Contemporary culture and digital transition

MARIA TERESA CRUZ

NOVA University of Lisbon. NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities
ICNOVA — NOVA Institute of Communication, Portugal
mt.cruz@fcsh.unl.pt

PHILIPP TEUCHMANN

NOVA University of Lisbon. NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities
ICNOVA — NOVA Institute of Communication, Portugal
philipp.teuchmann@gmail.com

Despite its trivialisation and frequent use in bureaucratic and institutional contexts, the idea of 'digital transition' has not lost its critical potential, at least according to the view expressed in this edition of the Journal of Communication and Languages. On the contrary, its ability to evoke a generalised transformation, which is increasingly profound and accelerated, makes it essential for characterising and questioning the present time as a time of transition.

Addressing the question of the digital (Galloway 2021; Hui 2019; Krämer 2018) is crucial to understanding the dimensions of the crisis of contemporary culture in its multiple anthropological, ecological and even cosmological configurations (Latour 2021) Furthermore, in light of what increasingly seems to be a one-way universalisation of technology, the task of thinking about the digital transition becomes even more relevant, as we will have to decide whether to resist a certain form of 'brutalism' (Mbembe 2023) or continue to be dominated by the forces of universalisation. Thus, it is of utmost importance that we imagine alternative futures while also concerning ourselves with the digital (Stiegler 2011, 2019), exploring these very processes of technological transformation.

Media theory, digital studies and the philosophy of technology have been the source of fundamental anthropological questioning (Hayles 1999; Kittler 1997; Stiegler 1994) by showing the co-constitution of human and technology. The view that the human is defined by the interactions with the environment and with the non-human is as central to media theory as to ecological thinking, a junction that leads to the post-humanist turn of the humanities (Braidotti 2019). In this context, the digital has long been

characterised as the postmedia or metamedia stage of the history of culture (Bolter and Grusin 2000; Kittler 1997; Manovich 2005), being perceived as a culmination in the long history of the intertwining of the technical and the symbolic (Kittler, 2009; Krämer, 2018), which indicates the relevance of the transition in question.

This issue of the Journal of Communication and Languages is the result of the intersection of this critical framework with various fields and objects of contemporary culture, as well as the paths opened up by the digital humanities and the digital arts. In the last decade, discussions about the cognitive and epistemological implications of the widespread use of AI and computation have cast new critical themes within Digital Humanities, overcoming a strictly disciplinary and methodological view of themselves (Berry & Fagerjord 2017, Burdick et al. 2016; Dobson 2019). Likewise, discourses and practices around the digital arts seem less concerned with defining them, and are more focused on how the digital is (in-)forming, in a direct and indirect manner, aesthetic and affective experiences, as well as various creative, performative and collaborative practices (Bishop 2012; Weibel 2015).

The scope of this issue is that of a broad cultural reflection on the transformation of knowledge, infrastructures, creativity and practices in an era increasingly characterised by the distribution of capabilities and agencies between humans and technology. Adding to a new stage of the industrialisation of culture and the arts, we are now witnessing the emergence of an industry of knowledge built on AI and the accumulation, automatic analysis, visualisation and generation of data (Negri & Vercellone 2008; Manovich 2021; Moulier-Boutang 2012; Zuboff 2019). The new cognitive industries threaten to trigger a general dispossession of cognitive practices, learning and "savoir vivre" (Stiegler 2019), and the replacement of the civic mission of institutions and practices related to knowledge transmission by infrastructures, platforms and algorithms (Bratton 2016; Srnicek 2016). However, we also need to recognise that the digital transition allows for an explosion and dissemination of knowledge on an unprecedented scale in human history, the strengthening of diverse forms of connectivity and collaboration (Castells 2012; Gerbaudo 2017).

The articles, visual essays and reviews included in this issue reflect on the technological transition of the arts and images, new practices of social action, participation and intervention, literacies and architectures, forms of algorithmic governance and governmentality, the new configurations that representation, corporeality, the organisation of memory and narratives, and the ecosystems of creativity take on with multiple forms of artificial intelligence. This diverse body of work renders it possible to put together an issue of the Journal of Communication and Languages that tries to address the links between culture, technique, technologies and the digital condition, to think about ways of establishing a political cosmology and ecology for the digital transition, a fundamental epistemic, cultural and creative task in which the humanities and the arts of the 21st century must play an important role.

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MARIA TERESA CRUZ

Maria Teresa Cruz has a PhD in Communication and Arts and is an associate professor at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at Universidade Nova de Lisboa (FCSH-UNL), in the areas of Contemporary Culture and Technology, Media Aesthetics and Image Theory. She coordinates the Group of Culture, Mediation and Arts at the UNL Communication Institute (ICNOVA), founded and directed the Interact Magazine — Art, Culture and Technology, and has directed several projects in the field of culture, arts and heritage, with an emphasis on digital media and participatory practices. She is the author of Aesthetic Modernity (2020); Media Theory and Cultural Technologies (Org., 2017); New Media — New Practices (Org., 2011).

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ORCID
0000-0002-4839-9052

—
CIÊNCIA ID
1118-47DC-43CB

—
Institutional address
NOVA FCSH. Av. de Berna, 26-C, 1069-061, Lisboa, Portugal.

PHILIPP TEUCHMANN

PhD student in Communication Sciences — Contemporary Culture and New Technologies — at Nova University of Lisbon (FCSH). In 2021, he completed his master's degree where he mainly addressed how the diagram emerges as a central figure in the context of various contemporary artistic practices. He participated in various projects and was part of the organisation team of the Arts and Humanities in Digital Transition (6-7 July 2023, CCB. Lisbon) international conference. He is currently writing a PhD thesis on the relationship between the notion of operativity and that of the — contemporary — image, for which he has attained an FCT PhD Studentship (2022.11230. BD). His areas of interest are media theory, philosophy of technology, contemporary art and cultural studies.

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ORCID
0000-0002-7363-865X

—
CIÊNCIA ID
3F1B-6C09-9BCF

—
Institutional address
NOVA FCSH. Av. de Berna, 26-C, 1069-061, Lisboa, Portugal

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