

## Inês Albuquerque (pt)

University of Aveiro – DeCA, Communication  
and Art Department  
Ph.D. Student  
inesalbuquerque@ua.pt

## Ricardo Torres (pt)

ISCTE – IUL  
Ph.D. Student  
torres.ricardo@gmail.com

## Rosa Maria Oliveira (pt)

University of Aveiro – DeCA, Communication and Art  
Department | ID+ Research Institute for Design, Media  
and Culture  
Professor  
rosaoliv@ua.pt

# From Art as Knowledge to the Aesthetics of the Subject

New Ways of Thinking the Art of  
the 21st Century

### Introduction

The article proposes the development of a new aesthetic approach to contemporary art produced in or for technological platforms, focussing on interactive art and art as knowledge.

### Art as knowledge

The work of art is a trustee of subjective, empirical and emotional information, accessible to those available to fit in the role of receiver and interpreter of that information.

Authors such as Claudia Giannetti are working under the perspective of art as knowledge related with new forms of artistic expression rooted in mediatic or technological environments, where the public plays a multiple role: as receiver, as collaborative partner, almost as an artist. Understanding art as knowledge means comprehend the interaction between public and artwork.

### Structuration of the subjective

One cannot fully analyse art by simply decontextualizing it (Panofsky, 1983; Bourdieu, 1979). It is necessary to take in consideration properly the micro and macro societal aspects, in a perspective ideally resembling that of Simmel's snapshots, where the ordinary of everyday life is stripped for its given symbolic meaning and relation to the broader symbolic articulations of society.

As today's society goes through globalizing processes with its cultural fluxes (Appadurai, 1991: 295-310) and traditional symbolic structures have lost their importance in the orientation of action and experience (Beck et al, 2000: 53), experience and reality become an individual construction, a work of every individual. This can be traced to Kantian philosophy and Goethe's camera obscura experiment, which underlined the importance of the subject in the experience. The relevant part of the experience ceased to be its structure or its symbolic perception in favour of the individual and his own reflexive interpretation.

The art system (Melo, 1994: 11-31) stayed on the path initiated since the institutionalization of anomie (Bourdieu, 1993: 238-253), leading to the definition of art as something not dictated by institutionalized dictates, but by symbolic legitimation originated from different social groups. Thus, contemporary society helps in shaping art experience as a subjective experience, both in terms of individuality and in terms of structure. Perhaps the best way to describe the act of experiencing the new art forms lays in the literary figure popularized by Baudelaire, the flâneur. Maybe, as the flâneur walked the city in order to experience it, the contemporary actor must subjectively experience contemporary art in order to travel through it.

#### **Interactive art and a new paradigm to the observer**

Interactive art places the observer in a different situation from that in "traditional art", as he can establish a relation with the work of art. Because the observer faces a new situation, we can consider that the observer no longer exists. He is a dynamic, collaborative and active participant (subject) in the creative and aesthetical process of contemporary art.

Modern and contemporary art framed in the relation between art, science and technology, under the goal of immersion and participation, include art forms such as installation, video, web art, virtual reality and ambient music (Paul, 2008).

#### **Aesthetics of the subject: a new aesthetical approach?**

In the context of contemporary art, authors seek to develop aesthetic approaches adapted to the reality of the relation between art and technology. However, this demand is not a result of the 21st century, since the last century was prolific in new ideas regarding art and technology: from Informational Aesthetics of Max Bense and A. Moles in the 60s, to Systemic Aesthetics in the 90s, appropriated from Endophysics theories by Peter Weibel. This theory, applied to interactivity and virtual reality in art, in which the observer (or subject) and the interface were the most important aspects, influenced Claudia Giannetti in developing Endoaesthetics.

Thinking the individual as the centre of the aesthetical process leads to the idea of the aesthetics of the subject. The key concept of this idea is the subject: when the observer became a participating element, almost a co-author of the interactive work, he becomes the centre of the aesthetic question, a

subject with a key role for understanding the artwork. His relationship and interaction with the work are the main ideas of this hypothesis.

#### **Conclusions**

This article presents a new aesthetic possibility, which is believed to make sense in the context of contemporary art.

Society is changing. The structuring of how an individual perceives reality is changing as society gradually becomes different. And to monitor the development of new forms of art, it is also absolutely necessary to develop new ways of thinking that will confirm the opening of different paths in the art of the 21st century.

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