artnodes

PRESENTATION

Introduction: How to archive and preserve artistic practices linked to new mediums

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Whether it is true or not, the following humorous anecdote from the early years of e-commerce is quite illustrative: it seems that some years ago the head of a large international publishing company "gave the order to remove from internet" a digital book in pdf format that shortly after going on sale on their web page was copied and spread by all of the world's servers. Today, similar attempts ("to remove a pdf from internet") remain hilarious to us, above all taking into account the vast profusion of textual, sound or visual material that we find on the net, legally or illegally distributed, free of copyright or subject to the most stringent intellectual property laws. Material that is there, whether we like it or not, and that continues to be consulted, reminding us that the digital realm has specific characteristics that are quite different from the analogical.

Everything seems to be on internet: all kinds of files are exchanged in peer to peer networks, we download songs, complete discographies, books or films from webs or spaces specializing in storage of digital contents. Meanwhile, thousands of users post their documents, classify, order and label files incessantly, in any part of the world and virtually in real time. Internet has become the archive of archives; in these times of superabundance of information the world has become an immense archive. Digitalization of contents has made the malleability of data possible – the easy accumulation, storage and transport – just as the conversion of analogue to digital has converted information into something numerical – and thus processable and calculable, turning all data and information into a process without end –.

We must not speak of the immateriality of this data, for despite the conversion of all analogue information into digital formats, the mediums that store and put this information into operation most certainly continue to be material. Anyone who has ever lost data from the hard disk of their computer can emphatically certify this: data and information have a place and take up space. In the same way that everything is archived, everything is lost: in the din of noise caused by the superabundance of information, in the obsolescence of the mediums that store, produce or reproduce it, or in the short circuits of the systems that archive it. How to produce meaning, order, significance and relevance in the midst of this exponential increase in the uninterrupted flow of data has become a crucial aspect for the survival of our fragile (and oversaturated) memory.

While blogs, wikis, tags, twitters or social networks of all types have become the hegemonic tools for quickly taking the pulse of what is occurring on internet and in this instantaneous world, mountains of data, millions of documents pile up in some hidden place waiting to be classified in some order that makes possible their eventual recovery on demand. After the current tempest, what deserves to be archived and what must be archived? What is best to be forgotten? What should we include in our archives for their perseverance? And above all, in what way should we construct our memory?

Although these questions are common to all kinds of data, information, objects, events, etc. in our culture, they are especially relevant in the context of artistic and cultural productions linked to electronic and digital mediums. Media art,

in its great diversity of singular expressions, which range from the now forgotten fax art to the most experimental forms of artistic creation with software or video games, for example, already has quite a long history. A history being written insofar as we are capable of reconstructing the pieces we find scattered through the myriad of disciplines stimulated by new artistic practices.

In fact, we are not confronting new issues, every age (re)constructs memory in its own way. This construction has been reflected upon throughout history, starting from the well-trodden phrase "history is written by the victors" to the Nietzschean genealogy that seeks to articulate history as a counter-memory, introducing its philosophy of meaning and value in the very heart of the truth of history. From the truth of history to the history of truths, from history as a search for the founding origins of meaning to history as counter-memory that disproves the foundational myth of origins; history becomes the way in which we explain the past from a present and for a future.

Today, not only do we continue to ask ourselves about how but also, and above all, about who constructs this history and from where. The access and control of information has been redistributed to undreamed-of limits, and today, although there continues to be a hegemony of some over others, the multiplicity of constructing agents of accounts of data from the past has become diversified, from the most micro to the most macro. While institutions ponder how to archive the large quantity of pieces of media art that are gradually achieving the category of "historical", thousands of users register, post, file, order and distribute their documents, making possible the construction of an infinity of accounts about "the happening of things that happen". The history of media art does not wait, but moves forward in its continuous attempt to explain that which occurs in the evolution of our contemporaneity.

The archive is the operational basis that makes the different accounts of history/ies possible. And from it we may ask ourselves not only about who constructs history and archives, and from where, but from whom and/or for whom are these archives? And in turn, from whom and/or for whom is history? These questions that mobilize users, spectators, consumers, fans or citizens throughout the world should also inform the practices of institutions that wish to adapt to these new times while they reinvent themselves in their eagerness for the production, collection, conservation, archive and documentation of that which "deserves" being preserved in memory.

In the age of the prosumer the spectator becomes, in turn, producer. In the age of remix, contents survive in a thousand and one ways, in a thousand and one different formats, redefining themselves in an infinite loop of production of meaning. The modularity, interconnection and interoperability of archives that form nodes in an immense network of multiple connections urges the question of *who, how* and *where* to redistribute this in a heterogeneous fabric of multiple relations.

If we go from asking ourselves: "why archive media art?"*,* to asking: "what should we archive?", and from there we advance to "how to archive", we can see how we move from, on the one hand, archiving objects to archiving processes, where, besides the conservation of original pieces, recourse to documentation becomes an indispensable tactic for the survival of the foundational material that history is made of. On the other hand, in the face of the rapid obsolescence of technological mediums and the need to contend with an incessant flow of data, we must take into account the policies of **free access** that diversify the use of archives, or the strategies of cooperation aimed at the interoperability and standardization of formats and other mechanisms that likewise contribute to the much longed-for survival. We not only focus on recovering and revering the original; the transformation has already taken place and that book that should "be removed from internet" has today become an endless quantity of books, fragments, videos, audio books, citations, cross references, poems, collages, etc., which travel along networks, redefining themselves a thousand times over; because when it comes right down to it, isn't this what culture is all about?

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