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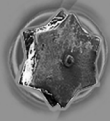
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Installations – and the Life of Image

Elena Tavani

Abstract

This paper asks whether we can vindicate a sense of installation art beyond ‘experience economy’ (Foster) and any ‘prescriptive approach to art’ (Bishop). The advent of social practice in art (under names as relational aesthetics, new public art etc) marks a move toward a reconsideration of the productive and receptive terms on which the artwork occurs. I suggest an analysis of installation art experience not reduced to context awareness or environmental feeling.

I wish to argue for the benefits of applying Bernard Stiegler’s idea of ‘technological individuation’ to installation works and Theodor Adorno’s model of ‘image-experience’ as a technical and evaluative-mimetic experience of the energy contained in an artwork to last generation of multimedia installations. Where organic life and technological life can merge and give way to a new ‘eloquence’ of art, through dischronia and distraction.

In the 1950s and 1960s, art was inexorably attracted to life. Today, our lives are intensively attracted to the *living device*, whose first (numerical) matrix is the digital and the principle of exchange is the net – with screens acting as its rigid, hypersensitive resonance membranes, and multimedia installations as its experimental physics.

In her well-known essay *Artificial Hells*, a few years ago Claire Bishop spoke of installations as ‘participatory art’, referring to the claims of community/collective of the so-called ‘relational art’. Bishop’s main thesis is that the aesthetic and political ambitions of ‘participatory’ art come down to a ‘politics of spectatorship’, which becomes a true behavioural indicator based on a “prescriptive approach to art” (and politics)¹.

Ethics substitutes politics, and the social-spectatorship value substitutes artistic value. In Bishop’s view, the key word is ‘prescription’: the ethical dimension has prevailed over any other alternative value in these artistic productions. Bishop, however, believes the constant search for such values is still essential (to get out of Hell).

Starting from these remarks, it seems to me that my argument can develop in two directions.

The first concerns a reflection on the link between the political and the aesthetic that relational art creates. Actually, in ‘participatory art’ both aspects

¹ Bishop (2012). See also Bishop (2004), pp. 51-79.

seem to disappear to the benefit of the ‘social’, which establishes itself as the only binding assumption capable of determining, simultaneously, the aesthetic and political nature of relational works as well as their point of contact, that is the (socialising) political nature of the aesthetic and the (socialising) aesthetic nature of the political, as Bourriaud’s theses clearly show². For Nicolas Bourriaud the social is “the material” of an artwork, while the production involved in contemporary social engaged art practice is equivalent to an aestheticisation of the social³.

In Bourriaud’s view, relational art seems to be the art that promotes a social experiment in artistic experimentation and that tends towards “collective production”⁴. The social/artistic overlap leads us straight to a second problem or risk entailed in this type of artistic production, which mirrors the difficulty entailed by the circular definition of ‘relational art’.

It is the situation whereby the spectators, not unlike the ‘form’ they interact with, are born already relational, domesticated, the prototype of an edulcorated socialisation, midway between a tribal (or lobby-like) gathering and entertainment. Because of this, there is a major difficulty in recognising any political value to the “temporary communities” that are invited to come together and interact with the installation,

² Bourriaud (2002).

³ Op. cit., p. 57.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 15.

which would, however, originally be consensus-based communities, missing the element of contrast and discussion that should inform the political⁵.

The problem thus becomes to establish whether there really are all the ingredients needed to produce an “ethical-political system”, that is if the stake can be, for relational art, “to reconstruct a lost political arena”⁶. It is also true that the spectators are subject to the same short circuit and simplification as the coincidence that forcedly equals the means with the ends, and makes the definition of relational art circular: called to be a protagonist and co-author of the artwork, the spectator’s margin for action does not go beyond the instrumental freedom envisaged by the device.

The preventive ‘domestication’ of the spectatorship downgrades the ‘relation’ which relational art enhances experimentally. This seemingly prevents it from becoming, against what Bourriaud contends, something that replaces or compensates for insubstantial or evasive political relations.

However, by stressing the fact that relational forms are nothing but “deviations” from pre-existing images and forms able to give rise to “random experimental encounters”, Bourriaud trustfully embraces the situationist heritage, trying to fill the idea of relational aesthetics with the forms of life introduced by Situationism: *détournement*, *dérive*,

5 On this topic, see Rancière (2004), pp. 160-161; Tavani (2014), pp. 81-103.

6 Tavani (2004), p.95.

the construction of *situations*, although always avoiding to end up in the “overcoming” of art which the Situationists predicted in the name of a more genuine, non-spectacular institution of places and communities⁷.

Unfortunately, the debate is often bound exclusively to ‘artworld gaming’, the key point concerning the possibility of art to rework the social⁸. As I have already explored this perspective elsewhere⁹, I will go on focusing more on the second topic.

This second direction – a direction that seems to me to be quite interrelated with the first one – is the question of the *image-character* of multimedia and relational installations. The critic Hal Foster suggests labelling as “imagistic” the negative outcome of the ‘global style’ (steel and glass) in architecture as well as of the offer of visual and performative art of museums and galleries, in the name of a standardised “experience economy”.

“Embodiment” and “emplacement” would be its positive consequence, instead, capable of taking us into the very substance of architecture and of installations¹⁰. Again, the terms chosen reveal the latent, as well as persisting, Platonism of those who tend to base their arguments on categories such as

7 See Debord (1967), §§ 191, 192. The Situationist International set up in 1957 near Imperia (Italy) and dissolved in 1972.

8 See in particular, the theorists of a “social turn” in aesthetics, like Bishop (2006) and Kester, Strayer (2005).

9 See Tavani (2014).

10 See Foster (2011).

‘embodiment’, which are particularly unsuitable to describe images like those of virtual environments, which tend to present themselves as “natural interfaces”, “transient, arbitrary, non-reproducible, and infinitely manipulable images”, where ‘materiality’ is limited to the individual pixel¹¹. And where technological arrangements usually produce huge amounts of information and images to deal with in a quasi-automatic way.

As an alternative, I propose the search for the *character of image* of installations as distinct from the concrete images – technical, as well as social and relational – that they produce in the first place. This choice may be partly supported by what Adorno called “experience of images”, partly by Gottfried Böhm’s later suggestion to not consider images as ‘bodies’ alone, but also as “actions and forces” that they generate and that can claim their own value¹².

Identifying a character of image in this ‘transcending’ sense with respect to the concrete images produced by an artwork may help us get out of the standstill which Rancière described with reference to the literal or non-literal value of the issues generated and exhibited by ‘participatory’ art. In other words, what is at stake is trying and verifying whether and how the ‘experience economy’ promoted by contemporary art installations and performances is not only obsessed with the target of

11 See Grau (2003), pp. 203-7.

12 See Böhm (2006).

an *institutive* managerial approach to the creativity exhibited in installations, but brings about an “experience of images” as an aesthetic experience in terms of *technical and evaluative comprehension* of the energetic outcome of installations as techno-artistic productions¹³.

Before dealing with the issue of the ‘life of image’ in installations directly, I would like to briefly analyse the *environmental* character of multimedia installations, thanks to which the images produced by the programme mingle with the image-making of the human beings that happen to move inside and live the time and space of the installation.

Environment 1. The installation as passage

Like the passage, the pariser architectural structure used by Walter Benjamin to portray the 19th century together with the metropolis of Paris and, indirectly, modernity itself, the installation is a path, presenting itself as a cut-out, without a well-determined beginning or end, and promising experience and discovery of places. Here ‘the image’ of the *passage* relates, with all the power of its materiality, to the “truth of present action”¹⁴. The

¹³ Here I am using and developing categories of Theodor W. Adorno’s aesthetic theory, whose possible persisting topicality of the category of “autonomy” of the artwork I have discussed elsewhere, beyond any modernist simplification but also beyond any neo-medial reductionism; see Tavani (2012).

¹⁴ See Benjamin (1982).

image is announced by an alteration in the pace of perception, by a shock: inside the passage things, as historical objects, lose their neutrality and go as far as touching us¹⁵. The image turns into a sign, like history, which Benjamin views as coinciding with its achieved, and always amendable, “readability”.

Furthermore, Benjamin had reserved the term ‘tactical’ to express the relationship we have with an architectural space, in which reception occurs “in distraction”, given that the environment is perceived through use, which makes it look very much like film viewing in a cinema, with most of the attention based on “occasional looks” rather than extended contemplation¹⁶.

I contend that both of Benjamin’s suggestions, the image as a historical sign and the link of spatial-environmental experience to a ‘tactical’ or use-focused experience are fundamental statements to answer the questions raised above. In this kind of experience habit allows us to manage with a distraction which does not mean inattention, but is rather *functional* to specific environmental occurrences like those generated by multimedia installations.

In the case of multimedia installations, however, a “perception in distraction” would not only be describing a certain way of perceiving in the presence of multiple perceptive stimuli, coming up one immediately after the other or simultaneously,

¹⁵ See Benjamin (1982).

¹⁶ See Benjamin, (1992), § 15.

but it would also be naming the type of motor, aesthetic *and* cognitive experience in which artifice draws its vital character directly from the practical attitude which prepares us for the use above all, for practice rather than for a mere vision or synesthetic perception of the installation.

Bio-power

In his *Musée imaginaire*, published after the Second World War, André Malraux exploits the freeing of the image from the body of the artwork. To Malraux, photography had freed the object from the material constraints of its embodiment, and this freedom constituted a further step ahead towards what the museum had already achieved by moving the work away from the geographic exile of its site of origin.

In multimedia installations, however, there seems to be an opposite process: various images and materials are in search of a body – maybe a phantom-like body fluttering in the environment set up by the techno-artistic device, outlining a magic circle, generating emotional flows.

In the installation, the *power of exhibition* typical of the museum – a power to arrange, to place, to exhibit, whose overwhelming power was first measured by Marcel Duchamp – is, in fact, combined with an architectural bio-power made up

of light effects, pathways, arrangement of spaces, as well as of a specific supply of perceptive-emotive-cognitive sites variously dedicated to contemplation or interaction.

A classic example of architectural spatial bio-power is when a museum hall becomes ‘environment’. There is no need to wait for multimedia installations for the idea of an environment-work, a work that wraps the spectator, to establish itself. The great paintings of abstract Expressionism by Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, *color field painting* as Greenberg described it, already produce a “wrapping effect” on perception: “surfaces exhale color”, they make it respond to these large canvas hanging on museum walls just like one “responds to an environment”¹⁷.

Obviously, if nowadays we think of an environmental, immersive experience of works, we rather refer to multimedia installations that we cannot only visit, but we experience in a sensorial proximity which involves us in various ways, from the mere system-stimulus to the devices capturing the visitors’ sensitive data.

Unlike the wrapping effect of extra large painted surfaces however, the installation would like to generate with its environmental character the feature of ‘home’ as collective “indexes of agency”¹⁸, whereas collective action and its multimedia

¹⁷ See Greenberg (1961).

¹⁸ Gell (1998), p. 252. Gell gives the example of the ‘Maori meeting Houses’, vehicles of collective power and of tribal effectiveness in certain groups.

indicalization often stress the living heart of the 'home' as an organised entity and as an organism capable of gathering and exhibiting 'a common ground plan'¹⁹ which, in the case of installations, corresponds to the creative energy of the synthetic and of the multimedia environment.

Environment 2. After the sacred

'Environment' therefore shall be no longer viewed in a mainly architectural sense, given that the 'environmentalisation' of space is due, rather, both to the "context awareness" circulating in the age of pervasive computing and to the physical presence of several viewers at the same time, i.e. to the resonance their movement generates through the frequent integrations of the dynamics of their bodies (visual, acoustic, thermal elements, etc.) within spaces of virtual action. The architectural space retains its importance as a shell, a structure that does not only contain, but enhances and empowers the hybrid environment of the installation.

Much installation art reveals to be constituted out of the paradoxes and discontinuities of a "mixed heterogeneous zone"²⁰. What is truly new, in other words, is the turning of the installation into the extensive physical terrain of deeds and contents

19 Op. cit., p. 251.

20 On this topic, see Crary (2003), Petersen (2010).

coming from the virtual environment of electronic worlds – of actions and relations based on the collective and connective logic of the digital. New is as well the inclusion of the intensity and complexity of the digital relational within the (relative) simplicity of the incidental-planned physical encounter of visitors who become ‘environment’ together with the installation.

Compared to the ritual, sacred space of a number of performances, including very recent ones (Marina Abramovic, *The Artist is Present*, New York MoMA 2010), the environment produced by multimedia installations concerns the generation of a *gaming* space in which “the multisensory mechanism of the body is supported, and interactive media are extending man’s space for play and action”²¹.

Sacred space in the etymological sense of the word suggests a restricted, separated, circumscribed space - the ‘magic circle’ of the artwork (Adorno). On the contrary, the structure of the installation makes the limit, threshold, border and passage explicit in a spatial and temporal sense.

This means not only that the work of art presents itself “as a relationship” – acknowledged as communal and shared and not exclusive and circumscribed to installations – but as an invitation

21 From Monika Fleischmann and Wolfgang Strauss’s comments on their installation *The Home of the Brain* (1992), quoted in Grau (2003), p. 219: “Many visitors said that they experienced the decoding of the image program and the possibility of discovering connection as a game”.

for each viewer to experience a kind of astonishment, a meditational detachment as well as a sympathetic identification with the *living* environment²².

On this basis the reference to the sacred as a detached space seems to still make sense only for ‘sculptural’ installations, like *God Save the People* (2007) by Vittorio Corsini or *Untitled* (2004) by Anish Kapoor, which are more clearly oriented towards the act of circumscribing a sacred space and lend themselves to an exclusive, private relationship with the individual viewer.

Conversely, in installations such as *Meccatuna* (2003) or *Tijuanatanjierchandelier* (2006) by Jason Rhoades, something different happens: a sort of ordinary (though orderly) chaos reigns over the interlacement of multi-coloured ropes, neon signs, sculpture-chandeliers, cascades of ropes ending in vaporous, quasi-circular nests, the floor covered with striped red carpets like in a Mosque, camel-shoes, lanterns and various objects hanging all around – the installation as a whole creating an image/portrait or an object-like and spaced-like reformulation, with evident playful features, of the (Inter)net’s interlaced structure and its self-containment, while showing a number of symbolic layers spread all around the exhibition area²³.

While presenting themselves as practices that have taken on the fluid, performative *habitus* of

²² See, for example: Pierini (2010), pp. 93-94.

²³ See Schaffner (2013).

20th century happenings and site-specific events, last-generation multimedia installations tend to outline a new set of values and potentials, with a strong retroaction of the virtual-digital logic, as a collective-connective logic of the installation itself, appearing alongside its persisting process-like rather than ‘object-like’ character.

The changed *formality* of multimedia installations compared to the minimalist site-specific event and performance concerns in particular the appearance of an environment which increasingly turns to *everyday life*²⁴. But what ‘ordinary life’ first of all imposes to focus on are everyday practices increasingly tied to the *living artifices* of technological arrangements.

The new “formality of practices”²⁵ introduced by multimedia installations brings the regime of the connective, that is the global system and digital remediation, back to the regime of a *distributed, public, partly deferred gathering*, with varying degrees of aestheticisation and politicisation of behaviours and output of ‘common sense’. It is this deferred character (their embedded re-mediation) that

24 I think of the exemplary parable of Allan Kaprow, from the *Environments* and the *Performances* in the late 1950s and 1960s to what he called “Activities” (in the 1990s), devoted to the study of normal human activity and perception in a way congruent to ordinary life.

25 The concept of “formality of practices” was developed by de Certeau (1975), pp. 153-212, to highlight the shift from the medieval religious system to the ethics of the Enlightenment (in particular, the presence of a Christian formalism in the political practices of the 17th century ‘civil religion’). The concept, however, could be applied far beyond Certeau’s areas of investigation, as the idea of a device shifting and transforming doctrinaire dimensions and order systems from one type of praxis to the other.

distinguishes the new media installations from Action Art, Performance and Happenings of the 1950s and 1960s, where the ephemeral interactions with the viewers introduced random ingredients which would contribute to the performative event anyway, strengthening its conceptual matrix as well as the goal (which was widely achieved in those years) of disaggregating the nature of “work” of artistic production.

Which image for multimedia installations?

Considering that they combine several media, one may not state that the logic of multimedia installations is the same as the combinatorial logic of electronic collages, whose images may result from any source. Yet multimedia installations seem to contain much of that “dual nature” which is normally attributed to digital art, as art that is at the same time visible (or, however, offered to sensorial perception) and ‘computable’²⁶.

The ‘programmed’ nature of installations remains quite strong, including of those that are more socially targeted to a ‘relational’ realisation of the installation. On the other hand, the situation they create is real, and can be experienced personally and shared with others whose eyes one can meet *de visu*.

²⁶ Nike (2014), pp. 287-8.

This does not only make the overall *image* generated by the installation a composite, analogic-synthetic one, but provides all of the digital imaging stored in the programme with an external reference, adds to the computer-generated diffusive effects the opportunity of concretely affecting the here and now, which thus takes on the role of environment.

Yet installations seem to create the opportunity for an *orientation experience* as well. This is not in response to a general psycho-motor need, connected to the spatial dimension and its exploration, but rather to a more precise, cultural and existential need, dictated or produced for the most part by the technological age, to test feeling and perception with the emerging, via distraction, of new “attentive norms and practices”²⁷, – the need to re-orient oneself by re-activating a virtuous circle of perception, imagination, knowledge.

Installations have the opportunity to offer themselves not only as a park for performing arts, a multi-function space with a major technological-virtual component or as a meeting place where to produce ‘social images’, but rather as a place for a re-organisation and re-arrangement of virtual and material data and images in one single environment, in which the technical attitude of life and the artificial life of the programme can meet and not simply blend in favour of the programme. The outcomes of this encounter are nothing but obvious, especially when

27 Crary (2001), p. 49.

the stake is not mainly the programme's capability to swallow up every sensible datum released by the public, that will be returned in a "paradigm shift" with respect to the original source²⁸.

Pierre Huyghe's work provides an interesting case-study of the possibilities embedded in such an encounter. The exhibition "Pierre Huyghe", at the Centre Georges Pompidou (2013) is an example of a virtuous-circled connection of organic life and technological life, a mix of alive entities and inanimate things. The 'living image' coming out from the exhibition²⁹ includes once more a mixed narrative structure; with the sculpture of a naked laying woman whose head is covered by a bee hive and a dog with one leg painted neon pink roaming the installation with her handler.

Environment 3. Entering the artwork

At this point it seems necessary to ask some questions. With their natural drive to become an

²⁸ See, for example Seiko Mikami, *Desire of Codes* (YCAM/Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media 2010 and ICC/InterCommunication Center 2011), where a matrix of sensors, small lights and surveillance cameras spans the space and follows the movements of visitors. Another interesting idea developed by the neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins is the "meme theory": according to Dawkins *memes* (memory units) are units of cultural information which develop similarly to genes in evolutionary processes, whereby form arises through algorithmic procedures, with no planning or control by an intelligence operating in the background (See Richard Dawkins, *Viruses of the Mind*, 1996, quoted in Grau (2007), p. 325).

²⁹ See Aitken (2004).

environmental phenomenon, what do multimedia installations reveal? The full achievement of life ‘mediatisation’? The need for the relational being to be remodelled or amplified? No doubt the resonance of artistic productions in our lives has long led us to focus on the foundations of such production rather than to develop a ‘theory of art’³⁰. But if this production takes shape mainly in the *living device* of multimedia installations, what are the foundations we should be talking about?

According to Theodor W. Adorno, the necessary precondition to understand a work of art is to be able to understand the work technically, as a construction, to enter the structure of the work so as to ‘perform’ it from the inside. However, a second step is required: the evaluation of the artwork through the intercepting of its “eloquence” or image-character.³¹

It is very likely that he wouldn’t have opposed the additional request that visitors would make to museums fifty years later, that is to go so deep into the work-installation as to be completely absorbed by an interactive multimedia environment. He may have objected to the idea whereby this type of participation, which is, after all, technical-playful, might exhaust the relationship with the artwork, given that in Adorno’s view even techno-artistic innovation must be able to introduce a dissenting note, some sort of diversion (and thus a ‘distraction’ too) from the

³⁰ Henrich (2001).

³¹ Adorno (1981), p. 131.

system and the device, all the more so when these are particularly routine-based and systematic or, better, when the technical medium is taken as fetish³². Only the emergence of a distinguished artistic outcome generates an *image* as its *individualised force*.

It is no coincidence that, according to Adorno, we call “expressive” the nature we experience as “image”: it’s not nature tout court, it’s not “simple nature”³³, but it’s not the image of nature, its idea or mythical or ideal figure either. It is, rather, nature “taken as manifestation” (*Erscheinung*) alone, and never as a material to be processed. For these reasons “even the aesthetic experience of nature, like the experience of art, is an *experience of images*”³⁴.

However, the fact that multimedia installations often present themselves in the name of an “aesthetics of immersion” has given rise to a few misunderstandings, or to a certain overestimation of the ‘urge to swim’ of those who accept an invitation to an “emphatically bodily” experience with a major “affective mobilization” in the coming down of borders between “space of the image” and “real space”, where, after all, immersive spaces account for a major part of the “aestheticisation of the world of life” that is so deeply rooted in today’s culture³⁵. The problem with these simplified interpretations

32 Adorno (1979), pp. 86-87

33 An art aiming to defend repressed nature, says Adorno, would in turn become a ‘natural reserve’ of irrationality, what Hegel called “bad indeterminacy”; see Adorno (1981), p. 408 (translated from German).

34 Op. cit., p. 103, p. 427.

35 Quotations are taken from Bieger (2011), pp. 75-95.

of the peculiarity of multimedia installations lies, in my opinion, in a sort of sealing that has been set up between Reception Aesthetics and Relational Aesthetics³⁶. This connection has highlighted, above all, the perspective of reception and of emotional socialisation, or has shifted the classic positions of intentionalism to images³⁷. In doing so, it neglected to ground its assessment on the constructive logic of the installations themselves as works/events – a choice which may turn out to be extremely useful also as a key to the understanding of the technical roots of its effects of environmental sharing.

Beyond immersion – beyond interpretation

The synthetic representation of the environment by installative artworks gives way to a *process of understanding* which can't be assumed any longer as an interpretive enterprise³⁸.

Noël Carroll has recently put forward the necessity of an 'objective evaluation' of the artwork. He is against "intentionalism", very often difficult to distinguish from "interpretation"³⁹.

36 The most significant references in this respect are: Kemp (1992); Bourriaud (1998).

37 See Mitchell (2005).

38 It's Dieter Henrich's argument: art is an essential form of subjectivity, which is "the process of understanding which results from our consciousness both of the darkness of our own lives and of the inaccessibility of the reason why life implies knowledge of itself"; see Henrich (2006), pp. 60-91.

39 Carroll (2009), p. 140: "the intentionalist claims that interpretation is successful

Like Theodor Adorno, Carroll refuses to take the artwork as a “hermeneutical object”⁴⁰, and prefers to follow its technical paths in search of what the work produces as “valuable”.

Now that use replaces observation, a problem of comprehension remains open. What could be further qualified as ‘environmental’ comprehension – to be understood as both a practical comprehension of the techno-artistic object’s “formation process” and as the capturing of a resonance of one’s own presence in the environment of the installation – doesn’t seem to be able to catch the *image-character* of the artwork in the sense described above.

With respect to this, any attempts to understanding, while not approachable in a “dynamics of subjectivity”⁴¹, should be determined on the basis of a combination of perception of closeness-and-distance in which not only perception must provide the coordinates of an environmental dynamics in which the subject is always included, but it is brought back to its generative grammar, i.e. a grammar of orientation *and* evaluation⁴².

to the degree that it tracks the intentions (the communicative intentions) of artists and uses them as a factor in the hypothesis the intentionalist proposes as to the meaning of the work”: instead, p. 147: “there is something valuable in the work that was not intended to be there by the artist”.

40 Adorno (1981), p. 179, p. 210.

41 Henrich (2006), p. 82. According to him, art today stands under “the imperative of restrainedness and of the restrained engagement and integration in the multiplicity of distances” (p. 90); translated from German.

42 I gave an ‘environmental’ interpretation of some useful statements. I’ve found in Henrich (2003), pp. 16-36.

To enter the gravitational field of the installation's programme results neither in the acquisition of the artwork's formal architecture (therefore in the perception of an order of the form, whatever it is) nor in the sensorial or emotive stimuli it contains. An evaluation is available as access to the installation itself as image, as something identified within the overall architecture of the medium *thanks to its energetic or critical content*.

Individuation

The step forward (towards an analysis of installation-art experience not reduced to context-awareness) I am suggesting is the following: although the unique position of the viewer (inside the image produced by the installation) makes it quite difficult to draw from an environmental aesthetics an aesthetics of evaluation and assessment, this outcome should be possible anyway, although not in the sense of a mere identification of existing canons or standards.

Conversely, the assessment must concern first of all a recognition – that is to say, the installation's ability to *individuate* itself, in line with what Adorno stated regarding the technological artwork's ability to come up as a distinct entity with its own formation pattern⁴³, through “technologies of trans-individuation”

43 Adorno (1981), pp. 94–96.

highlighted by Bernard Stiegler more recently⁴⁴. Jacques Rancière rightly opposes this ‘own’, the *autos* of art’s autonomy, which sees the closure or the self-reflexivity of a detail or a ‘field’ like art as a rule⁴⁵. However, we should consider the possibility to recover a certain meaning of ‘autonomy’ for the techno-artistic production itself.

This means that each and every entity, being loaded with features or properties, is originally related to its own individuation (including the technological one) as a *particular* path or output, whatever intertwined and multifocal it could be. Referred to individuation, ‘autonomy’ would clearly not concern a self-centred reflection by the artwork⁴⁶, but rather the possibility to point to a difference (a distraction) however small, with respect to the medium.

It is only based on these premises that even a techno-artistic device like a multimedia installation can engage in a sort of gymnastics entailing appropriation and expropriation, its own physiology of incorporation and break-up.

In this sense, individuation (being the outcome, not the starting point) cannot but concern the operational relation within the new technologies, and therefore also the work of an artist or a collective to the extent to which it is able to activate or re-activate technology from the inside.

44 Stiegler (2015), pp. 159-166.

45 Rancière (2002), pp. 134-137.

46 On Adorno’s insightful analysis of historical changes in the concept of ‘autonomy’ of art see Adorno (1981), p. 10, p. 86, p. 96, p. 158.

Consequently, in line with Bernard Stiegler’s remarks, there is a new type of individuation “dans la vie technique”, described by Gilbert Simondon in terms of a meta-stability of synchronic and diachronic dimensions – a type that has grown more complex due to its being rooted “dans l’espace publique numérique”, within which the identification of individuals must be possible alongside the identification of techno-artistic objects. Even in multimedia productions, this means to be able to distinguish itself from the “pure, final synchronisation” of the medium which Leroi-Gourhan predicted in the mid-1960s⁴⁷.

Image as force

The art of installation therefore entails a comprehension in terms of technological revealing. Still, revelation of what? Revelation of our being users and producers of a media ecosystem, which the installation can show us in its disturbing opaqueness, not transparency; in its character of ‘ground’⁴⁸ and the increasing interlace with life and living tracks. The main instance of this experience, however, remains defined only in negative terms if

⁴⁷ Stiegler (2015), p. 162.

⁴⁸ See Heidegger’s critique of the instrumentalist understanding of *techné*, whereby the work of art opens our eyes on what modern *techné* itself reveals: the technological apparatus as ground, a relationship of co-responsibility and indebtedness. See Heidegger (1977).

captured in the quasi-automatic way of ‘immersive attentiveness’. Let’s go back then to what Theodor Adorno suggests when speaking of the encounter with artworks as an “experience of images”.

According to Adorno, the character of image strived to keep together two elements of the artwork – appearance and expression – which he presented as antithetical phases in his “dialectics” and which in multimedia installations clearly cannot be presented in the same terms.

However, the idea of an ‘experience of images’ does not seem to be doomed to collapse together with the ‘dialectics’ of art. In order to manifest anything, an artwork must create some form; yet for this manifestation to express something, the mimetic attitude of art must not look to forms nor figures (myths) but to the formless, to the non-identical, to unchannelled energy. In the case of installations: technical and social energy.

In Adorno it is an image as the possible (historical, political, sensitive-pathetic) eloquence of an artistic production which is now desacralized and however keeping its veritative dimension, so that the experience of the aura is meant in its barest, most essential form, after all the halos, the magic, the mythical imagery have dissolved. Reformulated as an experience of images, it seems to suggest the artwork’s ability to produce (and the viewer’s ability to catch) a value or a meaning as a “liberation of forces”, a *hint beyond the medium* with respect to the

specific structure and logic of the artwork, which thus wishes to draw, mimetically, on the reality that remains silent or whose voice sounds processed, simply mediated by the media.

A *dyschronia* seems to be necessary, then – an only partial synchronisation of multimedia single productions with their medium, and (for the viewer) a distraction as a search for the artwork specific image-making. Where the images – as Gottfried Böhm remarks – are not only bodies, but also the “actions and forces” they generate and that “may claim a value”. We are not far from the need – stressed by Adorno – for a “mimetic moment” of the artwork or art production as a lively action, to catch by entering the artwork, going through its constructive moment, and then by intercepting its ‘eloquence’⁴⁹.

Therefore, it is precisely thanks to this distraction-from-and-inside “navigation”, “interaction” and “immersion”, although in the procedural fading of the image and of any symbolic thickness of the procedures, that a recognition of installation art in its image-being may become available, as something technically or technologically identified and ‘speaking’ beyond context-awareness. In this sense a ‘common sense’ will be circulating among the visitors, as energy which is not necessarily ephemeral, generated by the intransitive communication of their shared

49 “Art mobilises technique” says Adorno. See Adorno (1982) p. 86; as mobilisation, artwork is Frage-Gestalt, cfr. p. 184. I have explored these topics in Tavani, *L’immagine e la mimesis* (2012), pp. 157-174.

image-making in the environment-installation alone, but by the density and intensity of the *interrogation* suspended in that image-character, dispersed in the environment within the interplay of appearances, simulations, actions and living entities.

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