

TEMPUS FUGIT

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O. INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGIN OF THE TEMPUS FUGIT BLOG

The Tempus Fugit Blog began in March 2005 as a personal writing project in which the blog structure would be used to publish, with (relative) frequency, events or opinions on the confluence between narrative and digital media. My interest in this subject dates back to *Tempus fugit, el relato interactivo* (Fundación Espais d'Art Contemporani, Girona, 2004), an essay in which I analysed the changes which the traditional narrative will undergo with the use of computers and the creative perspectives which CD-ROMS and the Internet can generate.

The initial object of this blog was therefore to publish brief comments and notes on the subject of *digital narrative*, which I am currently working on in connection with my doctoral thesis. Shortly after I began to write online, I realised that there were very few freely accessible publications on the Internet where opinions rather than just information were offered about what was happening with the intersection between art and technical-scientific culture.

I began to write about the events I attended and the texts I read and realised that I needed to expand the scope of my comments to encompass an ensemble of creations, not only *the narrative ones*, where multiple changes are taking place due to the *direct* intervention of technical-scientific aspects which I believe are stimulating to reflect upon.

The blog format was the obvious choice for practical reasons. Not only did it allow me to publish without the need for specialised technical knowledge but it also allowed me to do it immediately. I could therefore publish my writing digitally before it was published on paper and in the academically reviewed publications which are checked by several professors/professionals in a process which can take months.

After spending the first few months *playing* with the *digital narrative* category and other entries referring to digital culture in more general terms, I decided to classify my interests in different sections, which included:

- References to events focusing on art and technology.

- Readings on the subject (on paper and on a digital medium).
- Contents focusing specifically on the changes affecting the narrative (which have a value of their own but could also end up becoming the *draft* of a future academic research project).
- And more general allusions to digital art in contemporary culture.

Likewise, in my eagerness to document everything and to contextualise the entries as much as possible, to emphasise my opinions and not to confine myself to reiterating announcements or information already covered by mailing lists or thematic pages, I began to gather information on questions relative to contemporary art which, in principle, seems to be unaffected by the technological changes having an impact on *digital art*.

It did not take me long to realize that people tend to talk about two cultural or professional spheres circulating parallel to one another but which rarely converge, something like *contemporary art versus digital art*. The topic caught my interest in a way that opposes to how it is approached by many theorists: coming from a degree in audiovisual communications, I trained first in images and technology, only later to discover images without any technological mediation, *images anyway*. In this presentation, I look at the need to address this confluence, thus this new category about the opposition between two artistic worlds (?) has been adding to the preexisting ones.

Tempus Fugit has therefore been taking shape as a work tool which expands upon the initial idea of acting as a simple and compartmentalised platform for a future doctoral thesis to offer an immediate *public usefulness* based on a personal desire: the construction of a blog that focuses on art criticism related to technological media. My intention in the presentation that follows is to break down the different aspects of my blog to propose a way in which criticism and technology can be combined.

1. IT CAN'T GET ANY HARDER: THE BLOG AS AN ART CRITICISM PLATFORM

In recent years, blogs have become enormously popular as alternative communication tools:

- Transmuting personal diaries in paper, which now are published online and in view of all readers of the net, as an alternative to traditional journalism.
- Offering opinions and contents which consolidated media have just recently started

to incorporate, in their case by way of subsections written by new experts or *amateur* journalists.

- ... and also as a substitute for the websites common in the nineties, with constantly updated news and projects, even where artists or cultural platforms are concerned.

The reason is very simple: anyone with a user's expertise of the Internet can create a blog through the multiple platforms available, generating an ongoing archive of her interests which can be updated regularly and quickly.

In the specific case of art linked to technological questions, a blog facilitates the visibility of projects which, until a short while ago, were basically spread using mailing lists. Now, in addition to consolidated discussion lists like Nettime or Emyre or websites focusing on works of art and events like Rhizome, we have blogs which offer new information on future events and publications on a daily basis but also direct access to works through hyperlinks or tools like YouTube. The information (and the access to it) has multiplied.

- But what happens with the opinions?
- Can blogs transcend their journalistic function to offer contrasted opinions?
- Can blogs become the new tool for art criticism?
- What type of criticism can be done with blogs?
- Does it make sense to separate the spheres of contemporary art and the so called *digital art* when it comes to art criticism?

I'd like to start out by talking about the professions that relate writing and art in order to make it clear what I *would not like* the Temps Fugit blog to be.

1.1. MEDIATION MODELS

In the field of cultural mediation professions linked to writing (I am purposely excluding the curator because in this profession writing is contingent upon the execution of a particular expositive project), the roles one usually finds are those of the critic, the journalist and the professor.

The Art Critic

Art critics usually have a background in art history, and to date, at least in Spain's case, they have not been particularly inclined to use digital tools or to address the relations between art and technology beyond the traditional gallery circuit. Critics are

often accused of intellectual inscrutability, but whether we like it or not they are the mediators between the institutions and the curated projects.

- But what happens when new labels such as *generative art*, *sound art* or *net art* appear?
- What happens when the predominant critical models such as institutional critique (i.e., art and its agents in relation to institutions) or relational aesthetics (i.e., the aesthetic theory that judges works of art according to the social model they inspire) seem to come up short in the face of new artistic praxis and new ways of approaching the social and intellectual relationship with the technical-scientific context.
- What happens when the sphere of contemporary art tends to be synonymous with shows, museums and collections, while a separate sphere exists that devotes its time to talking about dialogue between artists and scientists, curating immateriality or *copyleft*, to cite some recurring examples in recent times?¹

The Journalist

The journalist is considered an information professional who has recently been (even more) spurred on by the need to respond to a dynamic of hypervelocity in which today's news is due yesterday and is obliged to cover various fronts at the same time (paper editions, digital versions, monographs, etc.).

The journalist (and also the critic) frequently have to defend themselves against accusations of responding to corporate interests which oblige them to systematically laud certain cultural works or productions. Strange bedfellows: when they're not being accused of being partisans, they're accused of being half-hearted. Often, the complaint is based on the fact that a press release is repeated *ad infinitum* with statistical data that says nothing about the contents offered².

- How can journalism respond to the schizophrenia of having to work in an unthinking present while at the same time having to transcend the press release on that same present about which it is so necessary to speak?

The University Professor

The professor is in a different situation. The European university model is in the process of changing. Some wonder whether the Bologna reform will end up converting universities into businesses and students into clients. According to this pessimistic belief, critical thinking in universities would disappear from syllabi. But this conception is equivalent, to a certain extent, to believing in a Golden Age of academic thinking. And the University has never been an easy universe: financing difficulties, oversized structures... and a one-directional communication model that divides between students and (professors) experts.

In the case which concerns us here, peer reviewed publications are one of the most controversial elements. What is questioned in other professions for its excessive celerity is called into question in this case for its slowness and for the difficulties of external projection beyond academic circles.

- Why does the academic validation system tend to exclude publications in areas such as those of the critic and those of the journalist?³
- Why are academic publications not projected (more) toward the society they are supposed to be serving?⁴
- Will the national university system be capable of offering training programmes that understand what many have learned through *streamings*, *podcasts*, *wikis* and attending events outside of academic circles (i.e., the possibility of generating new communities of experts outside of the traditional academic career)?⁵

When I started to write the Tempus Fugit blog, all of these questions did not come up at once. As happens with most blogs, there were several failed attempts before I came up with the recurring themes that would allow me to cover a manageable range. Writing uninterruptedly for two years has enabled me to structure topics of interest and reflect on the writing format itself which I will try to detail in the next two sections (the relationship between the format and subjectivity and the relationship between the format and the proposed subject), and a possible conclusion to end.

1. 2. THE BLOG AND I

The possibility of writing about whatever one wants is extremely appealing but in much the same way as occurs with literary writing, if you publish, for whom are you writing? I have always considered the blog to be a tool that allows me to channel my subjectivity through writing but which also obliges me to ask myself about the purpose of the publication and to discipline myself to achieve more precise, direct

and relevant writing. In other words, assuming that one is not seeking objectivity, but also that the blog should not turn into a sort of “online confessions” appealing to the voyeur instinct inside us all⁶, what are the most common questions?

- How can I express my opinion?

On paper, on a website or in a blog?

Using quotes, aphorisms, journalistic style columns?

What is the most relevant way to insert hyperlinks and which hyperlinks should be inserted?

What are the most pertinent labels for classifying the contents I am writing?

- What do I write about?

What level of knowledge makes it legitimate for me to express an opinion on a particular question?

How reasonable is it to talk about technology without dominating technology?

How pertinent is it to talk about contemporary art on a blog focused on art and technology?

How sensible is it to engage in that eventual dichotomy that possesses resonances of the “art autonomy” formula?

- Does it make sense to inform about something that others are reporting on?

Is there life beyond the reiteration of Teletypes?

- Does it make sense to talk about what everyone else is talking about?

Can one talk about current events without falling into the reiterated coverage of a certain event?

How can one avoid the clichés that are associated with certain types of contents, such as multitudinous equals massified and minority equals interesting, etc.?

I like to quote Wittgenstein’s linguistic maxim “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”, considering that certain criticism can be unnecessary due to its repetitiveness. And yet I repeat myself. The blog is an exercise in style where, as in literary writing, one tries to convince others of the appropriateness of repeating that which one repeats. In the process, and trying to be demanding with oneself, formal questions arise such as how to adapt to a certain extension, publish with recognisable regularity, improve the quality of one’s writing and try to offer new visions of sometimes old topics.

In the exercise of this subjectivity, I do not mention topics such as publishing my favourites from delicio.us, establishing “*must see*” events as such and always using the same information sources. While I have no doubt that public writing is, by default,

demiurgic, I am quite reluctant to play the role of the *advertising prescriber* which online mediators tend to assume although, as subjectivity is weak, these good intentions often operate more as *desiderati* than as unquestionable facts. In the exercise of this subjectivity, I advocate connecting topics as serendipitously as possible and seeking a link which, no matter how one looks at it, may seem unpopular: that which should exist between the so-called *contemporary art* and *digital art*.

1.3. CRITICISM OF WHAT?

In November 2005 I published my first post on art criticism on the occasion of the annual symposium of the Catalán Critics Association⁷. As a result of that post, and the comments it drew, I began to look at the separations that exist between the world of art considered *contemporary* and the so-called digital or electronic art. To put it simply, I discovered that whenever I attended an event, conference or inauguration of the first type I never met anyone there from the second and vice versa. The suspicion that there was a gap separating the two fields led me to reflect on the subject.

I'm not going to address the hackneyed question of whether or not intangible art is profitable, but rather the observation that there is only one official type of critical writing: that of contemporary art. At the risk of being called a reductionist and that contemplating art that makes a more or less explicit use of technology is like placing a certain type of art in a limbo where the means obscure the end, in the blog I always reiterate the following:

- Why not talk about it?
- Why not ask why this separation exists?
- Why not analyse whether there is a space through which the two *worlds* can connect?⁸
- Why can't we speak of specialised criticism to the extent that one is capable of understanding the device before her and, more importantly, exercising her role as a mediator between the works and the public who have access to them?

As I have already discussed in relation to the abovementioned professional roles, it is necessary to reflect upon what it means to be a cultural mediator at this time. And to do so, in the hopes that art criticism will not be wary of robots, that journalists can do more than cut and paste press dossiers and that the professors can educate

beyond the physical classroom, I believe that the blog is an excellent starting point, albeit not an ending point, for a critical exercise based on something as necessary as *trial and error*.

1.4. WHAT, THEN, WOULD AN ART CRITICISM BLOG BE LIKE?

- I propose an interstitial space between traditional art criticism, paper or web-based journalism and academic writing linked to its own publication system.
- I advocate an interdisciplinary documentation process that encompasses references from all possible intellectual circles, i.e., that neither looks upon museums with disdain nor extols the virtues of software, but rather looks at what is happening between one and the other. Neither apocalyptic nor integrated but merely integrating.
- I support the need to cut, paste, eliminate and re-edit all personal contents until we find the formulas that are best adapted to accommodate both the blogger's convenience and readers' interest.
- I understand that everyone performs his or her task using the structure with which he or she is most comfortable: individually or collectively, striving at all times to write the best texts through a rigorous subjectivity that respects the opinions of others.
- I propose that online art criticism should end up establishing itself as an officially recognised professional practice and that those who do it should not have to wait until it is printed on paper to have their work as mediators recognised (and the remuneration that it might imply).

There are appearing online professions still without specific names in which the required skills must also be remunerated, such as knowing how to search, knowing how to find and knowing how to discern what is relevant and what is not. The term *cognitive capitalism* should not be used only as a prelude to begin (once again) a debate on the precariousness of cultural professions.

- All that's been said might and should be the object of clarification, discussion and even lively controversy. I think that the stimulating sessions of some debate forums, whether in person or virtual, can be naturally and dynamically extended using these tools called blogs.

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SOKAL, Alan y BRICMONT, Jean, *Imposturas intelectuales*, Paidós, Barcelona, 1999.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Artkrush issue # 57 Art and Design Blogs

<http://www.artkrush.com/mailler/issue57/#top>

-empyre- soft_skinned_space

<http://www.subtle.net/empyre>

nettime mailing list

<http://www.nettime.org>

NEW-MEDIA-CURATING

<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/new-media-curating.html>

Rhizome. Connecting Art & Technology

<http://www.rhizome.org>

Tempus Fugit. Cuando arte y tecnología encuentran a la persona equivocada

<http://www.raquelherrera.blogspot.com>

YouTube. Broacast Yourself

<http://www.youtube.com>

(All of the above were last consulted on 15/05/07)

NOTES

1 There are some interesting Spanish exceptions such as the *closed* artszin (<http://www.artszin.net/>), Acción Paralela (<http://www.accpa.org/>) or aleph-arts (<http://aleph-arts.org/>), and the still open salonKritik (<http://www.salonkritik.com/>), agenciacritica (<http://agenciacritica.net/>) and a-desk (<http://www.a-desk.org/>), but their relationship to technological aspects has been variable.

Despite the fact that aleph-arts accumulated texts and generated opinions on artistic practices and technological pervasiveness, artszin basically addressed the world of contemporary art while Acción Paralela did this in a tangential way. The only one that publishes critiques directly in a *stricto senso* fashion is a-desk (but only on museums and galleries).

SalonKritik acts as a repository of information and art criticism that focuses on the print press (regardless of the subject matter) and agenciacritica seems to be oriented more towards the criticism of cultural management (last consulted on 12/05/06).

2 A recent example would be the inauguration of the Centro de Arte Laboral de Gijón, devoted to the relationship between art and technology. A search of the first two or three pages of Google mainly gives back information on the number of visitors during the opening weekend and practical information on the titles of the exhibitions and the topics addressed.

Only the interview with the organiser of the *Feedback* exhibition in El País newspaper and the information prepared

by the journalists from the ABC newspaper on the two main exhibitions seem to escape from the tendency to reproduce the most recent press releases (last consulted on 12/05/06).

3 The prestige that is usually attributed to a specialised art publication is not normally shared when one is trying to earn points on an academic curriculum vitae (and vice versa, I fear), not to mention when the publications come from the world of journalism...

4 The question of the “modernisation” of university teaching in relation to the new context of digital media has many ramifications which can be perceived at the international level. Jon Ippolito has collected them in his article *New Criteria for New Media* (http://newmedia.umaine.edu/interarchive/new_criteria_for_new_media@m.html), (last consulted on 12/05/06).

5 By way of example, one can review the videos of Refresh! The First International Conference on the Histories of Media Art, Science and Technology (<http://www.mediaarthistory.org/>) or access the presentations of the guest speakers on art and technology from the Digital Media Center at Columbia School of Arts (<http://arts.columbia.edu/dmc/docs/lectureseries.html>), (last consulted on 12/05/06).

6 In this regard, web 2.0 tools such as Twitter, <http://www.twitter.com> (where the users send in e-mail or text messages about what they are doing at that time of the day) are another social example of “everything is publishable, therefore everything becomes *important*”. Interesting as a future sociological experiment to analyse leisure time on the Internet, or as an artistic experiment that combined the multitude of irrelevancies published, but not as a theoretical reflection (last consulted on 12/05/06).

7 See SIMPOSIO DE LA ASOCIACIÓN CATALANA DE CRÍTICOS, ¿CRÍTICA DE QUÉ? (<http://raquelherrera.blogspot.com/2005/11/simposio-de-la-asociacin-catalana-de.html>), (last consulted on 12/05/06).

8 Some theorists like Edward Shanken or Gunalan Nadarajan have addressed this question specifically. The first has alluded to the lack of “theoretical apparatus” of certain current digital works (see SOBRE LO INGENTE Y LO INABARCABLE: LÍNEAS MAESTRAS DE DEFINICIÓN DE ACT, <http://raquelherrera.blogspot.com/2006/08/sobre-lo-ingente-y-lo-inabarcable.html>, last consulted on: 15/05/07).

The second has referred to the lack of understanding on the part of contemporary art structures as exhibitions and fairs when contemplating the technological needs of the works (see II SIMPOSIO DE LA ASOCIACIÓN CATALANA DE CRÍTICOS DE ARTE: BIENALES MEDIALES, <http://raquelherrera.blogspot.com/2006/11/ii-simposio-de-la-asociacin-catalana.html>, last consulted on: 15/05/07).

One possible “unifying” proposal could be that suggested by theorists of “media archaeology” like Siegfried Zielinski or Erkki Huhtamo. Their historical perspective does not seem to reject either one of the two *models* but rather to look for their complementarity.