

ARTEFACTS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Adérito Fernandes-Marcos

CIAC-Research Center for Arts
and Communication; INESC-TEC;
Aberta University
Lisbon, Portugal

aderito.marcos@uab.pt

Marcos L. Mucheroni

Arts and Communication School,
São Paulo University, Brasil;
CIAC-Research Center for Arts and
Communication, Aberta
University, Lisbon, Portugal

mmucheroni@ciac.uab.pt

We are living in the age of the post personal computer. Personal computers or, for instance, our smartphones have been gradually transformed and multiplied into single nodes of a global web, embracing billions of other computers / devices scattered around the globe, where each node can be instantiated in the form of various devices ubiquitously accessible through a cloud of data and connections, a kind of protective sky that safeguards private and public data and connections where a significant part of the population connects to communicate, work and socialize in growing networks and subgroups of groups of interest, evolving to what has been designated as the information and knowledge society [1].

Already in the 1960s, when the idea of computer networks was only born in restricted academic and military environments, it was possible to perceive a change in communication and language present in the literature ranging from Heidegger's [2] technique vision to the idea of Marshall McLuhan's global village, both looking especially at radio and TV [3]. The essential discussion that these two authors bring is the distance between the "natural" and the "technical", in the digital case, the use of these digital media or means that act as accelerators of the technology. In the case of nature, it depends on the *poiesis*, and in the case of self auto-reduction autopoiesis (terms of Maturana and Varela applied to biology) can not be understood only as an operation to doing, for what appears in Heidegger's thought to be unveiled (from the Greek *Aletheia*), it is revealed by means of technique and not one more natural process. Hence McLuhan's idea "the medium is the message," that is to say, the *poiesis* was profoundly alternated by a medium, a technique no longer being a "natural" process, but is still ontological and concerned with Being [4]. So much so that, on the plane of natural happening, what comes to appear depends on nature as *poiesis*, in this case the natural self-production that could not be understood as an operation of doing. The difference is that when something is

technically produced, letting it appear occurs through technique, not through a natural process, but there is a cultural change through the influence of the language of the medium.

Marshall McLuhan in his two major works *Understand Media* (1974) and *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), studies three cultures dependent on the environment: the oral culture in which the oral word is fundamental for its understanding and based on this many tribal contemporary societies could have been studied, their typographic and visual culture (Gutenberg's galaxy) that definitively influenced modernity, and already in its time, the emergence of electronic culture.

Flusser launches the classic question of the tree that falls in the forest: "If a tree falls into virtual space, and there is no one online, does it generate a warning message?" In the introduction to his book, the preacher Rafael Cardoso recalls that "Flusser devoted much of his enormous power of reflection to images and artefacts, laying the foundations for a legitimate philosophy of design and communication." (p.10). [5]. Although Flusser separates here images of artefacts, which conceptually we do not separate since the images are original artefacts that comes from the rock paintings, what we call here native cultures, that is, the basic formation of many cultures that must be analysed from its oral base where eschatological elements are generated or if we prefer cosmological, which are essential to understand the symbology of a culture. This is true for digital art and culture, we must understand the structural and symbolic elements of digital culture, if it is a fact that not everyone is included in the digital world, the popularization of mobile phones and other gadgets that are emerging as cell phones and digital bracelets, applications for the most diverse services, the inclusion process is (and will be) fast.

Thus, in order to make a deep reflection between art production and the unveiling, this is to reveal what is art in this cultural change that we are living nowadays, it is necessary to

establish the relation between poiesis and *alethéia*, the latter understood in Heidegger as a different stage of truth, more linked to idea of memory (*lethe* - forgetting), to bring to the fore the essential foundations of culture that are sometimes forgotten, and which must always be analysed critically and unveiled.

With the popularization of the Web in the new millennium, there was a need to increase semantic structures to organize the chaos of information dissemination by the increase of content producers, along with the possibilities of introducing millions of people into the world of art, who have not yet come across photos, drawings and even complex artefacts made by unknown authors and for the more complex artifacts.

Nowadays, digital media became a fundamental part of the information society construction, especially considering the devices, infrastructure and computer technology that allow the generation (capture / synthesize), transformation, presentation or display and the communication of the information in digital format (binary base coding). Digital media, combined with information and communication technologies that enable its processing and control, strongly influence today, for example, how we nowadays understand, create and consume art and culture, especially when embodied in digital/computer artefacts that are presented to us from informational/communicational spaces, inviting us to interaction and involvement [1].

Marshal McLuhan wrote as early as the 1960s in the prologue to the Gutenberg Galaxy: "The Electronic Age [now digital], which follows the typographic and mechanical era of the last five hundred years, confronts us with new forms and new structures of human interdependence". On the other hand, the fact that the electronic media, especially the audiovisual media, have addressed the spectator's multiple sensibility directly and has a plea for sensorial integration, triggers a multidimensional and polymorphic apprehension, in a word that allows us to restore the expressive richness of oral communication, "that is, it is not a separation of the three galaxies, but a complex polymorphic integration".

However, if we look at the nature of digital art we find that it suffers from influences that run through the entire twentieth century, going back to the decade 10 and the Dada movement, not to forget the Surrealism as a post-surrealism when Salvador Dali understands the digital and somewhat quantumic revolution in his paintings: *Christus Hypercubus*, *The Persistence of Memory* (see the distortion of clocks as a new view of time and being) and *Lincoln in Dalivision* where the figure appears pixelated as if it were digital.

Byung-Chull Han in his works "The Salvation of the Beautiful" (2015) [6] and "Aroma do Tempo" (2016) [7] seeks to save the idea of beauty and contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) by putting it to the contemporary stress of *Vita Activa*, in "The Society of Fatigue" (2010) [14] that emptied the being and led humanity to anguish, consumerism and an egocentrism unprecedented in history.

Chull-Han (2015) also establishes the relation with the new media, where through the work *Mythologies* (1957) of Roland Barthes [9], reminiscent of the tactile model of the car *Citröen*,

that in the interactivity of the media: the talt is the most demystifying of the senses, while the visions [today the realities; virtual, augmented and mixed] the most magical. To mention the artists Dada, Marcel Duchamp or László Moholy-Nagy, who developed the concepts of virtuality, volatility or introduced the use of other senses, such as touch or smell, in their pieces.

The role of the active spectator / performer, who ceases to be a simple observer to assume as an observer-actor-intervener, that interacting, can alter the artistic artefact itself and its context of fruition, concepts that are dear to the current digital art / computer art *melieu*, are characteristics already intensely explored by Dada artists and subsequent movements, in a different way also links to this, the new idea of public: *The Emancipated Spectator* and *The Future of Image* (2003) by Jacques Rancière [10].

Analyzing the work of the painter Gaughin the Peasants, Rancière redefines Hegel's idea of autonomy that separates subject from object by the idea of autonomization, we dare to use a new category of ontic significance of the artefact, for the author is the autonomization: "one of these elements, the 'routing of the threads of representation' that bound them to the reproduction of a repetitive way of life. It is the substitution of these objects for the light of their appearance. From that point on, what happens is an epiphany of the visible, an autonomy of the pictorial presence. "(Rancière, 2003: 87), an apparition here is perfectly compatible with Heidegger's "clearing", hence ontic [10].

John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen developed the concepts of control based on instructions or controlled randomness to generate phrases and musical compositions. Other artists and pioneering theorists such as Grahame Weinbren, Nam June Paik, Michael A. Noll, John Whitney, Vera Molnar or Charles Csuri, to name just a few, developed the concept of random access in the generation of computer synthesized audio and images. Ray Ascott and Lev Manovich more recently theorized about the interactivity and the role of communicational averages in the process of digital creation and digital, computational and interactive art in general. These characteristics define transversally the art and the digital culture and all its variants and specializations such as the digital medium-art, establishing in itself the vectors of development of an aesthetics of the digital means [11] [12].

The digital art and culture are substantiated in the social interaction, of the manifestation of the individual and collective imaginary, through the artefacts, which coexist in a common informational and communicational space supported in the digital media and infrastructures. These artefacts represent the greatest expression of our common imaginary within a contemporaneity that is mixed up with the information society.

Routio presents the science of artefacts, or *arteology*, an attempt to establish a theory of the artefacts, using the combination of "ars" from Latin (art, technique) and the Greek "logos" (work, knowledge). Arteology studies the semiotics of artefacts, of any nature, their functionality and usability, beauty, message and surroundings, processes of investigation and

categorization, among others. Thus, it proposes the comparative study of several artefacts in the sense of helping to understand the activity inherent in their production, their creation processes and their creators. Routio analysed in detail aspects such as the difference of expectations and as such may be at the origin in the difference of experiences that a certain artefact can mediate [13]:

... If the observer of a work of art has an expectation, his impression of the work seldom corresponds to the expectation exactly. The difference can be called a difference of expectations. If this difference is too small, the result will be that the work gives a trivial impression. If, however, the difference is too large, the work of art may remain totally incomprehensible. Only when a work of art differs from the expectations to a suitable degree, is the aesthetic impression positive ([13], pg.355).

Artefacts of the digital culture and art are digital or computer-based in essence. They aim at enhancing meaningful experiences to the observer/user/enjoyer alone or in groups. In their most striking essence, these artefacts are not only objects to be passively appreciated, but bring virtual characteristics, eventually immersive, boosting interaction, leading the user-enjoyer to embark on a journey of aesthetic contemplation of a polysemic nature. A meaningful experience occurs when the subject classifies it as relevant and rewarding, embracing various kinds of experiences (aesthetic-contemplative, educational, playful, entertaining, historical, social, etc.) [1].

Digital and computer artefacts constitute an intrinsic constructing block of the today's information and communication society. They comprise their own specific aesthetics characterised by facets of the digital world itself in its

multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary nature. These artefacts are inseparable from contemporaneity.

REFERENCES

- [1] Fernandes-Marcos, Adérito - Computer artefact: the crucial element in artistic practice in digital art and culture. "Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais". [Em linha]. ISSN 2183-0886. Vol. 3, n. 2 (2017), p. 149-166
- [2] Heidegger, Martin. (2007) A questão da técnica. Disponível em: scientiæ studia, São Paulo, v. 5, n. 3, p. 375-98, acedido em: setembro de 2016.
- [3] McLuhan, Marshall. (1974). *Understanding Media*. [S.L.]: Editora Pensamento - Cultrix.
- [4] McLuhan, Marshall. (1962) *A galáxia de Gutenberg*. São Paulo: Nacional.
- [5] Flusser, Vilém (2017) *O mundo codificado: por uma filosofia do design*. São Paulo: Ubu editora.
- [6] Flusser, Vilém (2017) *O mundo codificado: por uma filosofia do design*. São Paulo: Ubu editora.
- [7] Han, Byung-Chul (2015). *A salvação do Belo*, Lisboa. Relógio d'Água, 2016.
- [8] Han, Byung-Chul (2016). *O Aroma do Tempo: um ensaio filosófico sobre a Arte da Demora*, Lisboa: Relógio d'Água.
- [9] Barthes, Roland. (2003) *Mitologias*. São Paulo: Difel, isbn: 9788574320489.
- [10] Rancière, J. (2003) *O destino das imagens*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto.
- [11] Marcos, A. & Branco, P. & Carvalho, J. (2009). *The computer medium in digital art's creative development process*. In J. Braman & G. Vincenti & G. Trajkovski (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Computational Arts and Creative Informatics* (1-15). Hershey, Pennsylvania: IGI Publishing.
- [12] Paul, Ch. (2005). *Digital Art*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- [13] Routio, P. (2003). *Arteology: Semiotics of Artifacts*. Available 5 May 2017 em <http://158.132.155.107/posh97/private/Arteology/Arteology.pdf>
- [14] Han, Byung-Chul (2010). *A sociedade do cansaço*, Lisboa. Relógio d'Água, 2014.
- [15] Eco, H. (1962). *The Open Work*. Harvard University Press.