

BLENDED REALITY. AN ANALYSIS THROUGH THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL MEDIA ART ECOSYSTEMS

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Summary: This chapter proposes an analysis of the impacts that three economic concepts that gained traction in the last decades of neoliberalism – experience, attention and ubiquity – cause in digital arts and artists, driving the establishment of blended-reality as the current inhabited space, and altering the relationships between artists, audience, curating, public spaces, academia, industry and markets. Using the Internet as a technological backbone, the global digital art ecosystem has become a network of relationships and relational mechanisms, where creativity and innovation are being commoditised, organised and consumed like products. By analysing pairs of concepts and the paradoxes involved, it also offers insights on how the blending concept is also being applied to what could have once been considered as extreme opposites. It concludes by showing how activism and hacktivism rise as the new innovation forces in a networked environment that is written and reads itself, blending materiality and virtuality.

Keywords: Ubiquity, experience economy, attention economy, ecosystem, b-society

Resumen: Este capítulo propone un análisis de los impactos que los tres conceptos económicos que han adquirido fuerza en las últimas décadas del neoliberalismo – experiencia, atención y ubicuidad – causan en los artistas y en las artes digitales, impulsando el establecimiento de la blended-reality como el espacio habitado actual y recomponiendo las relaciones entre los artistas, la audiencia, la curaduría, los espacios públicos, la academia, la industria y los mercados. Utilizando la red Internet como columna vertebral tecnológica, el ecosistema de arte digital global puede ser visto como una red de relaciones y mecanismos relacionales, donde la creatividad y la innovación se están convirtiendo en mercancías, organizadas y consumidas como productos. Al analizar los pares de conceptos y las paradojas relacionadas, también ofrece ideas sobre cómo el concepto de blending también se está aplicando a lo que podrían antes ser considerados como extremos opuestos. Se concluye mostrando cómo el activismo y el hacktivismo se elevan como nuevas fuerzas de innovación en un ambiente en red que se escribe y lee a sí mismo, mezclando materialidad y virtualidad.

Palabras clave: Ubiquidad, economía de la experiencia, economía de la atención, ecosistema, b-society

INTRODUCTION

Art and culture are a part of the social phenomena that derive from communication and information interaction, both on an individual as well as a collective level, through cultural artefacts and artworks. Through our senses they induce perceptions, emotions, feelings, and cognitive experiences. The impact of technology in art and culture has always been significant, from paintbrush to camera, from chisel to tablet. Decades ago digital media art (DMA) was born in science laboratories and the artist/scientist made a comeback, as a modern-day Leonardo, dwelling in art and science. Like with all new technologies, change and disruption occur, but true innovation often takes its time. Some forms of cultural experience, like video games, net-art or virtual reality, only exist because of digital technologies, whereas others, including film, music and literature, that existed well before digital technologies, became accessible to larger audiences than ever before, and are now being made, marketed, shared or distributed using those technologies. The public's appetite for discovering, consuming and sharing cultural content and experiences through the Internet, and on social and mobile media, seems to be ever growing, at the same time that the attention span decreases.

But organisations can (and do) use technologies to reach new audiences, generate new revenue streams, improve operating efficiency and generate entirely new forms of artistic experience and cultural value. Cross-discipline collaboration in the arts has a long history and tradition but increasing numbers of artists blend disciplines into their work in ways that defy classifications. For many artists, the time and creative skills of multiple partners – engineers, biologists, psychologists, etc. – are required to materialize their artworks. The artist is at the heart of an ecosystem, where art, technology, science, entertainment, society, politics and economy have intricate and interdependent roles.

The different relations between these various agents in the ecosystem show an increasing feedback loop between virtuality and materiality, activism and entertainment, experience and ownership that is at the heart of the blending concept, hereby presented. The human environment includes and incorporates technological extensions, and these are seldom mere add-ons. They change our perceptions and abilities, our notions of self and other, our notions of privacy and propriety, and our orientations in space and time.

We can understand the work of digital media art as that of modulation between the state of "data" and "display". The work of modulation is carried throu-

gh programming, parameterization, and interaction (sensory) mechanisms. The decisions behind the work of modulation are based upon the impacts the artists envision (conceive) for their artefacts.

Concept-pairs, once perceived as nearly opposites, are leading up to a blending model, fuelled by location technology and ubiquitous computing: individualism and massification, mediation and peer-to-peer, material and virtual, entertainment and activism, and (permanent) ownership and (transient) experience. These concept-pairs are not just becoming intertwined and complementary, rather than opposites, and the apparent paradoxes they pose are a consequence of some of neoliberalism recent evolutions, namely the experience, the attention and ubiquity economies. By bringing a systems-view to technological mediation, the author seeks to provide a strategic vantage for understanding the kinds of changes currently impacting society through digital media art observation.

RISE OF THE GLOBALLY AESTHETICIZED INDIVIDUAL

The Web 2.0 era was fuelled by user-generated content, social interactions and an increased access to cheaper technology and platforms, which were built within the architecture of participation, presented as a vector of globalisation, inclusion, enjoyment, and democratisation of access to creation. But even if social-media meant that people could more easily become connected, the accompanying phenomenon was that of a rise in individualism, stimulated by the consumer market intent on selling all kinds of distinguishing, status-making products and services. For Time Magazine, the 2006 person of the year was You, highlighted on the cover with a mirrored surface replacing a computer screen. And this trend can be confirmed using Google Books Ngram Viewer tool, applied to the words *I*, *you* and *we*. The graphic showing the evolution of their use over a 40-year span, between 1968 and 2008, on figure 1, speaks for itself.

Newspapers and television networks started asking readers and viewers to submit their own content, and anyone could become a reporter or a TV-star for twenty seconds, and the most common motivations behind such behaviour are money and reputation (Anderson, 2009). But since all of this content is unpaid, reputation is then the key to this massive unpaid spontaneous content delivery, and this should come as no surprise in a society where exposure means success (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). This individual exposure is seen as

Google Books Ngram Viewer

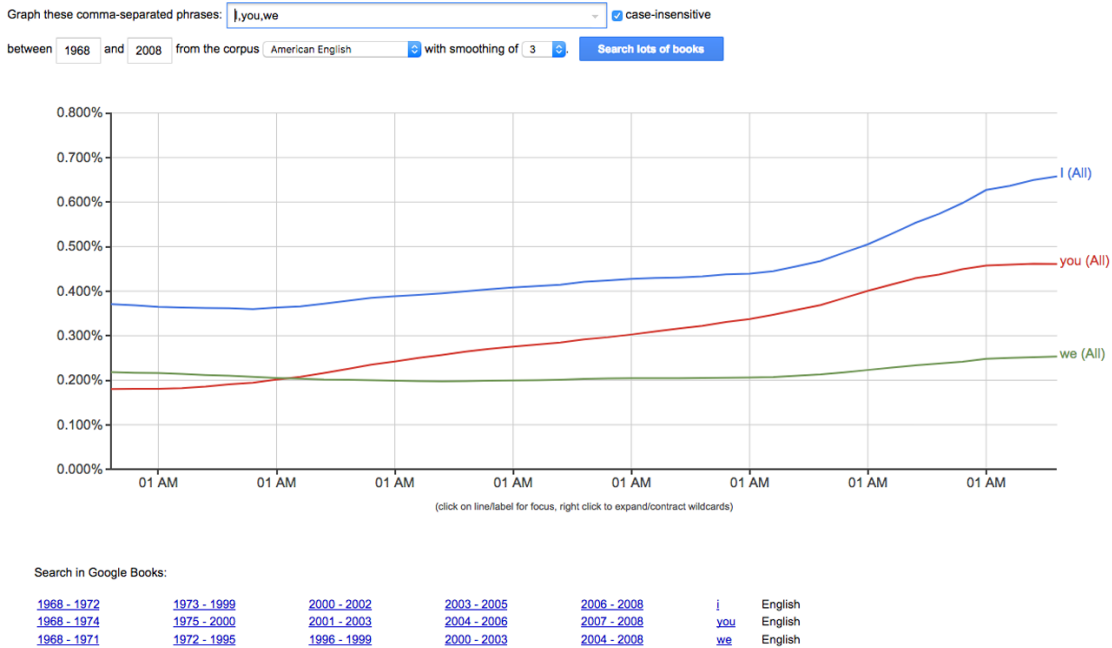


Figure 1: Google Books Ngram Viewer. Source: <http://bit.ly/2gCk037> [October 23, 2017]

a pathway to stardom, and all individuals can potentially reach the pop-star status on Instagram, Facebook, Flickr or any other social-media platform, like artists or actors had done before in the cinema and music industries.

In the globally aestheticized and exposure-addicted western world there is now a massive digital artistic production, reflected on the amount of registered users in specialised platforms – Instagram with 400 million, Flickr with 112 million, Vimeo with 35 million, Deviant Art with 38 million, SoundCloud with 175 million of which at least 10 million are considered as creators among many others (sources: Brandwatch, Techcrunch, Venture Beat and Deviant Art). For every human need, there seems to be an app; for each social representation, a network. This global aestheticization is driven, once again, by the consumer market (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2014), and digital artists have become interdisciplinary prosumers, acting as entrepreneurs, marketers, communicators, trying to rise above the global noise floor in order to be noticed, hoping to become on-line celebrities, paying for services and market tools to gain exposure, buying leverage, likes and followers in reference websites and virtual universes, using communication and marketing techniques eventually more complex than their own artworks. They are striving on their own, no longer as involved in communities and associations as their analog predecessors. Artistic collectives and

communities are often suspiciously regarded as politically biased structures – probably because most of them are built around ideals – reminiscent of the 20th century, but above all, as standing in the way of individual exposure.

Creativity and innovation became organised and consumed as products: through reality shows, start-ups, specialised websites and training courses, ranging from electronic music to special video effects, varied apps, and all kinds of festivals throughout the year, and throughout both physical and virtual worlds – see “The Wrong”¹. The neoliberal society requires that people become not just creative and innovative – like artists – but also that they have – or, at least, that they share images and videos of – artistic, spectacular, and aesthetic lives, giving individuals the freedom that it denies them during the working day.

For Deresiewicz et al. (2015) creativity is but a business concept, along with other clichés: leadership, service disruption, innovation, and transformation. Creativity is all about devising innovative products, services, and techniques – faster, more beautiful solutions for already-known problems – and no longer about raising and researching new problems and solutions. The tendency is to increasingly focus on markets, management, and the use of new technologies, but less and less on social, political or economic intervention. Even art-hacking is now organised in hackathons, being promoted by most major universities and industry partners, permeating TED talks² (Technology + Entertainment + Design), making audiences reverberate with optimism about the role of hacking, brainstorming and crowdsourcing in the transformation of citizenship.

The rise of a self-entitled generation is, thus, paralleled by the loss of the sense of community, collective, and collaboration. These were once regarded as structures that fostered discussion, creation, and progress, but are now perceived as homogenizers, anti-innovation, anti-individual structures.

For the Critical Art Ensemble (1998), market demands discourage collective activity to such a degree that such a strategy is unfeasible. Modern-day communities risk being built around crowdfunding mechanisms, technologies or artistic genres, rather than ideals and concepts, and are marked by the re-commodification of art. The diversity of views is eradicated on social media through algorithms that make people see more of what they like – not what challenges them. The same social media used by artists to (pay to) promote

1. <http://thewrong.org/> [October 16, 2017]

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DSe4o45i3o> [October 16, 2017]

their work – meaning that audiences who enjoy their *type* of work will likely also be flooded with suggestions of similar types of work.

CURATING: FROM ELITISM TO RE-INVENTION TO D.I.Y.

The dramatic increase in (content and artistic) production caused audiences some immediate problems: by facilitating free online sharing, it encouraged unrestricted copying; by equalling (social media) exposure to success, it hampered quality assertion – which came dangerously close summing up likes and comments, many of which are expertly bought online. Audiences can no longer tell the original from the copy, the good from the bad, and be directed towards what is worth it, because there is no more mediation: curating had no online presence.

“The Attention Economy” is an approach to information management that deals with human attention as a scarce commodity, and applies economic theory to solve its problems, namely, the fact that attention has become the limiting factor in the consumption of information in an information-rich world. If one variable increases, another variable decreases: a scarcity of whatever it is that the first variable consumes. And what information consumes is the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it.

If at one point curating was not just regarded as elitist, but also deeply involved in the creation of elites in galleries and museums (Balzer, 2014), the fact is that today’s attention-challenged audiences get easily tired or bored of drifting aimlessly online from link to link, and again welcome counselling, quality assertion and selection. The Internet may have destroyed the former social power held by traditional curating only to reinstate it a few years afterwards, in a popular and legitimised way. Media theorist and curator Dieter Daniels, as quoted by Cook (2008: 32), claims:

I don’t see yet the real way to bypass what you call the legitimization structure of the art world. Because bypassing any kind of context-creating structure – which is galleries, museums, curators, magazines, education and all this – makes it so difficult for who should find whom. It’s a very good idea that artists might directly address the public but we have the problem of information overflow in general, and so there is no quality filter within. We just get lost and we don’t know how to choose and find what we want if everything is accessible.

Curating addressed the attention economy generatives proposed by Kelly (2008) – immediacy, personalization, interpretation, authenticity, accessibility, embodiment, patronage and findability – by reinventing itself and moving on to deal with the complex systems involving artists, engineers, scientists, physical and virtual spaces, both educated and curious audiences and a growing hunger for entertainment and fun, away from the conservative and traditional gallery or museum views and spaces. But if DMA has been developed mostly outside of the traditional exhibition spaces, why display it in such a context? Perhaps because that is where the audiences expect to see art, therefore the institutions could be said to take part in the definition of art by what they include. Alternative exhibition spaces abound now: the mobility of festivals echoes the often transitory nature of DMA; publishing and broadcasting yield more control for the artists who wish to self-curate and directly engage with the audience; art agencies and public art foster stronger community bonds and politically engaged collectives and initiatives; labs provide greater experimentation and collaborative practices, are more flexible and allow for negotiation between artists and curators that annihilate the old disciplinary boundaries.

The curator became a business aware co-creator, working in collaboration with artists, but also with other curators, no longer *only* a guarantor of exhibition, collection and preservation, becoming a commissioner of mediation between artists, audiences, institutions, lenders, industry and infrastructures, both physical and virtual, and still as a trust inducer, attesting to the quality and authenticity of artworks and authors, and channelling attention to them, by creating experiences for the audience.

In the age of global sharing and aestheticization, Simon (2010) refers the growing use of discrete objects, technological or not, instead of educational settings or interpersonal relationships, as the basis of social interaction, that is, objects (or their digitised images) that become nodes of a shared communication network – and calls them social objects. Businesses were built over the collections of these nodes and their gathering on social networks, and companies such as Pinterest, Flickr, Houzz or Etsy are good examples where each and every user presents micro-exercises in curating. After the massification of individualism and artistic creation comes the massification of curating (Balzer, 2014).

Other interesting experiments have been carried out in which curating an exhibition in a conventional location (i.e. a museum) has been participated by

the audience over the Internet. The Plains Art Museum in Fargo, USA, held the “You Like This: A Democratic Approach to the Museum Collection”³ exhibition. From around 3.500 artefacts, through crowdsourcing mechanisms, only 50 were selected for display. At the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, USA, another experiment entitled “50/50: Audience and Experts Curate the Paper Collection”³ assigned the curating role to both the public and the resident curator. More than 250.000 votes were registered. Active audience engagement over the Internet is a measure of business success in the cultural industries, and if these initiatives are particularly suited for DMA, it must also be noted that these models exist beyond DMA itself.

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN ENTERTAINMENT AND ACTIVISM

For the attention-challenged audience, festivals are increasingly popular alternative exhibition and performance spaces, well suited for DMA and contemporary society’s mobility and ubiquity, and are usually created and managed with multiple goals, stakeholders, implications and meanings attached to them. They embody a materialisation of the DMA ecosystem, and bring together creation and consumption, artists and audiences, culture and entertainment, patrons and buyers. DMA festivals are prime playgrounds for the industry and companies to dazzle audiences with new technology, and where academia is present, institutionally, experimentally or through curating.

The festival experience occurs at personal, social/group and cultural levels, and meanings can be created at personal, social, cultural and economic levels. Interestingly, though, the experience itself is simultaneously personal and social. Festival curators are particularly interested in knowing how their combination of various factors (setting, program and human interactions) affects the audience and/or participants, and the festival goals, economic and otherwise. This requires interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary knowledge of culture, the arts, economy, society and environmental psychology. There is also a special appeal in festival studies that is associated with their inspirational potential for creativity, (hopefully) attracting large audiences, and generating emotional responses, making festivals akin to, and part of the entertainment business, and often featured in place marketing and tourism.

But virtual festivals can also take place, and an international art fair that doesn’t require plane tickets and hotel accommodations has already had two

3. https://www.artsjournal.com/realcleararts/2011/10/plains_museum_and_public.html [October 16, 2017]

editions: "The Wrong". The Indiegogo-funded event makes claims of being the most comprehensive art biennale worldwide today. With more than 90 curators and 1000 artists over 60 online pavilions and 40 IRL gallery spaces (embassies), that claim may have its merit.

The term "festivalization" has been coined to suggest an over-commodification of festivals exploited by tourism and place marketers (Richards, 2007). In this approach, drawing heavily upon consumer behaviour and other marketing concepts, motivations for attending festivals are studied at length, and more recently the links between quality, satisfaction, and behaviour or future intentions have been modelled. Getz (2010) suggests that escapism generally leads people to events for the generic benefits of entertainment and diversion, socializing, learning and doing something new, i.e., novelty seeking, but most of those who attend new media art festivals are knowledgeable about the field and, as an audience, not especially diverse.

If festivals wish to attract large audiences, they must present content in crowd-pleasing formats – concerts, exhibitions, workshops, parties, etc. – as part of a profitability process based on ticket-paying audiences (or sponsorship models, according to audience sizes), and for audiences the hedonistic value of entertainment is superlative.

Therefore a careful balance between entertainment and art/concept should be reached: the economic viability of a festival depends on its capability to attract a large enough audience, whereas its artistic reputation and social impact rely on its ability to attract meaningful artists and artworks around a socially meaningful theme.

Digital artists have already protested against an excess of "hello world" type of creativity at the Ars Electronica festival, and critical voices are also heard in other countries, like Portugal, about this technology-as-merely-entertainment phenomenon, where for artist and university teacher André Sier (2015: 14) "the connection between art, science and technology has permeated History and will always do so. Now it has temporarily become a buzzword to host a lot of rubbish that thrives in the curve of changes that technology has fostered".

As an alternative, the hacking mind-set and the free/open software community present themselves as digital capitalism's dissidents, with their activity based on an ethics of voluntary cooperation, allowing for the experimentation of other ways of life and other social relations. Art activism and hacktivism is central to our time, and is a new phenomenon, quite different from critical art.

Art activists – or activists – do not want to just criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they seek to change these conditions through art, in reality itself.

Art activists try to change living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions, among other social, political, environmental, economic, racial, sexual or technological topics of interest. In other words, art activists react to the increasing collapse of the social state and try to replace the state itself and the NGOs that, for different reasons, cannot or will not fulfill their role. Art activists want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place, but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. Artists and art-hacktivists share a willingness to improve society through art. Art-hacktivism is a type of artistic practice that may show significant variations in the artist's willingness to engage in illegal or legally ambiguous activities. The outlaw orientation will determine practices such as site defacements or sabotage whereas the transgressive orientation only challenges the law, without pushing the challenge to the point of immediate legal jeopardy. Digital activists, on the other hand, will operate within legality, mainly through culture jamming and subvertising, using creative energies rooted in one's heart and soul and belief in the cause, not through aggression but through fierceness, not by hurting but by confronting, not violating but disrupting, thus creating a new language altogether.

Activism is an organised practice by nature, naturally opposed to the individualism massification processes. These organisations also produce their own events and festivals, often as self-curating artistic communities, which emerge as a form of resistance and survival, probably not immune to consumerism, sometimes even collaborative by necessity, along the lines advocated, for example, by Furtherfield:

For over 17 years Furtherfield has been working in practices that bridge arts, technology, and social change. (...) Our artistic endeavours include net art, media art, hacking, art activism, hacktivism and co-curating. We have always believed it is essential that the individuals at the heart of Furtherfield practice in arts and technology and are engaged in critical enquiry. (...) If we as an arts organisation, shy away from what other people are experiencing in their daily lives and do not examine, represent and respect their stories, we quite rightly should be considered

as part of an irrelevant elite, and seen as saying nothing to most people (Garret, 2013: 1).



Figure 2: Mi Querido Barrio (My Beloved Community) augmented reality in East Harlem, NYC, preserving a pre-gentrification neighbourhood through augmented reality. Source: Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI)

IS VIRTUALITY LESS REAL THAN MATERIALITY?

DMA Artivism and art-hactivism will usually occur, by definition, in the virtual space, based upon digital and computational technologies. But “computing is not about computers anymore. It’s about living”, wrote Negroponte over two decades ago (1995: 6). One could add that perhaps the Internet is no longer about networks; digital is no longer about binary representation; and virtual is no longer opposed to material or physical.

The birth of cyberspace was heralded as a promised liberation from materiality’s restrictions, where avatars could represent our ideal selves and creativity could be unleashed without restrictions. But instead, cyberspace became a business simulacrum of materiality itself, with actual payments over the

virtual occupation of equally virtual land, housing, furniture and accessories, special virtual powers, clothes, animals, plants and other objects of desire – including virtual sex – in environments like World of Warcraft or Second Life (which generates the equivalent of a small country's GDP - 500 million USD⁴). But if the material world has been transposed onto virtual universes, the reverse can also be witnessed, as hashtags get tattooed or printed and location markers appear physically in town squares. The circuit is now closed in both directions: from material to virtual, virtual to material, with feedback mechanisms, loops and interdependencies.



Figure 3: A virtual marker becomes a physical piece. 'Map' by Aram Bartholl, part of the show 'From Here On' during Rencontres Arles, France 2011. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Maps_pin [October 16, 2017]

Our perception of reality/materiality is affected by virtuality, which, in turn, is built over material paradigms. Death is trivialised by TV series, computer

4. According to Ebbe Altberg, *Linden Lab's CEO*, the creators of *Second Life* <http://motherboard.vice.com/read/why-is-second-life-still-a-thing-gaming-virtual-reality> [October 16, 2017]

games, soap operas, crime dramas, mysteries, documentaries, live television coverage of bombings, shootings, and executions. People simulate reality and then share those simulations as evidence of fact: as *fake news*. As far back as in 1922, Robert Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* showed an Inuk actor being directed into simulating some real actions, like seal hunting with harpoons, instead of the actual Inuk weapons, or displaying an overly inappropriate use of a gramophone, only to illustrate and exacerbate ethnographic concepts in a documentary style. Or as more recent examples, consider photoshopped selfies and magazine covers, or fake holiday trips in Asia⁵.

Virtual reality tried to create a virtual world inside the computer, and the paradigm has now shifted to the computer that extends and amplifies the material world. Computer-readable data and all the different ways, in which it can be altered, processed and analysed, are brought into the material world. For the festival-going *Millennials*, experience implies social, local and physical sharing but also social and virtual/digital sharing. In fact, the distinction is no longer important, the blending process is ever-expanding: information and cultural elements, characteristic of the digital universe, migrate freely to the physical plane⁶. Any experience will not be complete without proof – a selfie, an artie or a video – as a blended piece of evidence: from material to virtual and back, because your Instagram photos may well find their way into an art exhibition, even without your consent⁷.

FROM GLOBAL BACK TO LOCAL: UBIQUITY AS A BLENDING AGENT

In neoliberal societies life's daily experience is now a blended process, intimately linked to *onlineness*. This new state causes social space to be distributed, not in a geographical-physical way, but implying a seamless, constant flow between materiality and virtuality, resulting in a blending of the two worlds (some authors would say an augmented-reality or mixed-reality world). The Internet makes any location a viable place to find or meet another person or enjoy experiences – any urban space is a potential gathering and sharing space, the

5. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2014/09/12/what-is-reality-a-qa-with-the-artist-who-used-social-media-and-photoshop-to-fake-an-epic-trip-even-her-parents-fell-for/> [October 16, 2017]

6. <http://jilliancnyork.com/2011/10/16/hashtagging-real-life/> [October 16, 2017]

7. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3097994/Artist-fire-using-people-s-Instagram-photos-exhibition-without-permission-selling-prints-borrowed-images-100-000-EACH.html> [October 16, 2017]

digital artist's place of creation can be anywhere, and correspondingly, it is now expected that urban spaces facilitate permanent connectedness.

Weiser (1999: 3) introduced the concept of *ubicomp* (ubiquitous computing): "the most profound technologies are those that disappear. They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life until they are indistinguishable". He suggests the expression "embodied virtuality" to refer to the process of drawing computers out of their electronic shells, onto our physical environment. Embodied virtuality places everyone in the centre of permanently accessible and interconnected networks. This post-virtual world does not translate into an abandonment of virtuality; instead it means that networked devices have become so ubiquitous that it is now anachronistic to think in terms of a dichotomy between material and virtual, but rather in terms of blending.

For Clark (2003: 6), "we have been designed, by Mother Nature, to exploit deep neural plasticity in order to become one with our best and most reliable tools. Minds like ours were made for mergers. Tools-R-Us, and always have been". And when tools become unobtrusive, like the pencil, hammer or smartphone, then human hybridisation occurs, as they become a reliable and dependable extension of our abilities and senses. And so the embodied virtuality that mobile network connected devices brought into our lives is used to increase the physical experience, rather than hamper or cancel it. Ubiquitous computing and mobile technologies have been redefining public spaces and cities, people feel that they are physically within the network, as opposed to watching it from the outside; they use images and move objects; each individual feels like being at the very centre of the action.

Locative digital art or locative new media art appears as a type of digital art that can express a level of spatial relationships, following the social media trend of tagged, tracked and mapped. Locative media functions on locations, but the technology it uses is location-independent, in a technical sense. The location-based nature of locative media has led to a renaissance of cartographic representations, as maps are the natural structure to support the indexing of spatial relationships.

Today's connected individuals are more familiar than all previous generations with the omnipresent latitude, longitude and altitude to the point of not even thinking about them, just using them. The overlaying of virtual and real space in augmented reality or games like geocaching clearly demonstrates this use. Locative media art is mapping information in novel ways that may express,

criticize, expose, challenge or motivate different aspects of urban life. We are confronted not by one social space but by an unlimited multiplicity or uncoun- table set of social spaces where each digital layer potentially creates new mea- ning and use, and during this process no space disappears: the worldwide does not abolish the local.

Although location-based arts have long and rich histories, the novelty of locative media art projects seems to be in the way they extend the human community to include an array of agents, arranged in space, which includes antennae, rooftops, trees, buildings, masts and their practitioners are experi- menting with these technologies and free software tools for manipulating and exploiting location-based devices and media, and sometimes hacking them. An artwork that operates with locative media is not just about the public com- munication of a new technological form, nor is it necessarily austere and overt- ly political. Locative media art, at its best, enhances locative literacy, enhances the local. An awareness of how flows and layers of information intersect with and augment a person's locality, and the ability to intervene on this level is a further extension of this literacy, and of their agency.

This may be a sign that in the near future, the socially excluded individual is the one that does not have a permanent mobile connection, and may be defi- ned as the digitally immobile subject: digitally anti-social (Beiguelman, 2013), even if that subject has a rich and socially rich and intense physical life.

The exploratory dwellings of locative media lead to a blending of geographi- cal and data spaces, reversing the trend towards digital content being viewed as placeless, immaterial. A coherent discourse around locative media art is just starting to appear, and is simultaneously opening up new ways of relating to the (physical) world and mapping its own domain.

HOW OWNERSHIP IS BEING REPLACED BY EXPERIENCE

The age of the ubiquitous mobile devices is simultaneously the age of glo- bal aestheticization, (Groys, 2009), of the addiction to the spectacularisation of reality, centred on seduction and celebration, of success being measured by the level of exposure and social engagement. The eagerness for innovation and creativity, and their subsequent trivialisation, have determined the emergence of a paradox: with media and technology's fast obsolescence, the ease of crea- tion is nearly matched by the ease of destruction. "Denouncing the recent past as outdated and announcing the arrival of a brand new, cutting-edge reality, in

other words, is part of capital's interpretive logic of self-legitimization" (Ebert, 2009: 11).

Permanent ownership of an extremely large artistic production is economically challenging, and could act against the growing thirst for novelty. Therefore, rather than focusing on artwork ownership (whether digital media art, music, video or any other digitally distributable art form) the focus has shifted to the mediating networked technologies: mp3 and mp4 players, smart-phones, set-top boxes, smart televisions, among others. The *experience* is the new paradigm, and art, too, has increasingly become the object of transient experience: a screensaver, a gif, a piece of code, are all perceived as something that is easily and readily copied and destroyed without even a second thought, whereas destroying an art print or silkscreen would raise concern. But how is it possible to sell something that is impossible to own? Take net-art as an example: if it is online, it must be replicable, by nature – either by download, screen or video captures – and since the desire of ownership (linked to its perceived value), is also connected to exclusivity, it will thus hardly be enticing for the regular art investor. The strategy to take it offline – therefore eliminating its replicability – would seem like a good idea, but it would then disrupt the very nature of the artwork! In conclusion: applying old rules to new realities will likely contribute to the distortion of both⁸.

Music and home video businesses are now centred in selling subscriptions to streaming services and players, even if that means users will never own the actual files, and they do not really seem to mind that. The very physical and elegant Meural⁹ technological frame materialises virtual art on the walls of any home, like an mp3 player does with a music subscription: attention and ownership, as a symbol of status, has shifted to the players, rather than their content. It is all about the iPhone that you own, not about the apps, music or images that it stores. Kelly (2008) suggests that publishers, studios and labels – to which galleries and museums can be added – will never disappear, even if they are no longer needed to distribute artworks; in fact their new role is distributing the audience's *attention* back to the artworks, enabling the *experience*.

8. This discussion around the sale of an animated gif file is representative of this topic <http://hyperallergic.com/19769/how-do-you-sell-an-animated-gif> [October 16, 2017]

9. <https://meural.com/pages/about> [October 16, 2017]

The current festivalization trend is also a sign of this shift: the event/experience overtakes the content; the Festival itself becomes more important than the artists and/or artworks it showcases.

“The Experience Economy” is an expression coined by Pine and Gilmore (1998), and the concept is based on two main pillars: participation and connection. Individuals can participate actively or passively in an experience. In active participation, the individual plays a key role in creating the event or interaction that generates the experience. Concert attendees, for example, participate with their presence, and are therefore passive participants. Physical and mental connectivity also determine experience levels, between two extremes: absorption (a blend of focus and participation) and immersion, closer to the passive participation, but with overall sensory engagement. While prior economic offerings – commodities, goods, and services – are external to the buyer, experiences are inherently personal, and they exist only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on any level – emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual. No two people will likely have the same experience, because each experience is a result of the interaction between the staged event (like a theatrical play) and the individual’s state of mind. Networked technologies, in particular, encourage new genres of experience, like interactive games, social-media video chat or multi-player games, motion-based simulators, virtual and augmented reality (Pine and Gilmore, 1998).

CONCLUSION

Hybridisation, creativity, innovation, and brainstorming risk becoming market clichés, and the individuals risk being driven into creative isolation – even though they are more interconnected/networked than ever before – by the competitive *startup-like* mentality.

The totalizing belief that social and aesthetic values are encoded in the being of gifted individuals (rather than emerging from a process of becoming shared by group members) is cultivated early in cultural education. If one wants to become an ‘artist’, there is a bounty of educational opportunities – everything from match-book correspondence schools to elite art academies. Yet in spite of this broad spectrum of possibilities, there is no place where one can prepare for a collective practice. (Critical Art Ensemble, 1998).

The relations between artists, artworks and audiences are extended to/by several actions: creation, enjoyment, curating, entertainment, education, training, research, socialisation, economic return, social impact, among others. DMA curating implies a displacement of the curatorial approach in equal parts to the production, distribution and exhibition of the artefact, thus emphasising the relevance of other ecosystem agents: technology suppliers and artisans (industry, companies, experimental laboratories, etc.), distributors (editors, curators, networks, managers, specialised websites, virtual worlds, mass media, etc.), and exhibitors (museums, galleries, public spaces, festivals, virtual and material infrastructures, etc.).

These actions flow between the physical and virtual planes, almost incessantly, and interweave urban multi-layered spaces with social media layers, where interactive experiences are created that question the sense of belonging: to society, place, time, materiality or virtuality. Space and location are constantly written and read, and establish successive bridges between materiality and virtuality.

The digital media artists are evolving between two extremes: those who aspire to (only?) create technologically innovative, increasingly blended artefacts, and who are compliantly and fully engaged in the experience, attention and ubiquity economies, and on the other extreme the digital media activists and art-hackers who use their vision to collectively and socially engage in critical interventions through art and technology, accepting that they must act inside an economic scenario, while also deconstructing it. Challenging neoliberalism does not imply refusing it, but rather transforming it into a *playground*, both to appropriate it and expose its incongruities. DMA will become a blend of those two extremes. It is however more likely that true innovation will be linked to the hacking mind-set rather than the compliant mind-set. Hackers create the possibility of new visions, creations, uses, maybe not always wonderful things, or even good things, but new things. In all areas and processes of knowledge, from art to science, from philosophy to culture, where data is gathered and information extracted from it, there will be hackers looking for new possibilities for the world, hacking the new out of the known.

Technology is the relational backbone in the DMA ecosystem, and the Internet its propagation mechanism, much like the natural environment of biological ecosystems, and is increasingly devoted to processing the surrounding

physicality, to channel the *attention* of people on the move – including artists and their digital artefacts.

Online communities, such as Furtherfield or NetBehaviour, probably represent the most open and innovative playgrounds, and bring together networked media artists, researchers, academics, soft groups, writers, code geeks, curators, independent thinkers, activists, net sufis, non nationalists, net mutualists code-poets, net-artists, theorists and activists, many of whom primarily know one another only through the virtual connections established and mediated by those very same networked initiatives and collectives.

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CV

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CREACIÓN, INVESTIGACIÓN, COMUNICACIÓN CULTURAL Y ARTÍSTICA EN LA ERA DE INTERNET

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