

WIRELESS CONDITIONS

Wop Art (2001), *Leste o Leste? (Did You Read the East?)*, *egoscópio (egoscope, 2002)*, and *Poétrica* (in progress) are projects of mine that address reading contexts marked by nomadism. The first one involved cell phones, the second and third projects were tele-interventions combining electronic panels and the Internet, and the last one involves PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), cell phones, Internet and large plotters.

All these projects deal with situations in which inscriptions vanish, and interfaces multiply and fragment the reception on electronic surfaces connected to telecommunication networks. They investigate the possible realm of a cybrid culture, where the informative, programming, and aesthetic codes are entangled and produce a new semantics, involving a rearrangement of signs and signification processes. Their creational environment is a post-urban city where the virtual and real dimensions that operate it are products emulated by nomadic inhabitants and communication devices, constructing a reading context where the media are dissolved.

These projects, however, did not obey a preliminary plan. They were the fruit of some particular questions, and afforded the elaboration of points of view on what could be considered conditions of a wireless culture.

1. Nomadism

Art has overflowed the support limits to invade and to be invaded by the transient territories of windows and non-places that compose us as connected beings, inhabiting distributed bodies. Now that we have become fast snails traveling the world like a handful of data that reside @somedomain, and not in a specific place, it is urgent to think of forms of creation that answer to the fragmented and mixed character of the nomadic reading contexts that emerge in the scope of global cities.

The popularization of portable wireless communication devices with possibility of Internet connection, such as cell phones and Palms, and the proliferation of telecommunication spaces in the

urban area, such as electronic billboards, are sufficient elements to establish the incorporation of nomadism into the large cities' way of life. Devices especially developed for the adaptation to situations of traffic and displacement, PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants), cell phones, and electronic billboards are adaptation tools to an urban universe of continuous acceleration and entropy, which modifies and adapts to new forms of perception, visualization and reading. Those systems are generated from hybridization processes that announce the exhaustion of distances, that previously allowed to differentiate art from mass communication and texts from each other, implying new aesthetic, cultural, and behavioral perspectives.

Art created for nomadic interfaces (PDAs and billboards, among others) obviously demands the accommodation of image and text size to the dimensions of minute screens (in the case of "portables") or huge ones (in the case of electronic billboards). However, this is an ontological question, and does not answer to the epistemological cleavage imposed in that context.

Now is the time to contemplate reception in environments of constant flow and in situations of displacement that involve interaction with different devices enabling multiple, unrelated tasks, such as talking on the phone and driving, checking e-mails and eating, or watching films in private and waiting in a line. To create work for those conditions of saturation and entropy implies a rethinking of the very nature of artistic fruition and of communication conventions and formats in the context of a culture characterized by ubiquity, in which contemplation will eventually fade, accompanied by the dissolution of subjectivity as a presence to oneself.

2. Emulated Identities

Creation directed towards the emergent context of liquid reading that occurs from and in the flow of connection systems is frequently intermediated by emulations, processes by which routines and behaviors are transferred from one object to another, which incorporates that first "other" in itself.

by Giselle Beiguemann

It is a kind of programming that is entitled to the classic figure of aemulatio (emulation), which played an important role in the thought and representation forms of the world of humanists such as Paracelsus. It was, as Michel Foucault explains, a relationship of likeness thought of as a fold of the being -- "freed from the law of the place" -- that acted as a sequence of double mirrors, where things could imitate each other without being chained and without being near.

As the French philosopher puts it, in emulation

"(...) The world abolishes the distance that is proper to it, and triumphs on the place that is given to each thing. From those reflexes that cross the space, which are the first ones? Where the reality, where the projected image?"

Frequently used for selecting -- on the Internet, or on the desktop -- the content the user wants to have on the Palm or mobile, emulations are not visualization effects that represent an absent model (which would be a simulation), but a situation of telepresence; since they do not mimic an absence, but rather present a kind of non-time that is made by the transit of networked information. In that behavior transfer process, the clonable character of the digital content stands out. The content may have its code reproduced in an identical way in different support forms and interfaces, reinforcing Peter Lunenfeld's hypothesis that the digital image brings with it the phenomenon of the "second-generation original."

Today, images and texts are offered for seeing and reading without warranty, without anything to assure their visual unity. This presupposition allowed Mallarmé to revolutionize poetry by trusting the materiality of the page -- sure of the presence of the white that would intervene, always, in the same place between

verses, in spite of the kind of reading. An unequivocal indication of a subversion of the ways and paradigms of art making emerges in this context, where elements such as the impossibility of contemplation, entropy, the emulated experience and the loss of aura conjugate with an alphanumeric writing that prefigures a post-phonetic culture.

3. McLuhan Updated

In this hybrid culture, texts, unlike images, are closer to the Latin meaning of "texere" (to weave), not only because technically they may be linked to each other, but because they become, in an environment of online data, the very condition of the image's possibility. What is visible, readable, or audible therefore depends on a textual route of addressing, the standardized resource locator, that is, the URL (Uniform Resource Locator), a kind of standard identifier (Uniform Resource Identifier, URI).

The experiences of reading -- including the reading of places -- are redefined, because they now become related to the differentiation among text, image and place, even though the metaphor of the screen with the page masks that unusual situation. The text is confused with the notion of place, and the image becomes a given

of the writing. The trivial message "404 - Not found" indicates a typing mistake in the location that is sought, or a route description that did not take place. That points, at least, to a novel situation: the space is now a matter of the text, and the possibility of visualization a given of the writing.

Moreover, since they are always built in agreement with a transmission process, on-line text and image also deal with the download time, both becoming a question of weight, beyond volume. It is in fact peculiar -- or even emblematic of the critical fragility of digital culture -- that the data available online (on desktops, portables, Palms, cell phones or electronic billboards) is seen just as a surface, something immanent to the screen. The very metaphor of the page as something that describes contents reinforces that conceptual illusion, hiding that which implodes the notion of volume and the horizontality of line. This is typical of the reading formats suitable for the historical context of Codex, but not of the formats for digital culture's liquid texts.

A liquidity that deeply entangles the dynamics enunciating the author's figure with those of the reader and enhances the process of convergence among different activities is decisive in digital culture, reconfiguring the notion and the idea of authorship. This is a transformation intrinsic to the peculiarities of digital writing, a transformation that allows -- through connection and linkage processes -- the decentralization of the self and the de-unifying of the author in multiple personalities, at the same time virtually fragmented and united to other authors', correlated or not.

In that sense, what needs to be confronted now is the disappearance of criteria that allowed to order, to classify and to distinguish -- not only the different discursive formats of texts (according to their materiality: letter, newspaper, file document or book), but the very specifics of the media (sound, visual, textual), which see their objective limits being imploded by the interface.

The digitization of culture has disconnected content from its support. Ten years ago, the difference between a movie and a TV commercial, an ad and a netart site could be unequivocally recognized from the point of view of the media object; today, there isn't a possibility for the formal distinction between a personal and a commercial letter, between the page of a newspaper and that of a book. The web browser still is, perhaps, the clearest indicator of that process in the beginning of the 21st century; but it tends to be remedied, if not superseded, by the proliferation and incorporation of mobile devices into daily life.

As we have learned from Bolter and Grusin, the new technologies and their continuous transformations have created a cultural paradigm where creation occurs in an environment of recycling and where interfaces constantly mime, aggregate, and recompose each others' attributes. That process is not limited to the artistic sphere, but has expanded to include countless day-by-day objects, such as computer screens built to resemble TVs; TV monitors with multiple windows resembling computers, printed books with a layout typical of computers, and computers designed in the shape of books, performing an interesting media ecology.

It therefore does not make sense to think of an "e-culture" in terms of a "proof test" of the advantages and disadvantages between digital and printed products, or wireless and cable, drawing attention to their technical profiles. The process of the hybridization of media and the cybridization of reading and contexts of urban life will certainly exhaust the qualities of the support of media-specific languages. However, beyond any

scatological vision of the end of the book, the death of the author, or the disappearance of cities and art, it is necessary to recognize the radicality of the transformations that new telecommunication systems have brought about for forms of creating, reading, and organizing representations and senses in a symbolic universe where the media does not matter, and the interface is the message.

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