

During the early 1990's reality was a singular entity and yet the world was changing; the internet age had begun. The world has come to the point where there are two currents running parallel to each other which make up our contemporary reality: physical reality and virtual reality.

Current terms in social media dictate connectivity to one's own network as a constant — breaking this world's physical temporality of personal and external connections. In fact we are connected at all times to a wealth of current terms, news, information and people. This reality that blurs the line of virtuality and reality ambiguously, demands a new term that incorporates two into one: Contemporeality.

-amaCollective

What is there to say about *contemporeality*? Well, it is a belief that the internet's web of networks is, in fact, an additional layer to the physical realm, rather than an alternate plane of existence.

This is a consequential effect of increased interaction, of our minds and bodies, with that of the machine. There has been a depreciation in our attention span and a withdrawal from physical intimacy. Could it be we've vainly fallen in love with the screen¹?

We see through it how much we love, both, our individual identities and, even more, ingesting others for our visual entertainment². We release ourselves through this breached physical distance; and create viralities of the most embarrassing moments. This is a proclamation for the individual, a selfish focus on the self³.

¹ Lovink (2013) made the implication that a self-help guide for the "virtue of networking," that would aid "us in what to say and when to shut up, what to save and when to join, when to switch off and where to engage" (Lovink, 2013), was needed. This citation came with his identification, "We struggle to keep track of all the information that approaches us, making it hard for most info bits to be properly digested [...] when we are constantly exposed to real-time interactive media, we develop attention fatigue and a poor sense of time [...]" (Lovink, 2013). This is also a problem art critic Jonathan Crary (2001) noted, with the increasing concern of attention deficit disorder: "Even some of the most avid defenders of technological progress acknowledged that subjective adaptation to new perceptual speeds and sensory overload would not be without difficulties." (Crary, 2001: 30)

² You can search YouTube endlessly discovering new and more shocking videos everyday with several YouTube channels dedicated to this form of media. A particularly interesting link to checkout is from watchmojo.com, and looks at their picks of the, "Top 10 Viral Videos of All Time." The particularity is that the short video highlights only videos directly uploaded to the internet, that have contributed a number of cultural references, i.e., referenced in popular culture, that were not aired on national televisions prior to their virality.

³ In 1904, English Magus (or wizard...) Aleister Crowley claimed to have spoken to spirits, which provided him with the words that would later become the Thelema religion's 'bible,'

Is this where the worrisome queries of humans and machines begin? We can hear the contemporary battlecry; be green, be sociable, and find true happiness now. It rings through the communication waves — encouraging a return to a simpler way of life.

Yet, a hypocrisy exists.

There is a history to humankind and its technology. It is a union forged since our beginnings, with every innovation made for the intended purpose of our progression.⁴

What we call *virtuality* may be ethereal, its material infrastructure is certainly very real. Cables, concrete, fibre optics, metals, plastics and synthetics, stretch across oceans, linking continent to continent. No other age, to memory, has experienced such connectivity as this.⁵

We are colonising our planet — superseding physical stagnation with mobility, and allowing it to flow back and forth — creating a subconscious reflection

The Book of the Law. In this bible it spoke of 4 epochs, one of which is the age of Horus, a period where individuality rules, and the individual true will, i.e. acting with the only intention of self-realisation, are the 'dominate aspects' that humanity will encounter.

⁴ Despite any call to detract from the web, and reduce internet usage and dependancy, the internet site, internetlivestats.com, is a statistical website which calculates live statistical tallies of the increasing number of internet users, mobile devices, and social media usage. At the end of 2014, there was a total number of 2.9 billion users — approx. 40 percent of the population. If it is compared to the 1995 figure, of less than 1 percent, the increase in users in a 20 year span is astronomical. This increased dependency on the network has also seen our landscapes change over the course of 20 years. Artist, writer and map maker Ingrid Burrington's *Infrastructural Studies* (2014) which presents itself as a tourist guide of New York's network structure, is a revealing piece of work that shows how this expansion has amalgamated itself into our urban/suburban architectural.

⁵ We have to remember that which allows the internet to exist, other than ourselves, is mechanical, "The medium of the internet is electricity. And the supply of electricity is finite. So the internet cannot support infinite data flows. The internet is based on a finite number of cables, terminals, computers, mobile phones, and other equipment. The efficiency of the internet is based precisely on its finiteness [...]" (Groys, 2013).

of our global economy⁶. Could we not say that this physical web is, in fact, a matrix of our collective consciousness?

In this sense, we add a grey shade to the debate on the ghost in the machine. Our interaction with foreign bodies, and the perspective of the self, have all been turned upside down.

We are the creators and we are the machines⁷.

Now that we have our protective screen.

Beneath its cosmetic exterior lie strings of algorithmic codes, packaged into a digitised product, and we dictate our lives through its archive and the capabilities of connectivity⁸.

⁶ If, "The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of the term network suggest two contexts: mass-media networks and management terminology. The citations to a business context suggest that the term took on its cybernetic connotation around 1957. The copious usage history of the term does not include artists' networks, and neither mail art nor correspondence art appear anywhere" (Larsen, 2014: 32). This would indicate a truth to the idea that, "digital networks are, at some point or another, for-profit ventures [...] And while the performance of public acts in private venues need not imply exploitation or oppression [...] the difference is that while digital networks do increase the opportunities to act and participate, they also exploit the gap between network participants and those who profit from their aggregated contributions. [...] For a digital network to operate successfully and support 'free' participation, it must figure out a way to exploit the creative and social labor of participants and turn that participation into a commodity, into something that can be exchanged for capital" (Mejias, 2013: 22).

⁷ There is an irony in the bible's passage, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis, 1:27), which presents the human conundrum, the ascension of ourselves to something superior. Maybe it is part of a linguistic code, naked to our eyes – in this respect the bible does subscribe to the power of language. The parallels between the computer programmer and the alchemist who brought the golem to life with language, are uncanny, "The significance of the language used to control the Golem can be interpreted in terms of DNA, computer code and art (as visual language with identifiable formal components that can be rearranged ad infinitum)" (Sutton & McKenzie, 2007: 159).

⁸ "The internet registers every moment when a certain piece of data is clicked, liked, un-like, transferred, or transformed. Accordingly, a digital image cannot be merely copied (as an analogue, mechanically reproducible image can) but always only newly staged or performed. And every performance of a data file is dated and archived" (Groys, 2013). Further, if we link Mejias' implementation on social media: "It is rewarded not with a paycheque but with social capital such as attention, rank, and visibility. Surrendering privacy and property, lured by promises of fleeting viral fame and motivated by fear that we will be the only ones left out, the urge to participate impels us to upload the fruits of our creative labor and hand over the social capital of our electronic address book" (Majias, 2013: 26). It becomes observable that this recorded participation is mostly for a commercial purpose, and in that sense capitalism has already utilised *contemporality* for a consumer endeavour. However, if we reflect on the 60s and 70s art movements, which challenged institutional structure to seek fair avenue for expressive and economic freedom, this period now requires a different use of *contemporality*. One which purposefully acts outside of the perimeters of the consumerist scheme.

But this celestial plane is far from utopic despite the open-source intentions of the language.

And, like in all of history, a hierarchy is formed.

Yet, it was the human race's physical work that harvested the plastics, the metals and minerals from the earth, bringing to life this matrix.

Self-exclusion is not an option when the world is moving towards a singularity; where contiguity has no physical concern.

Our language and culture's natural evolution has been altered⁹, so a different approach should be taken, one that releases the idea of the physical objectivity from the word *existence*, to allow it to interact with the idea of *virtuality*¹⁰.

⁹ Roy Asott (1990) wrote, "The 'telematic culture' that accompanies the new developments consists of a set of behaviours, ideas, media, values and objectives that are significantly unlike those that have shaped society since the Enlightenment" (Larsen, 2014: 76).

¹⁰Craig Saper (2001) wrote about 'Intimate bureaucracies' and alternative systems, developed by artists which, "monitor the pulse of the society of the spectacle and the corporatized bureaucracies: economics, as in big business; culture, as in museums and art markets; mass media, as in studio systems and telecommunication networks; and politics, as in 'big government'. Rather than simply mounting a campaign against big conglomerations of business, government and culture, these artist's networks and their publications use forms of corporate bureaucracies for intimate ends. Rather than reach the lowest common denominator, they seek to construct what those in the business world would call niche marketing to specific demographics" (Larsen, 2014: 33). Interestingly, Saper also cited that, in this specific case, the work by artists was later picked up on by capitalism and utilised for capitalist gain...

Despite this negative connotation of everything reverting back to capital gain — the signal that the market follows the art-world is implicit. "Branded goods really do seem to be based on artworks, not least because of the parallel ways they generate experience and produce individuality. The consumer of a brand can imagine himself to have done something good, to have made a display of taste, or to have demonstrated his membership in the caste of the knowledgeable and the cultivated" (Graw, 2009: 130). This can, in fact, be seen as a positive exchange if artist and curators a like, approach the production of culture from a perspective that allows creativity to illuminate the system imposed framework, i.e., more new media/internet based art that strikes at the heart of network discourse. Mary Catherine Bateson (1972) expressed creativities revealing force, through the muse of poetry (i.e. art), "One reason why poetry is important for finding out about the world is because in poetry a set of relationships gets mapped onto a level of diversity in us that we don't ordinarily have access to. We bring it out in poetry. We can give to each other in poetry the access to a set in ourselves. So we need poetry as knowledge about the world and about ourselves, because of this mapping from complexity to complexity" (Shanken, 2015: 49).

While this does incite thoughts on *utopia*, what is argued here is that art has instigated change. The explicit examples in art's historiography show a progression, overtime, in taste, aesthetics, social engagement and artist practice. Hence, if we approach *contemporality* in the world Ascott (1983) envisioned, "I want to propose, perhaps naively and without caution in the light of society's relentless determination always to institutionalize and contain creativity by a new means, that telematic discourse can exist outside such closed systems, or that a much more inclusive, indeed planetary 'fellowship of discourse' can be created, lying outside and circumnavigating the

Our parameters of interaction have been shaped for us, emulating the utopic capitalist dream. However, a tool is a tool, isn't it? And if I choose to exert my will on that tool — won't its purpose change in the light of this new perspective? Now what if this tool was, in fact, a reality? One where language is the only prevalent factor, and successful¹¹ communication is its only residual evidence. In this reality, proximity seems only relative to the corporeal.

Alejandro Ball, *amaCollective*

institutional management of discourse as it now exists in book production, conventional telecommunications and entertainment media structures. [...] Telematic does not only generate a new order of art discourse but demands a new form of criticism and analysis" (Shanken, 2015: 85-6). In other words, with the inclusion of the internet in the art world, we can extend the idea of reality.

Imagine a world where the exhibitions can happen simultaneously in two physical locations, while accessible on the web for the rest to see... This would call into question the idea of authorship, division of the artist's and curator's labour, and finally pull on the very strings of consumer capitalism. This is because, "[C]omputer-mediated networks [...] offer the possibility of a kind of planetary conviviality and creativity which no other means of communication has been able to achieve. One reason may be that networking puts you, in a sense, out of body, linking your mind into a kind of timeless sea" (Shanken, 2015: 84). Thus, to move in this direction we have to identify the source that is preventing *contemporality*; the computer. Ascott (1990) wrote on this, "It is the computer that is at the heart of this circulation system, and, like the heart, it works best when it becomes invisible. At present, the computer as a physical, material presence is too much with us; it dominates our inventory of tools, instruments, appliances and apparatus as the ultimate machine. In our artistic and educational environments it is all too solidly there, a computational block to poetry and imagination. It is not transparent, nor is it yet fully understood as pure system, a universal transformative matrix. The computer is not primarily a thing, an object, but a set of behaviours, a system, actually a system of systems" (Larsen, 2014: 80).

If we can move forward from this physicality, we then stand at a precipice, where reality's subjectivity is called into question. It is not just a physical reality we live in — but a social reality, with language at its centre. One that is an ingrained system, like money, that has no significant value other than what society determines it to be. In terms of art, this brings an artwork that is always on show, with several manifestations of the artist's process and progression, with the potential of multiple simultaneous manifestations, displayed across the globe. And what of the final product? Well, for some time now everything can, and has, become art.

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