CULTURE AND DIGITAL ART NETWORK: THE RECARDI PROJECT

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Abstract

The RECARDI project – Culture and Digital Art Network intends to merge features and services, enabling enhancement and expansion of digital art. RECARDI also aims to provide an opportunity for experimentation and digital creation in network, for virtual display of digital artefacts, approaching creators and audience, art and technology, building a collaborative network in digital art, through a web platform. In this article we aim to analyse RECARDI site and its features and think over the new paths in the contemporary recontextualization in the author-work-audience relationship.

Keywords: culture and digital art, web platforms, digital networks

1. Introduction

It is known that since the advent of photography no tool had revolutionized both the evolution of art and culture as the computer did and later the internet and the network. Since the 1960s, with the rapid development of information and technological systems, in an increasingly technological society, the digital art has spread vertiginously.

It is important to stress that it is combining, in diluted and troubled borders, art, science and technology that digital art is achieved. This triad brought important transformations that lead to refocusing new possibilities of action and reflexion. According to Manovich (2001), in the last decades of the twentieth century, the current programming languages and the

technological network trends allowed the accomplishment of some key projects of contemporaneity.

Thus, in a time of computerization and virtualization of the culture, as defined by Lévy (1996), an increasing number of authors are considering that the computer is a versatile tool and they have start to exploit it to develop some aesthetical and conceptual issues in their works, allowing heterogeneous and innovative representations, featuring the tendencies of art in XXI century. Still according to Manovich, "Human-computer interface comes to act as a new form through which all older forms of cultural production are being mediated" (Manovich, 2006: 6). This is how in the last decades have arisen new ways of being creative in the digital world, a great tendency in the art universe, opening a path to the exploitation of informative and aesthetical expressivity of the media, of the contents and of the technology, combining new and unforeseen sensorial speeches, new forms of expression, supported by digital technologies, today named as artifacts of digital art.

As this kind of art finds expression, platforms, very important in art future, have arisen, enabling the divulgation of the digital artifacts made by contemporary artists. First through personal websites and then through social networks specialized for digital art. According to Jose Luis Brea (2003), like the situationist motto of setting up events and situations, many of these new artistic practices are focused in producing communities and relational skills: being online provides possibilities of communicational action, allowing the construction of the speech through a participated dialogue. It is in this context that emerges the RECARDI platform, Culture and Digital Art Network, a virtual space, based in the community concept, a horizontal medium, where each one can intervene, overturning the concept of sender and receiver and the hierarchies. The RECARDI network intends to be a platform where all receivers are at the same time senders, or at least, they have the possibility of being senders, if they want it, a space similar to the deleuzian rhizome (Deleuze e Guattarri, 2002), a body without organs, without structure, where the internal liaisons between spots are made randomly (every one can interconnect with each other). Like the RECARDI platform, and Internet in general, the rhizome has not a central unit responsible for guiding a specific growth axis. In the rhizome the lines change their direction, at anytime, or they give rise to

lines from a different nature. The circulation is uncontrolled and decoded, the spots are mobile, they have no beginning and no end, they only have middle, and they exist as a media, as *Plateaux*, where all multiplicity is susceptible to interconnect.

The RECARDI Project

The RECARDI network is materialized through the implementation of a Web platform, an approach for collaborative networking and for cultural and artistic boosting, contributing to the construction of a new type of place, deterritorialized, a fertile ground for the creative process, as Lévy (1996) idealized it. In this new place, according to McLuhan (1964), it is possible to extend the central nervous system globally, abolishing the idea of time and space.

For this, the RECARDI platform will incorporate features and services allowing creating, boosting and expanding, facilitating the collaborative experimentation and digital creation in network, allowing the virtual exhibition of digital artifacts, the education and virtual training, digital business, digital preservation and copyright on a proprietary Digital Repository, of the most diverse art and artifacts of digital culture, and their availability on devices and complementary and heterogeneous platforms. All these features will allow the consolidation of a national network of excellence in culture and digital art, enhancing dialogue between creative and audience.

RECARDI platform (image 1) exploits a modular approach, which is desirably extensible, allowing that new modules can be added at anytime. This way, there will be job opportunities to digital creators; they can contribute to the network development, conceiving and programming new features and new services. Initially, the platform will have five modules incorporating generic services: services of sharing and collaboration, digital business, copyright, advanced search and cataloging and digital preservation.

To develop this project, a consortium between companies and universities has been formed. The main goal was to assemble a multidisciplinary team with high knowledge in web technologies, advanced methodologies in project management, software programming and

artistic and cultural skills. This team includes three Portuguese companies (Edigma, project promoter, Multisector, project manager and Methatéke, co-promoter) and five Portuguese universities and institutes (Universidade Aberta, Universidade de Coimbra, Centro de Computação Gráfica, Instituto Politécnico de Viana do Castelo and Universidade do Algarve/Centro de Investigação em Artes e Comunicação). Besides the Consortium, the Project also has the collaboration of multiple institutions, allowing access to the contents and to networks in digital art, culture and education. These RECARDI partners will intervene in the project as pilot users and they will facilitate disseminating the platform.

1.1. The Platform

As previously mentioned, the platform integrates multiple modules offering different features and services. We will now describe the five initial modules accessible to the users.

The module of collaboration and sharing operates nuclear features supporting the collaborative network, the artefacts sharing and the interaction. These features are used by the RECARDI platform applications and they are available to final users, attenuating the borders between the creatives, allowing collaborative work, and between the creatives and the audience. This module aims to design and implement innovative approaches in establishing an online team, with or without different responsibilities, rights of access and edition, forms of annotation on documents, intra-group communication, services of sharing and combining contents in a formal and open way, following the instructions of a team leader. This module also allows controlled sharing of editing applications external to the project. This way, it will encourage co-authorship network, basis to establish communities with collaborative interests.

Coupled with collaboration and sharing features, the module of digital business enhances the creation of synergies between users in order to create artefacts with potential for reuse in business dealings, becoming profitable. For this purpose, the platform offers services allowing setting prices, virtual selling and all associated features, such as including taxes and fees in the final price, complaints handling, among others.

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The platform also ensures the integration of mechanisms able to protect the artifacts allowing copyright management associated with production, edition and disseminating of contents. Through the module of digital rights management, the platform guarantees that all protected works cannot be acceded or modified without permission. The author can, autonomously, protect and manage his works.

The module of advanced research and cataloguing in the Global Repository of Digital Artefacts in the network, operating in parallel with the module of digital rights management allows an adequate cataloguing of the artefacts that can be find though the advanced research. This module offers multiple features, including semantic research and summarization. The main goal of this module is to facilitate the access of the audience to the digital artefacts created in the RECARDI platform, already anticipating its consumption in new generation networks and in digital terrestrial television. In other hand, it has an accessible internal component to the authors and managers of the platform, allowing not only the access to the digital artefacts but also their classification, cataloguing and integrated management. Here are included the services of research and access to the external repositories of multimedia content associated to the project.

Finally, the module of digital preservation searches to guarantee the authenticity of the works to preserve in the platform over time, making possible for an artist to preserve his work independently of the technological support. This module ensures the availability of tools for virtualization of the digital artefacts, for preservation of their authenticity and their backup and recovery through the conversion and maintenance in standard formats. This feature is particularly important because of the increasing evolution of digital art and the nature ever more unforeseen and distinct of the digital artefact.

The module of digital preservation is intimately connected to the Global Repository of Digital Artefact. It is important to stress that this component of the RECARDI platform is transversal to the all the project because it is the digital space where all digital artefacts generated by the network are, virtual and physically, kept. This repository is designed for high modularity,

advanced research, high flow access and large volume of data. Strategies for protection and losses recovery will also be implemented, ensuring limit situations of damage or data loss.

1.2.   The pilot applications

Along with these five modules for initial services, the platform offers five pilot applications. These applications implement the central features provided by the network. Here we can find space for experimenting in creating digital artefacts, by programming small applications or by simply combining images, sounds, music, colours and geometric shapes, among other possibilities, from multimedia crude or using digital artefacts already completed, we also can experiment features for online exhibition of works, it is possible to establish networking through sharing applications, artefacts and contents, integrate sessions of virtual education, and finally it is possible to try designed features for creating didactic contents in the form of a digital narrative.

These five applications are the basis of the network; they will be the first of other more developed by the community using RECARDI.

The application eExperiencing (image 2) intents to assert itself as a space of creative experimentation, here the edition, the combination, free visual composition are possible, using several algorithms, and from initial assumptions provided by the users, conjugating randomly data, such as colours, words, sounds and images.

The eExposing (image 3) application allows users to create a virtual two- or three-dimensional space in the form of a gallery where users and audience can access existing virtual exhibitions. In these exhibitions the digital artefacts can be appreciated through navigation and enlargement facilities; here each artefact can incorporate not only visual elements but also audio elements and three-dimensional depth, with or without dynamism.

The virtual tour should be put on the form of a digital narrative or reporting to an actual physical artifact, in an audiovisual sequence. On the other hand, this application will allow

the user-author to configure its virtual exhibition, after he is duly authorized. This task may be performed individually or in groups.

Given the specific configuration of the artefacts on display, the application eExposing will allow visualizations not only in the Web, but also in others physical displays, such as smartphones or tablets.

The application eCollaborating provides a concrete space of interconnection in the RECARDI network, opening the features provided by the eExperiencing application to the network collaboration and exploring the nuclear services provided by the module of collaboration and sharing. In practice the features of the application eExperiencing are extended here to allow group work in network. This application will also seek to extend the network devices that can be employed by various members of a group working as a team from mobile devices, mutatis mutandis. This way the users will have access to the state of the projects that they are part of, to the last additions and modifications of each artefact, for example, and they can even add their input to the process. Thus the network utilization is potentiated, because it is possible to access and interact with RECARDI through a great diversity of platforms, and not only using the traditional keyboard, mouse and computer screen and also because conditions are offered for conducting and promoting teamwork.

eLearning is another application available in the RECARDI platform. In this application features are provided allowing the user-author to configure complete training sessions from didactic modules in the form of a digital narrative or simple multimedia content, relate to the themes of art and digital culture, aiming their consumption as e-learning education. All this will be possible using principles of design and implementing of e-learning objects. So using elearning application the specialists in RECARDI can provide their knowledge and skills in any area, but especially in culture and digital art, in the form of courses that can be consummated with high quality and innovation, using e-learning techniques and technology of digital storytelling.

The elearning application is accessible for Web and for mobile devices, mutatis mutandis to the inherent technical characteristics of each of these channels and the diverse needs of the

user type (audience or author). The moodle technology will be initially adopted in the implementation of this application.

Finally, in this early stage, it will also be available the etelling application that provides features allowing the users to design, structure and integrate multimedia elements in order to create a digital content in the form of digital narrative. These are short stories, in video format, with duration of less than five minutes, about a particular theme, adopting technology and principles of digital storytelling. This kind of contents retrieves the ancestral tradition of mankind from stories told orally, from a generation to another, and it has been exploited throughout the world in many applications, from education to training or even to pure entertainment or cultural dissemination. They can be consummated in Web or integrating virtual sessions.

2. Conclusion

The RECARDI platform intends to be a network of excellence, innovative and unique, in the field of art and digital culture, setting the base for strong relationships between the main actors in this area: artists, curators, art experts, performers and audience. This project aims to meet the needs of a new state of the art that has been developed amongst contemporary art practices. In this sense, the dynamics of the network will go through individual achievement and/or through the association with events in this area, like conferences, art festivals and specialized workshops.

The digital artefact, due to its characteristics and its contemporaneity, requires rethinking the relationship between author-work-audience. These art works, or if we prefer, these digital artefacts post-aura benjaminian (Benjamin, 1985) interact, create, recreate, reproduce, multiply and transform themselves, constituting a new paradigm in the spheres of art and culture.

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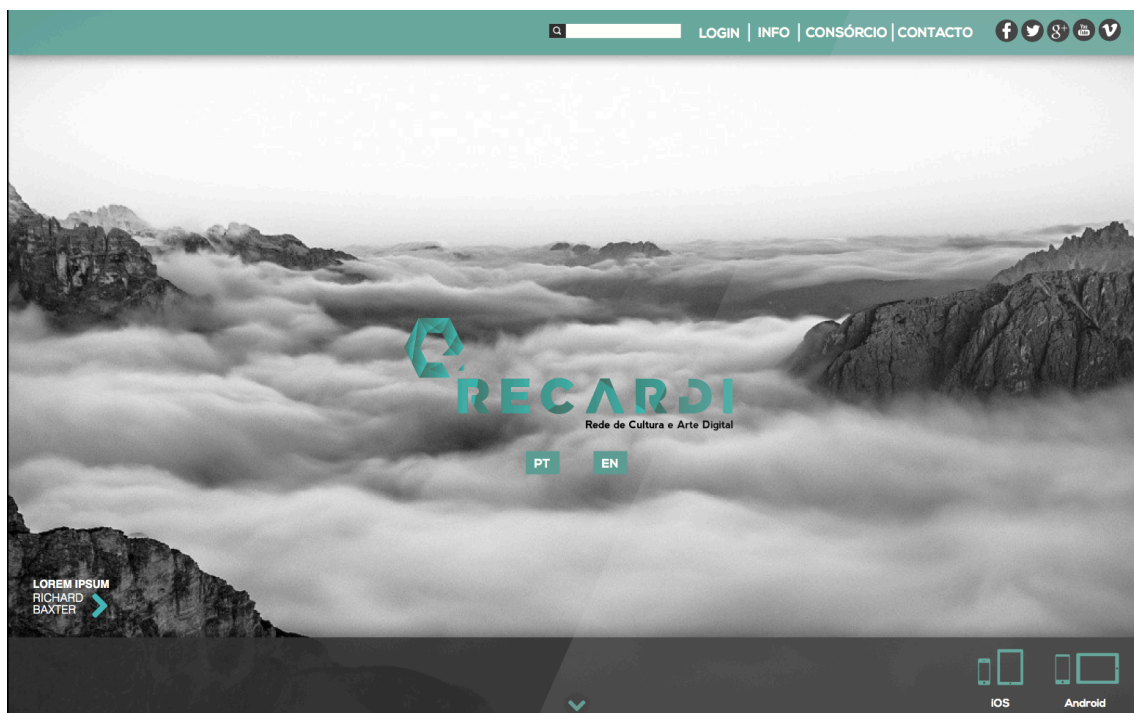
4. Attachements

Image 1: Homepage graphic study

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Image 2: Graphic study on the access to the page of the application eExperiencing.

Image 3: Graphic study on the access to the page of the application eExposing.

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