

New media and the future

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Technology has become an extension of us, a second-skin that penetrates through (almost) all of our daily activities. This of course makes sense for the 21st century, the digital era, the era of accelerating 'progress'. When we talk about technology, we usually relate to it as a tool, used to navigate things more easily, to make everything *efficient*. But what can happen when we experiment with it, testing its boundaries and capacities or when we use it in ways it hasn't been used before? In art, technology has integrated one can say almost *organically*, adapting to the changes happening in all domains of life and gapping the bridge between art and science, a bridge that has existed in the collective consciousness for a long time, even if the two have always been tightly connected. Thus, the rise of new media - the marriage between different mediums in a single artwork, usually involving technological components (there are a lot more implications where this came from!). The word *new* is essential here - it indicates that it is bound in time, always changing, shifting, evolving. New media relies on technological advancements. If this is the case, then, how do artists relate to their new media works and can we envision the future through new media?

Technologies are always prone to faults and errors, so one has to always keep this in mind when making a project - electrical components break and perish. Once you make the work, it's a matter of time before it becomes disaffected. Somehow, this aspect can be viewed as *performative*. The work has a certain life expectancy - it is alive. Talking to new media artists, this doesn't seem to be a bad thing. I've found that their approach to their works is rather pragmatic - when they make something, they don't necessarily imagine its future, once it's done, they move onto the next thing. This may also be a result of having to constantly produce in order to survive, like in any other industry. So, rather, the work is a body that keeps building itself, while also decaying. This made me think about what happens to the works we leave behind. After a point, they become merely virtual. We keep making new things, while abandoning old ones. The old only comes to serve the new. But in a world obsessed with consuming and engaging, caught in the middle of the climate crisis, shouldn't we be responsible for imagining a place where what we make can take part and exist in a potential future?

Usually, the fate of discontinued works is that of the archive - digital and/or physical. The archive serves as a witness - *I exist/existed at some point in time and space*. It is interesting to see archives as *ghosts*, active ones, ones that become more 'real' than the work itself. What remains of it. Of course we cannot expect a new media piece to have a 'long life', but it seems like the work comes with an implication - *the future is lost/losing*. The process of archiving new media art becomes an essential bridge between the present moment and the uncertain landscapes of the future. Many artists touch upon this, even unconsciously, we are often urged to think about how these works relate to the present and how they will be perceived in the

future, if they will be. This impermanence is crucial, it reminds us that technology is *fragile*.

Iranian author Azar Nafisi says “You need imagination in order to imagine a future that doesn’t exist”. Essentially, the future is inexistent. The only thing one can do is *speculate* about it. There is something powerful and freeing that comes with speculation. It encourages us to challenge the boundaries of what we know and envisage what could be. By daring to speculate, we engage in a mental exercise that allows us to anticipate potential scenarios, imagine solutions to complex problems, and create an alternative to the prevailing narrative. In essence, speculation shapes the way we prepare for, adapt to, and create the future. It reflects in order to generate new, possible landscapes.

Similarly, besides being reflexive, new media art is also *generative*, thus, *speculative*. It relies on translation and transformation - working with data and manipulating it has something very transgressive - it’s a way of showing new ways in which different mediums communicate and relate to one another. Decoding data sets, transforming them into visual or interactive forms that often transcend the initial intended purpose, inviting audiences to engage with complex information in new ways isn’t just a breach of conventions but rather an exploration that pushes the limits of how we perceive, understand, and interact with data, highlighting the adaptability and richness of information in the digital era. New media art becomes a platform for not just interpreting data but also for defying the constraints of conventional interpretation, offering a new lens through which to explore, question, and reimagine the world in its digital manifestation. It generates new information and new frames of reference. In a world driven by the promise of technological utopias, artists using digital tools, virtual environments and interactive experiences bring into focus the contradictions and inequalities that often accompany technological advancements. As stated earlier, new media art has the power to disrupt and deconstruct prevailing narratives of progress, forcing us to question the seductive stories of a brighter future offered by tech giants and governments.

The way in which society is being shifted is important when we envision the future - the state of the world - but what is also important to look at and think about is ourselves as subjects. It is crucial to perceive ourselves as active participants, equipped with unique perceptions, desires, and motivations that steer our interactions with the world around us. This lens allows us to recognize the interplay between our internal landscape and the external environment, acknowledging that our choices, beliefs, and actions hold power and responsibility.

Capitalist theorist Byung Chul Han explores how technology, particularly digital technology, is reshaping human subjectivity. He observes that in our hyperconnected, technologically driven world, our sense of self is increasingly influenced by digital media, leading to a redefinition of our relationships with ourselves, each other, and the world. This altered sense of self also impacts how we conceive the future, as the boundaries between the virtual and real world blur. Similarly, Mark Fischer argues that technology, particularly digital technology, has

played a crucial role in shaping the cultural landscape of the 21st century. Fisher is critical of the ways in which technology has been harnessed not only for progress but also as a tool of control and surveillance, particularly in late capitalism. He explores how technology, while offering the promise of connection and efficiency, has also contributed to alienation and mental health issues, as it exacerbates feelings of isolation and anxiety.

We often feel we are *small* and the world is *big*, which means we cannot make radical changes. The feeling of powerlessness is extremely present in our modern lives. We are part of a society that offers incredible technological advancement and interconnectedness, yet also produces a pervasive feeling of powerlessness when confronted with the enormity of global issues and their potential solutions. This sense of powerlessness can, in turn, prompt a yearning for collective action, community engagement, and a search for meaning and impact in a world that often feels beyond individual control. In short, it seems like we keep searching for a form of connectivity. Technologies have distanced us from each other, but maybe they can also reconnect us in new ways. The paradox lies in using the very tools that can create distance to instead build bridges and facilitate authentic connections. It's an ongoing endeavor where technology isn't the endpoint but a means to transcend its limitations, aiming to restore and reinforce the fundamental human need for genuine connection.

New media art dissects the potential ramifications of our increasingly interconnected world, from the erosion of privacy to the amplification of inequality. Artists using social media platforms, algorithmic installations, and networked experiences shed light on the consequences of our ceaseless pursuit of connectivity. They invite us to seek meaning in a world marked by canceled futures and hidden complexities by reshaping the way in which we perceive ourselves and the world, often in an interactive manner, creating a shared space, a space for *togetherness*. New media works play on potentialities, trying to offer little windows through which we can look in order to see something peripheral that has been brought forward or something that has always existed, but has been filtered through a new 'lens'. It is a way of expanding the rather gloomy horizon of the future, creating alternative modalities of perceiving and interacting. It seems like talking about the future ad-litteram in artworks is not interesting, but rather talking *around it*, creating an alien-like conglomerate that *might exist*.

In essence, the responsibility of new media artists lies in their capacity to bridge the gap between the present and the uncertain landscapes of the future, raising questions, proposing alternatives, and engaging with the complex realities of a rapidly changing world. The works are temporal agents that provoke the viewer. These imaginative and critical contributions help envision and navigate the potential paths ahead, fostering a collective awareness of the choices we make today and their impact on the future.