

# Displacements of Creative Activity in Brazilian Visual Arts

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## Displacements and communication

The Electronic Arts played an important role in the displacement of creative activity, which has traditionally been focused on the artist, that is, in the conditions of production of the works of art/artistic experience influenced by a romantic-modern perspective. However, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a process of actively including the spectator as someone responsible for the creative activity began, especially under the auspices of Marcel Duchamp. In this paper, we analyze some aspects of the above mentioned displacement in the pre-electronic art made in Brazil by Hélio Oiticica and Ligia Clark, passing through the telepresence and Interactive Arts of Eduardo Kac, up to the more recent Web-Art productions developed by the young Influenza. In order to help us during this historical promenade we will pay attention to the transformations and features that characterize the creative activity as the invention of a sort of communication. In other words, the art production is considered as a balanced relationship between artist and spectator resulting in a special communicability.

The displacement of the creative activity happens at least due to two motives: a) the decreasing importance of the artist as the only responsible for the creation of works of art or artistic experience leading astray the romantic path of the foundation of art on a theory of genius; b) the democratization of the concept of creative activity as including — more than only bringing closer — the spectator as a necessary part of the work of art conceived now as a communicational experience. The argument to be defended is that with the rise of Electronic Art in general — Computer based, Digital, Web, Virtual Arts, etc. — this displacement reaches an optimal position. Firstly, because the Electronic Art does not impose on the spectator the responsibility of completing the work of art, what can be found in some of Oiticica's works. Secondly, because it invites the spectator for an experience of art through the establishment of a kind of dialogue, as we can see in Kac's interactive works. Finally, because in Electronic Arts there are sufficient grounds to promote art experience through websites

and/or file programs, as conceived by Influenza.etc.br in which works of art and art experience are waiting for an activation (by accessing or running) as “opera(c)tion” of a communicative experience.

## The pre-Electronic Art: Hélio Oiticica and Ligia Clark

Ligia Clark and Hélio Oiticica are a landmark in the process of introducing spectators as creators. Exponents in the 1960's and 70's, such authors have sought for an understanding of visual art that emphasized the spectators's position, provoking them to participate and to collaborate in the construction of the work of art. Some of their works were mainly viewed more as happenings or performances than actually as objects: something like a “proto-immersion”, an anticipation of digital immersion.<sup>1</sup> The spectator had to live and dance Oiticica's *Parangolés* (1965) and to manipulate Clark's *Bichos* (1958), *conditio sine qua non* for the existence of the art experience or the work of art. Both Oiticica's “Ambient Art”<sup>2</sup> and Clark's “Relational Objects” carried out an inversion of the place of creation, displacing its authorship from artist to spectator as Duchamp once suggested saying that the *regardeurs* alone made the picture.<sup>3</sup> In *A dança na minha experiência* (1966) Oiticica explains his ideas:

Here is the key to what I call Ambient Art:  
the eternally mobile, the transformable,  
which structures itself by the act of the  
spectator.<sup>4</sup>

Both pre-electronic Brazilians artists anticipate the explosion of interactivity that happened in the Age of Electronic Art.<sup>5</sup> Their assumption was that the fundamental task of art is to involve the spectator, who becomes more and more immersed in the making of art. However, the forms of interactions were restricted to the available media. As time passed by, innovation of supports pressed and it was necessary to extend the range of possibilities of collaborations.

## The Interactive Arts: Eduardo Kac

These limitations set the starting point for the works of Eduardo Kac. His first works on telepresence using technologies of communication in the 80's were surpassed with the introduction in the early 90's of new technologies of interactivity like the Internet. He had consistently developed the Oiticica tradition bringing new supports and technologies. His contribution, however, was larger than a mere inclusion of new materials and media. He was trying to increase and create new kinds of collaboration turning the spectator-artist exchange thought by Oiticica into a new kind of communication — *Ornitórrincovi* (1989) and *Uirapuruvii* (1996/99). He tried to radicalize the introduction of communication as a reality inside the creation process of Visual Arts. From now on, communication was not to be comprehended as data transferring, but as 'virtual dialogue': "...works of art created with telematic media are communication events in which information flows in multiple directions."<sup>8</sup>

And art here also becomes a communicative experience.

## The Web Art: Influenza Group

Enlarging the path opened up by Kac, the young Influenza Group<sup>9</sup> increased through the Web(Art) the number of ways interactions and communications are possible. File programs install on users' Desktop skins through which spectators navigate the Influenza homepage. Hence it is possible to create a different determinate interface for each user connected, what results in a data mixing of the users/spectators opened desktop programs with the Influenza homepage contents. The starting point for an art experience can now be file programs or homepages. Simultaneously, virtual users become spectators interacting and building a different and productive-communicative experience between themselves and the artist.

## Final notes

We can draw as conclusion that, in the context of the New Media, art is communitarian, i.e., produced by the artist with the spectator's co-participation. I do not believe that it works like a collective creation as can be seen within artists groups. What is to be underlined in this context is the necessity of communication, either between artists or between artist and spectator. The individuality of the artist remains quite the same, but it is now (counter)balanced. Thus, we recognize the place of creation in a balanced position in which the co-dependence plays the role once played by the figure of the genius alone.

The artist creates his or her work and is still responsible for its creation, but not exclusively responsible given that he depends on participation. The communicative process is special because it takes place only when the work of the artist is somehow operated by the spectator, who nevertheless is not obliged to make/interpret/remember anything<sup>10</sup>. The balance of this communicative process depends on how much information is made available: excess of information can drive the spectator, hindering his will, while lack of it does not allow the spectator to recognize the work as something to be operated. This is always the case when an artistic production has been displayed and nobody — or few — perceives that he or she is in the imminence of becoming part of an artistic experience. The creative activity understood via this balanced process and this special sort of communication keep spectator and artist side by side. The great challenge for the disciplines that are reflecting upon an art definition taking into account the New Media Art world is to understand precisely what the key-point of this communion is.

- 1 Cf. Grau, Oliver. 2003. *Virtual Art: from Illusion to Immersion*. Boston: MIT Press.
- 2 Oiticica, H. 1967. "Esquema geral da nova objetividade." In Ferreira, G. et al. 2006. (Org.) *Escritos de artistas*, Rio de Janeiro: J. Zahar, pp.154-168, here 162-3.
- 3 Duchamp M. 1989. Apud De Duve, Th. "Kant d'après Duchamp" In *Au Nom de L'art*. Paris: Ed. Minuit, p. 77.
- 4 Oiticica, H. 1966. *A dança na minha experiência [The dancing in my experience]*. Unpublished original text, Museu de Arte Contemporânea de São Paulo, p.4.
- 5 Cf. Osthoff, Simone. 1997. "Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica: A Legacy of Interactivity and Participation for a Telematic Future." In *Leonardo* 30 (4), pp. 279-289. See also the video works/projects and notes by Oiticica: BASUALDO, Carlos. (2001) *Hélio Oiticica: Quasi-Cinemas* (Catalogue). Koeln: Koelnischer Kunstverein/Hatje Cantz Publishers.
- 6 Cf. <http://www.ekac.org/ornitorrincom.html>, projected before the Web.
- 7 Cf. <http://www.ekac.org/uirapuru.html>.
- 8 Kac, Eduardo. *On the Notion of Art as Visual Dialogue*. In <http://www.ekac.org/dialogue.html>.
- 9 Cf. <http://influenza.etc.br>.
- 10 Cf. Gally, M. 2007. *O ambiente do belo e o pluralismo nas artes visuais: Inspirações para uma atualização da "Crítica da Faculdade de Julgar Estética" de I. Kant [The Ambient of Beauty and the Pluralism in Visual Arts: Inspirations for an Update of I. Kant's "Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgment"]*. Univ. Federal do Rio de Janeiro. PhD Dissertation. Chap. VI.