

## “Borderlines: Digital art to produce social statements.”

Is it possible to produce an artwork that engages the society? Which are the tools, the techniques and the correct terms to represent the society today through the well-known technological speed development?

Adriano Casanova. 2008.

### Abstract:

This paper intends to analyze the work “borderlines” (a collaboration between artist using digital technology to represent immigrants aspects and conditions in London)

The current essay uses different concepts - related to the digital technology in the art field - to translate and illustrate the context about the work and also to create questions about the terminology ‘digital art’.

What is produced today that we could call digital art? How we can identify this term in our contemporary production and how this technological evolution in the art field helps to develop the society?

Looking in the process of this art production the technology is inserted “as a tool” to engage social statements in different contexts, and at the same time, to represent and analyse the today’s society searching for further paradigms and aesthetics.

Keywords: digital art; social art; contemporary art; ‘work-in-process’; New British Art, Joseph Beuys.

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In the beginning of this century the digital technologies in the art production wasn’t something that we used to call as ‘new’. As a matter of fact, it was in the 1990s the so-called “digital revolution” appears in the art market as a consequence for the intensive speed of the technological development industry.

The terminology for artworks that use technological platforms have been changing since the 70s, and also this kind of works had started to develop with the intensive technological productions access.

The terms ‘computer art’ (1970) and ‘multimedia art’ was used to exemplify this kind of art production. Today the term ‘digital art’ is another example that is part of the big space that englobe the term ‘new media art’ which appears in the end of the twentieth century.

“The qualifier of choice here – ‘new’ – points to the fleeting nature of the terminology. But the claim of novelty also begs the question, what is exactly is supposed to be considered ‘new’ about the digital medium?” (PAUL, Christiane. “Digital Art”)

What can we identify here is that since the technologies started to influence the art production in different concepts the artworks created was made with the aim to exemplify and classify this 'new' art production into the art history.

But what we have to analyse in this context is actually this concept of 'new' about digital medium and how this digital technologies – or – how this different term for digital artworks help to develop the political and artistically spectrum for the contemporary art content and consequently how are the influences into our today's society?

In the work "borderlines: immigrants environment in a social and technological art context", a collaboration between the artists: Adriano Casanova, Brazil, Lana Lasagna, South Africa, Francesco Beneamato, Italy and Aline Der Assem, German; the digital environment is used to represent (in different ways) the art research that investigate an immigrant aspect in the city of London.

Using the concepts of belonging, language, identity and environment the work translate these different immigrants representations using the technology as a tool, a helpful technique to exemplify and, the same time, analyse how this certain social group – today – deal with their social perspectives.

The statement created in this art piece is one of the main contexts of the work, where the art production is still in experiment and process when we look to this process as the real art piece. Although, we can notice that the art field (with or without technology) it was always related to social issues.

As an example to clarify this ideas is the concept of "social sculpture"<sup>1</sup> created by the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921- 1986).

Looking to the artwork as the process, Beuys production was always related to the university environment, putting his artworks in different contexts and always helping or using the society as a theme or as the proper piece.

"I see social sculpture as the ultimate participatory live artwork, where there is not one artist/expert creating, and the passive audience watching, but all of us creating together. Social sculpture appeals to me politically for its leaderless-ness and its challenge of equality and co-operation. It appeals to me as art for its' contextuality, and that it reinstates art as an inclusive arena of creativity". (LOGAN, David. "Piece of Many Voices")<sup>2</sup>

But, How are the vanguard production that connects - just like Beuys did - the society and the art to search for new aspects?

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<sup>1</sup>*Beuys uses the term 'Social Art' and 'Social Sculpture' as synonyms for a Discipline concerned with creative forming and shaping, a discipline which see its' task. Social Art is the new creative forming discipline and social organism is the material. But the social organism, the society, the whole social body – in contrast to his forces and substances of nature – is non-physical material, and its form necessitates perpetual re-shaping and development".* SCHATA, Peter.<sup>1</sup>

To start this discussion we first have to clear out different concepts and context about technological productions.

What we have today is two types of works with technology, the one that use technology as the main artwork (like programming, interactive environment, virtual reality, games, etc.) and the other that use the digital technology into the way of production and also to display the work, so, in this last one we can say that is a digital artwork that use the 'technology as a tool':

"The use of digital technologies in almost every arena of daily life has vastly increased during the past decade, leading to speculations that all forms of artistic media will eventually be absorbed into the digital medium, either through digitalization or through the use of computers in a specific aspect of processing or production. It is certainly true that more and more artist working in different form of media – from painting, drawing, and sculpture to photography and video – are making use of digital technologies as a tool of creation for aspects of their art. In some cases, their work displays distinctive characteristics of the digital medium and reflects on its language and aesthetics." <sup>3</sup> (PAUL, Christiane. "Digital Art")

In the work "borderlines" this issues is embodied to be used as a tool; a weapon to insert in different social groups this fast technological movement and to create social networks to help in group development.

Defining these aspects we also can identify that in this work the society is being used as the material (theme) - a context in the laboratorial process - to exemplify and represent this social changes nowadays.

With this art aspect we can propose a political perspective to vanguard statements of the society, being an activism inside the social group and use the digital technology to catalyse and document the group voice.

The work "The last 9 minutes, 1977" – made in the beginning of the technological experiments in art – is a potential example of how an artwork can develop a political perspective.

This work, made for the Documenta VI from Kassel, German, is the first teleconference performance in real-time that collapsed virtual geographic boundaries, and also collaboration between the artists Douglas Davies, Nan Jun Paik, Charlotte Moorman and Joseph Beuys where the group created a series of performances in front of a video camera, connected to more than twenty-five countries.

"Paik and Moorman perform a series of collaborative works, while Davis considers the nature of the telecast as a medium. Beuys, who often used his exhibitions as platforms for social and political agitation, discusses his utopian theories of 'social sculpture' and his efforts to transform society through artistic activity" <sup>4</sup> (Harvard Film Archive. "Fluxus on Film")

Another conceptual implication on the work "borderlines" is the idea that the artwork is create in collaboration made with a group of artists, just like this last example.

And then we can also notice the idea of artist as a mediator (curator), when one of the participants acts as a mediator for these social relations to produce the artwork (in this case with digital technology). The social environment and the immigrant political aspect are used to

exemplify and represent these ideas in different representations (such as video, photography and web) using the documentation of this process as the art piece.

We can see that the artists are individual actives inside the society, using their own perspectives to create and mediate relations. To exemplify this idea of 'the artist as a mediator (curator)' in the own art production we have to understand how this collaboration works.

Today we can find a lot of artist that, in collaboration with other artists in other context, appoint relevant aspect about their process. But here we are interest of: how this production happens into the art history and the society?

Thinking in the 80-90s, where in England the artists started to do their own exhibition, without curators, commercial galleries or any establish system behind it, without knowing was being created what we call today as "New British Art" with Damien Hirst, Antony Gormley, Tracey Emin, Sarah Lucas, and others – ironic or not, all this artist today are well know in different parts of the world, selling their pieces for outstanding prices in the most famous art actions.

"(...) The link between works in artist-curated group shows may have a little to do with their content; for those in the know, they are much more to do with certain social sets (...)" <sup>5</sup>  
(STALLABRAS, Julian. "Curating: the contemporary art museum and beyond")

What matters is the idea of the artist that in his artwork does a curatorial process – i.e. a mediations between this curatorial contexts within the art production. In the work "borderlines" this actions is one of the most important part of the work. Dealing with different artists and the same time with different platforms, the 'artist-mediator' has to guide and create the art production for the final propose. Looking to the artwork in the process, the idea of the mediator is totally active in the work production, its means, in the collaboration with each artist where the 'artist mediator' has to select some 'documentation' of the process to display in the exhibitions.

Using the same pieces in any context the 'artist-mediator' tell different histories about the work' issues (in this case the immigration in London), and when the work is applied in different tools such as the internet (with an online exhibition) and the video, photography, etc. the powerful identity about the curatorial and artistically statement` process came through.

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