

Immersion in a field phenomenon. Going with the flow Carlos Augusto (Guto) Nóbrega, Maria Luiza (Malu) Fragoso

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Abstract

NANO-Nucleus of Art and New Organisms has developed practical and theoretical investigations in the field of art and technology related to biotelematics, hybridization and transcultural experimentation in the last 6 years. A methodological approach has been applied in order to create a flow of informative and sensitive experiences based on collaborative strategies such as events, meetings, immersions and interactive platforms. NANO lab is not regarded only as a physical space for experimentation, but also as an environment in which the practice reflects the concepts applied in the artistic work. In this sense, we engage in field trips, artistic residencies and field projects that relocate the lab environment into a “wild”, “unexplored”, unknown natural condition which we call immersions, situations in which the lab is re-located or dis-located according to specific work plans, work groups, project objectives. On the following paragraphs the organic model behind these ideas and strategies will be briefly discussed and some examples presented.

Keywords

Art & Technology, Aesthetic Organism, Hiperorgânicos, Immersion, NANO Lab

Introduction

As already discussed in previous articles (Nóbrega & Fragoso, 2015), the concept of field has been a consistent and productive working model for the methodologies applied at NANO Lab. In the first place we believe that art should be addressed as a organic system of and integrative dimension whose essential qualities such as coherence, connectedness, emergence, transductivity are part of a complex web of forces that can only be fully grasped if one allows for him/herself to go deep in the playfulness with the system (artwork milieu) as a whole. Going with the flow is a state of awareness which implies to be present but not in a fixed manner, not anymore from a standing privileged point of view towards the artwork, but to exert an state of presence in movement, oscillatory, encompassing multiple

perspectives and scenarios, here and there, all at once. This is why the environment in such a context is critical, as it has the power to reverberate to ones presence. The environment should be considered not the “white cube” for the artwork, but effectively and affectively integrated to the artwork’s nature as part of its genesis. The environment must be taken into account, not

only on the process of reception of the artwork, but also for the process of its invention. However, we cannot to go further in that discussion without defining the artwork’s nature, without specifying what we conceive as the nature of a work of art and the multiple forms it can assume.

Aesthetic Organism

In his paper “Towards a Field Theory for Post-Modernist Art”, Roy Ascott (1980) draws our attention to the transactional character of works of art, in which a field of “psychic interplay” between the artist and the observer takes place, and proposes the artwork as a system. Thus, the artwork may be seen as a matrix around which the art game is set. The art object is in fact a fraction of a general system that encompasses several actants - human and non-humans, natural and artificial organisms, multidimensional perspectives - with several entrances. Playing, would be “...the way the artist, the observer and the artwork become a whole interlinked mind, and that art is a game of which the rules are to be discovered through playing, and that in playing ludic patterns that interconnect are revealed” (Nóbrega, 2009). The work of art is what results of such live experience with the system – the playfulness of getting immersed in acts of invention, transductions, emergence involving its several parts. That is why we call works of art “Aesthetic Organisms” (Nóbrega, 2009).

Activating Flow

This framework gives us the possibility to approach

artworks not as a process byproduct, but, indeed, as a process component of a larger structure, a trigger, of its one nature, able to activate along with the system, an artistic experience. We may consider such an experience as a fourth-dimensional window, which brings visibility for the system and allows for its fruition. In this case the concept of field shall be applied “as a working model for the systemic role of information within the immaterial, invisible, dynamical flow that intercommunicates natural (humans and other living systems) and artificial (machine) organisms in the process of invention as well as fruition of the artwork” (Nóbrega & Fragoso, 2015). This brings us back to our initial point regarding NANO Lab methodologies which includes field trips, artistic residencies and projects immersed in nature. These are actions that relocate the lab environment into a “wild”, “unexplored”, unknown natural condition which we call immersions, situations in which the lab is re-located or dis-located according to specific demands, network needs and project goals. What is important for us in such a strategy is the window opened for the process and the awareness for the emergence, crucial for nurturing the genesis of aesthetic organisms.

Hyper-organic Immersions

As a practical example, we may focus on “Hiperorgânicos”, an open lab event created and organized by NANO Lab which provides for the participant a network of actions during three days of sharing experiences, processes and invention in a collaborative manner. There is not an expectation of a single artwork to be created along the process, but rather an open space for exploring and connecting. The core of the “Hiperorgânicos” event is a server that interconnects all processes created along the three lab days. Each participant is invited to share data and connect, using local and telematics data to generate, transform their own processes and the whole emerging picture from these exchanges. The public is invited to engage in an active form, bringing their own resources, sharing knowledge with the artists, scientists, researchers in a collaborative way. Video, sound and behavioral systems are generated along with the event. At some point, performances are shown to the public, inviting them to interact. However, what draws our attention is the systemic, complex behavior of the whole system (environment, processes, network) which at some point show us some aesthetic values we could qualify as art. This is an important observation, as it calls our attention

for the multidimensional, trans-sensorial nature of art. As a temporal phenomenon, timing is crucial for the absorption of what we call an aesthetic organism. Instead of the classical fruition mode artwork-observer relation, we notice that context such as these open labs and immersive residencies brings awareness to the continuous sampling of multiple unfolding of the system, a flow of events which can be grasped by intention, intuition and immersion. The concept of this proposed work could be thought of as that of emerging organisms whose duration is conditioned to time, space, the environment in which it develops a play full experience with the public. Ephemeral work, updating itself to each encounter, metabolizing itself in time.

Nature Immersions

A practice that functions as a preparatory for the “Hiperorgânicos” event, as well as for several processes developed at the NANO Lab. These are moments in which all members travel to a place outside the city and engage in a program specially created for that specific time and space. These programs are a set of propositions brought through by any member of the lab when there is a need for group focus, concentration and co-creation. Usually happens two or three times a year and requires specific planning for each detail of propositions. Immersions in natural environments are usually stimulating for our senses and perceptions. These specific immersions are conceived to construct sensitive coupling between natural/organic and artificial systems. When one returns to nature, after a tremendous technological immersion, normally stimulated by the lab’s research practice, carries with and on the body these technical apparatus. These syncretic interactions and hybrid intersections are extremely relevant to the artistic processes developed in NANO Lab. It is not only the natural environment that we are interested in, but, specially the sense of being enhanced by technology and connected to nature. This is made possible only when our bodies (flesh and machine) are provoked and demanded by the environment.

Immersions last for three days, when documentations are made through photos, videos, drawings and texts. Collaborators are invited to participate and the groups are usually around twenty people directly or indirectly related to the lab’s team. Most activities are experimental and some are proposed after arriving at the chosen location, stimulated by the environment itself. There is little time to sleep and interactions

between all are intense and challenging. After each immersion, results and processes are organized and re-located at the lab space and became object of reflection and further research. The intense group activities during the immersions contribute to the laboratory's integrative system, to promote academic dialogs and favors the need to bring into form the experimentations in order to show the processes in artistic or scientific events and consequently creating a coherent flow of creative initiatives within the collaborative works at NANO. Immersions allow us to return to the essence of the the nucleus of new organisms, stimulating what "conversations" and "autopoiesis" as explained below.

Other than Roy Ascott's work, we point out here two, from a few, theoretical references, that influence this methodological approach to the art-lab environment: Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela's idea of "autopoiesis"(1980) as a systematic medium (space) where all recursive dynamics of reciprocal interactions occur to sustain the survival of life, of processes, and of systems; and, Jorge de Albuquerque Vieira's approach to art as a type of knowledge essential to the *umwelt* (and it's possible poiesis) and to any process that guarantees the permanence or the survival of any living system. Very briefly, Maturana and Varela envisioned self-referring systems by which life is centered in maintaining and reinforcing the vital parts (organs) that the system needs to survive. Environmental influences are absorbed and processed but the essence is maintained and this is advocated from the understanding of "biology of cognition". This essence would be what defines or differs one organism from another. Interaction with the environment is referred as "conversation", a consensual braiding of emotions, behavior and language, which reinforce the construction of networks. According to the author, technology is seen as a powerful instrument/medium to expand our knowledge about structural and sensitive coherences within living and nonliving systems.

In this sense, Jorge A. Vieira (2009) quotes three major characteristics for the survival of an open system: sensitivity, to operate information flows; memory, to transfer and retain information; and capability to elaborate, or prepare, information according to its needs. Vieira applies the term *umwelt*, first introduced by Estonian ethologist Jacob von Uexküll, to propose the idea of understanding art as a type of knowledge, so to speak an open system related to the survival of any living organism. According to the author, before philosophy or

even science, art served as an "evolutionary adaptive strategy" of survival. This is possible if we consider the idea that survival is directly related to deliberate conditional couplings of each organism's with it's *umwelt*. Vieira also tells us that our *umwelt* has long been technologically constructed and art, understood as a type of knowledge, incorporates all necessary technology to favor processes of consciousness, and consequently of survival. Creativity and innovation are aspects in artistic processes, which reinvent our relations with our *umwelt* and construct possible realities. Other than a scientific approach to understanding the truth of biological systems, artists may be more interested in understand the possible relations between humans and nature; other living organisms, humans and nature; technology, organisms, humans and natures, and so on.

Conclusion

Practical and theoretical investigations held at NANO Lab in Rio de Janeiro intend to explore in the field of art and technology notions of biotelematics, hybridization and transcultural experimentation. From Field Theory, to the concept of Coherence, in processes of autopoiesis and environmental consciousness, there is this constant need to understand an emerging hybrid organic structure, thought as an aesthetic organism, that becomes more and more product of our own bodies and lives. From experimental processes applied to strategic methodologies, dynamical flow is necessary to intercommunicate natural (humans and other living systems) and artificial (machine) organisms in the process of invention as well as fruition of the artwork. Methodological approaches are in process of experimentation. Informative and sensitive experiences are based on collaborative strategies.

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Authors' Biographies

Guto Nóbrega received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from The Planetary Collegium programme (formerly CAiA-STAR) based on the School of Art and Media, University of Plymouth – UK (2009), where he developed 4 years of research under supervision of Prof. Roy Ascott. His doctoral thesis, funded by CAPES – BRAZIL, is a transdisciplinary research in the fields of art, science, technology and nature in which he investigates how the confluence of these domains has informed the creation of new aesthetics experiences. As a result of this study it was developed a theoretical-practical intervention in the field of arts with focus on the ideas of interactivity, telematics, field theories, and hyperorganisms. He holds a position as Adjunct Professor at Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and coordinates the NANO – Nucleous of Art and New Organisms at the same institution.

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