

New Museology, digital collection and new media art

New media transcend geographical boundaries, increase the volume and speed of communication, and bring interactions to a highly interconnected and complex level (Feldman, 1997; Russell Neuman, 1991). Some viewpoints seem to be positively excited about the possibilities offered by new media, in a sort of technophilia, whereas others feel threatened by them in a pessimistic vision of the future, and adopt a technophobic attitude (Aristarkhova, 2007; Subtle Engine, 2014). Particularly interesting is the position of technorealism (Shenk, Shapiro and Johnson, 1998). As technologies are not neutral, the technorealist approach carefully and critically examines the role played by new media in improving our quality of life (Hafner, 1998; Shapiro, 1999).

New technologies and media impact upon art in terms of perception, experience and production, as they have expanded and diversified the artworks' creation, public experience and expectation, have increased the access to art and had huge effects on museums. Also, digital learning initiatives concerning artistic education have arisen. I take into account academic and professional reflections, including artists, teachers, critics and curators, who also had to redefine their roles in the light of new media. Challenges are both practical and theoretical: professionals need to master basic IT skills and think how to benefit from such powerful communication in terms of promotion and marketing, how to provide a participatory and engaging experience, and how to deal with conservation, acquisition, display and interpretation (Dorai and Venkatesh, 2001; Frieze, 2015; Duff et al, 2009; Golant Media Ventures, 2017). New technologies also allow artists to create new forms of art rich of possibilities, conventionally called new media art. The term encompasses artworks created with new media technologies- such as interactive art, digital art, computer graphics, and virtual art- which make possible a new kind of creativity (Gere, 2004; Cui, Guo and Wang, 2014). Artists are increasingly experimenting with technological tools and

software. The digital medium often involves the audience and redefines the traditional roles of curators and museums, which face multiple issues in terms of control and policy, conservation, selection and display (Gandolfini, 2014; Cook and Graham, 2010; Dietz, 2006). Due to their nature, new media artworks provide new modes of aesthetic experience and open to “permanent transformation at user-level” (Crowther, 2009, p162).

As digital media spread art beyond formal contexts, they can reach a new and broader public, and make art more accessible and engaging for diverse communities. Therefore, artists and museums are increasingly implementing their online presence to influence and communicate with their public, share and distribute their content or works through websites and social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, etc., directly competing with all other forms of entertainment (Miranda, 2016; Jeffreys, 2015; Hannon, 2016). According to ICOM (2007) social media impact on museums in terms of acquisition, conservation, research, exhibition and communication. Many museums have even developed their own apps, like Love Art (National Gallery) and Strawberry Thief (V&A).

According to a survey conducted among 1,244 American arts organizations (Thomson, Purcell, and Rainie, 2013), the majority of respondents considers new media very important for fundraising and promotion, to gain a new public and increase the level of engagement. However, 49 and 22% of the participants worries about the negative impact of new media on audience attention spans and attendance, respectively. Moreover, 74% of them recognise a lack in staff or resources regarding social media.

On the one hand art risks to become a tool to obtain likes and shares, satisfying public narcissism who looks for the most Instagrammable artists (Williams, 2016; Whitehead, 2017). On the other this evidences an engagement with the artwork, and

it can attract a new audience. Audience call for an engaging experience rather than a contemplative one; they ask for a more sociable, interactive and personal involvement, and expect content to be available digitally (Napoli, 2010; Russo et al., 2007). In participatory experiences audience act as co-creators or curators; according to Nina Simon (2010), participation promotes the social value of museums. Thus new media have widened the access to art, in a sort of democratization of knowledge, and have fostered a new participatory culture, which softens the line between artwork and user (Peppler, 2013; Nielsen, 2015).

Technologies have introduced a new way of cataloguing content, challenging to traditional ideas of collection, presentation, documentation, and preservation. Increasingly, museums rely on digital archives and software to manage and conserve their cultural heritage, and offer interactive and online collections, exhibitions, tours, archives and educational activities. Online collections are composed by items intended as digital surrogates of physical objects or by new media art. A digital collection does not present the objects physically, so it cannot provide the experience of being in front of the artwork or replicate the same encounter occurred in the museum's walls, as it creates a different context in which artworks are experienced (Bayne, Ross, and Williamson, 2009; World of Museums, 2001). Digital collections offer an opportunity to extend the museum experience and foster accessibility of the museum collection: they can rewrite the meaning of collections by promoting polysemic models for interpreting them (Cameron, 2003). Recently, museums are focusing on digital collections providing interactive opportunities rather than taxonomical information, mainly adopting a thematically-based narrative, and are developing personal collection systems, which enable users to save, share and interact with digital resources through a personalized page (Cameron, 2005; Bertacchini and Morando, 2013). For instance, Tate allows visitors to create their own online collections, and the Louvre also enables them to create personalized tour

plans. However, according to a survey conducted by Paul Marty (2008), visitors are more interested in customization than personalisation.

Moreover, through online platforms, museums promote and market themselves by extending and interacting with their network, attracting new volunteers and building online communities. Community resources also play a role in terms of conservation and research (Drotner and Schroder, 2013; Hannon, 2016; Russo et al., 2006; Kotler and Kotler, 2000).

Museum visit can occur in the physical space and/or in the online environment, thus redefining ways, time and places of communication, as the latter is not affected by buildings' capacity or accessibility, opening times, budget or geographic boundaries (Kelly and Groundwater-Smith, 2009; Ciolfi and Bannon, 2007). In fact, users can continue their visit and find additional information after leaving the museum.

Moreover, through the use of more personalized online tools, museums can reach and adapt to different learning styles, allowing users to learn at their pace (Kelly, 2002, 2007; Hamma, 2004).

Following Marty (2007; 2008), who surveyed over 1,200 visitors from nine American museums, almost 76% of respondents consider the online environment a useful tool to present unique experiences that cannot be duplicated in museums, but only 19% of them reckon it as a substitute for the physical visit.

Almost 80% of them rely on museum websites to find information (like location, admissions fee, facilities, exhibitions) or implement knowledge, whereas approximately 30% of participants use learning and educational resources.

Accordingly, around 85% of users claim to have different needs and expectations when visiting online and traditional museums, as they prefer to do some activities within the museum context and others online. Marty also shows that the majority of users prefers access to digital collections after the museum visit rather than before,

often because the museum has too many objects to see in one visit (79.6% of participant).

The digital realm has become a new space in which museums can achieve their goals; therefore a proper understanding of how to effectively use digital resources is critical for their success. The digital has transformed the management of museums and their relationship with visitors, who can interact with and manipulate content. Web and social media pages have become basic user's expectations. According to the definition provided by ICOM (2007) "a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment". Museums function as phenomenological texts (Wood and Latham, 2011) and offer us lived experiences and knowledge to explore and interpretate the lifeworld, as they create meaningful relationships and provide us with sensory and intellectual interactions through our bodily presence (Brulon Soares, 2009; Latham, 2015). New media enable visitors to provide feedback and indicate their needs, changing their relationship with the museum and artist. Museums have shifted from the one-to-many communication model to the many-to-many one, from knowledge providers to communicators (Russo et al., 2008). Over the 20th century, museum studies started to present themselves as New Museology, human science which shifts its focus from objects to visitors and opposes the traditional idea of museums as elitist places. New Museology considers the public and its experience as its primary subject, and moving from here addresses the social and political role of museums (Assuncao and Primo, 2013; McCall and Gray, 2014; Ross, 2004; Vergo, 1993). Therefore, it emerges the importance of taking a visitor-centered approach (Masberg and Silverman, 1996; Samis and Michaelson, 2016; Black, 2005) and of effectively using digital resources to support the museum mission without undermining the

value of the institution and its experience. As seen, new media extend accessibility, sense of ownership and belongings, and the dialogue between museums and public. Thus they contribute to challenge to the vision of art as segregated from everyday life and as prerogative of the dominating elite. For Dewey (1934) the segregation is a consequence of the rise of nationalism and imperialism, whereas the primacy of the object derives from the rise of capitalism (Krauss, 1990; Leddy, 2009). According to Pierre Bourdieu (1979) the elite determinates aesthetic preferences and cultural capital; the museum preserves this status quo, as its visit presupposes a certain knowledge, not equally received in schools (Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper, 1966; Fyfe, 2004). By going digital, museums have better chances to become inclusive and reach visitors from all social classes.

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