim Museum? What did it happen to this work of art?

Shu Lea Cheang: Is it a question for me? It was actually not purchased by the Guggenheim Museum. It actually was commissioned by the museum. The project, in the course of one year of production, development and production... It was designed to be developed during a whole one year time. There's many different interfaces going on, many different public event presentations going on, including the virtual trial at panopticon... at the theatre anatomicum in Amsterdam. At the end, the museum told me to work with the many different institutions including the Waag Society in Amsterdam, the Banff Center for the Media Arts in Canada, the Civic Art Institution at Harvard University... many forming one into this production. At the end, it was really not an actual purchase. The Museum didn't pay my any money for the purchase. I think they paid one dollar to say the truth, because it became a symbolic purchase because in a way the collection is about how the museum helped to produce this work in terms of a whole one year of production... But at the end there was no actual purchase from the museum, let's put it that way. But in the collection, in the beginning and also during the whole collection period, we actually had a lot of server trouble including the sponsor's server got shut down. We had to move to the Museum and it was the Museum who actually secured a server to host the project. It went through

many, many changes and the project actually got shut down a couple of times for long periods of time, so a lot of researchers, a lot of students who wanted to access the site were having a lot of trouble throughout the piece.

Elena Tóxica: I would like to add that the access to this work of art was open until very recently. You had to have an access code, it's not as though you had to pay a ticket to access the work of art, but you needed a code to access the work. We don't know whether due to the research or to the interest it has raised, now the web is completely open and anybody can access it from they own computer and you can navigate through the work piece.

Shu Lea Cheang: Let me just clarify this part about not having been able to access it. The piece has gone through two times of different restoration and actually at the moment, this year, the piece will go through another code analysis by some code programmers in New York City, mainly because there were several times of a server change and every time that the server got changed to another server, the code sometimes got lost so you always need a lot of renovation to preserve a web site as such. The Museum was quite concerned, because at some point, the work had a lot of code problems, the programming went quite wrong because, as Remedio's was mentioning, the different navigation program codes have changed throughout the years. So finally I think we went through several phases where they tried to restore the programming codes for the work and at the end... I think at the moment, the Museum still feels that certain parts of the code aren't still modified correctly, but we decided to release the work anyway, so... It wasn't in the purpose of trying to limit the access, but it was just that the piece was not in the best order.

Participant 2: I wanted to ask on the aesthetics of this work of art. She has mentioned images that reference the 90s, the slowness of the navigation, I don't know if this has to do with the 90s's aesthetics, but there are some images that look more contemporary and that have nothing to do about what was fashionable in the 90s. I would like you to explain how you have made decisions about the aesthetics of this work of art.

Shu Lea Cheang: Actually, when I first conceived the project, I already decided it would be a project with multiple authors, multiple artists and multiple institutions. My purpose was first to involve the Guggenheim to decide to mount it. This would be their first Internet art commission, and thanks to the name of the Guggenheim I was also able to get many other institutions to assist with this project. Now, with the aesthetic, the way I conceive the project, I do have different interfaces laid out, but through the one-year period time, many artists joined the project, many artists helped design the piece. Of course, I think there is an understanding between me and the artists about how the work should be perceived, in terms on having a kind of coherent aesthetic style. I want to particularly point out that the work and actually all the interfaces are designed so that we expand the work. I mean, these days, if I say: "Let's get more road signs, more icons on the trip", we can invite more episodes, we can invite more artists to join in and create their own episodes. The panopticon is the same. I think one time I tried to do an open call to ask artists if they wanted to be in prison or check into the hospital, into the clinic in the panopticon. In that way, all these interfaces are open doors to invite artists to join. Of course, in the end, me as the one who conceived the whole project, throughout the process, of course I invited people that I really know can contribute certain things, certain aesthetics, certain

codes to the project also.

Participant 3: In other works that you have carried out, aside from what we see on the web, you have presentations, where we have the body. You said before that the Brandon's presentations were done in this theatre anatomicum in Amsterdam, in these presentations, did you have some sort of performance? Can you tell us how these performances were, the performances that were held in this anatomical theatre presentations, this concept of the theatre, of the stage, of a lecture hall all brought together?

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, because the theatre anatomicum at the Waag Society still exists, from the 17th century. The theatre still exists in the Waag Society at the Central Station in Amsterdam, in the center. I got a residency with the Waag Society at the time because I totally fell in love with the Theatre Anatomicum, and through the Theatre Anatomicum I also realized that in the Netherlands, there's also a panopticon prison cell that exists in Aachen. So I also did my research in an actual panopticon prison in the Netherlands. In the Theatre Anatomicum I was able to do the installation and also at a time when the installation involved making a streaming... of course at the time it was very difficult, we were not doing video streaming, but more like a frame by frame, sending the image between New York and the Guggenheim Museum and the Theatre Anatomicum in Amsterdam. This was for the opening, when we did that. Later I did the virtual court as an installation, also at the Theatre Anatomicum, which we actually had, I think 10 virtual court sessions with virtual jurors. Again, I think that today you probably didn't go through this part of the navigation because it's hard to get to also, it's hard to get to the virtual court. But on the virtual court, we have a lot of cases and a lot of script to reach, hopefully maybe at home you can get to the actual virtual court.

Elena Tóxica: I have a second question. A year ago, the interview that we had, you explained that throughout the years you had learnt to go from big large-scale productions with large budgets to more modest productions, guerilla-style, with lower budgets. Apparently, Brandon was one of the first ones. On the other hand, we also talked about the differences and the coincidences that you had with the Venus Matrix manifest and the idea of associating the nomadic style of life with hacker codes, and your idea of relating talking about how to be in the Internet, how you can be there creating and facing the challenge to sabotage the big daddy mainframe in line with the cyberfeminism discourse. And this cyberfeminism speech, we also talked about this censorship that your work of arts have suffered throughout the years. In this sense, I want to ask you about how the Brandon production was. Did you feel free enough to create it or were you subjected to pressure or censorship by any of the participating institutions? How do you see this paradox, that big institutions such as the Guggenheim Museum, which is a symbol of the cultural patriarchy, have tried to absorb the political load of your Brandon work of art? How does this link come to life between you and Guggenheim Museum? Do you think that it's possible, even today, or that due to your way of producing works of art, you have moved to more guerrilla-based works of art, or ways of producing works of art?

Shu Lea Cheang: Just to say, as far as my artistic career, or me being an artist, I was very fortunate because my first art work, the installation called Color Schemes, was first presented in the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Because of this, I didn't go through the gallery, I was never really a gallery artist, but I went

directly to the museum. After this, with the Internet arrival, we are talking about net.art in the 90s, I was quite early on to proclaim myself that I wanted to move to cyberspace, that is to say, I would take cyberspace as my home, I would leave my physical body and migrate myself to the cyberspace. By doing so, I decide to take up the museum as the institution that I can infiltrate, and I have tried to infiltrate into many museum spaces, and in the cyber era, the server space is the context realm in a way. So I have done a few projects that I intentionally wanted to use the museums' cyberspace to produce the work. At the moment, now I have my own private sponsored cyberspace, but in the beginning I took the concept that I wanted to move into the museum via the cyberspace, via the server space. The way that Brandon was conceived as a one year piece that is constantly developing and constantly uploading, that all the content is under my control, there was no way for the museum to preview the work in a way. So I think I have a very trusting curator, at the time it was John and Mathew, and I communicated with the curators. Once we decided the way that the project would go, there was no time that the work was fixed. It's not like a painting or a photograph, or an installation that is fixed. It was constantly happening on the web. I think I have so many different body parts floating in this web site, but for sure, in other projects I got censored because of showing penis or having real sex, that kind of things, but for this particular work, there was no way that any censorship could happen because the work also takes on many different interfaces, and somehow the design of the interface, of course intentionally from my part, is really difficult to navigate. As Remedios was saying, you actually have to go through the road trip, and you have to find your way into the work, there are so many branches that you could be taken here and there, and it was really intentionally done this way. It was not a painting or a photo that you could clearly deny your access to it.

Participant 4: Thank you very much for all this information. I have a question about this. You said that you have collected a lot of information, that you activate and generate more and more information, and that you also want the people who navigate the work of art to produce information, and not only by navigating through the work, but you also captured the way we navigate, so I was wondering to myself, have you developed a certain way of extracting the information that the people navigating your work provides you? How are you collecting all this information? Is there a specific action of a political or an artistic nature on what you can do with all this information that you are collecting from the different viewers and from the different people that have navigated through your work, the way they have navigated and the different interfaces they have gone through and the order? Are you going to be doing something with this information that you have collected?

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, actually I have to say this year, the Guggenheim Museum just contacted me and they are working with the students of New York University to study the content of this project, because at the same time I have a lot of research materials done, not only on the transgender and transsexual people issues, but at the same time, I think you have to go back to the piece, it's really a lot about the actual and virtual space. Particularly in the 90s, the identity issues, the way we take on avatars, different identities, and how in really life, when we start crossing the border of identity, we may get into trouble and in the virtual space, we are supposed to be freer to go around and take up different identities. Surely, several interfaces like the court cases, when we conduct the court cases, I don't know if you know that in the Moonplay interface, there's actually a check box function that allows people to make contributions in the net. So there's many different ways of entry into the piece that are viewer-interactive.

Participant 5: I would like to ask you if in your current work, you're using the deep web, this Internet that is not the usual channel, but an anonymous one. How can you work in there regarding gender, when visitors are anonymous? There you can find activism people being sheltered and taken on, have you investigated a bit about this realm of the deep web?

Shu Lea Cheang: Which big web? I don't understand in this reference which big web we're talking about.

Participant 5: Yes, the deep web. Since it is an anonymous and invisible Internet, what type of transgender or feminist activism can you develop in this realm that is characterized by anonymity?

Remedios Zafra: I think in the 90s, there was a clear link between activism, feminism and art, and now the bond is not so tight, the link with art is not so tight, but we can still find... In my opinion, there is a difference between the way feminism worked with art in the 90s and the way feminism and art are linked today. I think from the year 2000 and 2002, we have seen many different groups emerge that are not devoted to the artistic context, but that also follow the line of the deep Internet, and one of these names is... We are carrying out an experiment on transgender and technology and they are working on the idea of feminism and safety, and this safe Internet or deep Internet I think it follows along the same lines.

Elena Tóxica: Would you like to add something for the audience?

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, one of the things that I want to say, because particularly this question is very good and I would invite you to come to the next event that I will be doing in Madrid with a collective that I started with Maite and Lucía (one of them is living in Madrid and one in Barcelona). We started a women's live performance group called LaptopsRus and for the past three years we have been working on CrisisRUs and we are coming to Intermediae Matadero on February 26th to 29th to talk about Home Economics and in this week's workshop and conference we will deal with a lot of net.working feminism issues, extending to other issues, including the issues of refugees, the new immigrants in new countries. I have to say that I don't have much hope on the Internet at the moment, I think it has been very much occupied by the big corporations with the whole data surveillance. I am wanting to get out of this deep web if there is one, and I'm entering my own bionet period. I have decided to build the Internet inside the body, inside the human body, so I have already found some ways out of the Internet. Also to understand all my work, I collaborate with many different people and I will use different collectives, different groups collaborating and starting different collectives using different platforms to pursue the work which is of course very much involved with activism in a very different sense. In the 1980s, in New York, I was very much involved with a certain activism including the AIDS issue, the racism issues, but at the moment I think we will have shifted the grounds of activism. Many people say that activism is not fought on the streets anymore, we have shifted the whole battleground into a different realm, and it's something for us to keep inventing new strategies for any kind of activist activity that we want to be engaged in.

Elena Tóxica: Thank you very much for being patient. We thank you very much for your patience. In a few weeks, the two videos will be available online, a transcript of all the text in Spanish and in English in www.toxiclesbian.org. And see you in a little

bit, Shu Lea. See you in a few days time.

Shu Lea Cheang: Yes, for sure. Thank you so much to you and Elena, and the translator. Thank you so much. Fantastic. It was a very good session for me.

Remedios Zafra: I also want to thank Shu Lea for this schizophrenia that raises from this interaction between my writings, your interfaces... I would like to say two things. Some people have tried to enter the work of art and were not able to, and I think we should ask the Guggenheim Museum to keep this work of art alive for all the people that are interested to be able to access.

Elena Tóxica: Well, we will convey the wish or the desire of the audience to the Guggenheim Museum. Thank you.

Shu Lea Cheang: Thank you very much. Thank you so much everybody.