

Introduction

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The digital age indeed has much to offer to the arts. Digital media provide new tools that can be put to the service of already existing practices, but they also represent an opportunity for developing unprecedented artistic researches and for taking novel theoretical directions. In this sense, the digital allows for the advent of brand-new practices while also coming to concern art as such. Exploring the digital dimension artistically can shed light on its fascinating, exhilarating, uncanny and frightening features; in turn, the arts and their relating categories (such as form, form-taking, image, imagination, creativity, style, performance, just to mention a few) are transformed by the digital and by its inherent possibilities. The papers gathered in this issue of *Trópos* aim to address the entanglement of the arts and the digital by offering a variety of scholarly perspectives and focusing on a great number of different specific aspects and objects of digitality.

The issue was initially conceived as the proceedings of a conference organized by Professor Gaetano Chiurazzi, held at the University of Turin on June 23, 2022. The conference, funded by the Collège International de Philosophie (Paris) and titled *L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de la numérisation: Beauté, critique, reconnaissance* [*The Work of Art in the Digital Age: Beauty, Critique, Recognition*], brought together many different voices around the questions and puzzles that rise from the encounter of the arts with the digital dimension. Some of the papers presented in this volume report interventions delivered at that conference (the contributions by Gaetano Chiurazzi, Massimo Leone, Gregorio Tenti, Claudia Blümle and myself). Other scholars (Katharina D. Martin, Andrea Osti, Babette Werner, Evan S. Raskob) have been invited to contribute to the issue in order to further enrich the already wide array of perspectives presented in these pages. The result is a markedly interdisciplinary volume that features contributions from fields spanning from philosophy to art history, from semiotics to visual culture studies, and is completed by the first-hand account of a digital art practitioner, Evan S. Raskob. Despite the variety of disciplinary perspectives and the (sometimes contradictory) multiplicity of theses defended, the attentive reader will discover a great number of recurring names and many common threads that run through the pages of these contributions.

The volume opens with a paper by Gaetano Chiurazzi, titled *Œuvres acheiropoïètes. De Boronali à l'IA* [*Acheiropoietic Works. From Boronali to AI*]. Analyzing cases of artworks realized either by animals or by machines, Chiurazzi links them to Christian *acheiropoietia* (i.e., icons “made without hand”) in order to argue for human making to be a necessary condition to classify a given object as a work of art. The human hand, here, plays a fundamental yet metaphorical role in referring to «com-prehension» as the essential feature of the human as such. «There is no art without the hand», the author claims, thus problematizing all possible inclusion of Artificial Intelligence production into the artistic domain.

The second paper, *Ein Streifzug durch die Abstraktionsebenen digitaler Formen* [*A Foray Through the Levels of Abstraction of Digital Forms*], is written by researcher and artist Katharina D. Martin. If Chiurazzi's represents a decidedly philosophical contribution, Martin's paper could be ascribed more accurately to the intersection between philosophy and German media studies (*Medienwissenschaften*). In this text, Martin investigates the ways in which programming language explains and constitutes the process of digital form-taking. Shifting the focus from devices, interfaces and displays to the code, the

author thoroughly explores the relationships between technology and production of digital images.

Andrea Osti's paper, *Immagini, materia e oggetti* [*Images, Matter and Objects*], entwines careful philosophical reconstruction together with a visual culture studies approach. Considering different theoretical frameworks, Osti shows how problematic it is to conceive of the materiality of images, especially digital ones (whose "object" can easily be parted from all contingent material support). Nevertheless, it is precisely in the direction of a digital materialism that the author aims to direct the argument. Such digital materialism could avail of concepts such as that of «anarcho-poietic desire» [*desiderio anarco-poietico*], which describes the material activity of prosumers who encounter digital images and (poietically) alter them, thus (anarchically) dispersing their origins.

Massimo Leone focuses instead on the practice of measuring heads, skulls and faces – a practice common to both artists and anatomists, despite relevant differences –, and does so from the perspective of a «long-term cultural semiotics». His paper, titled *La recherche du visage parfait dans le numérique. De la craniométrie à l'intelligence artificielle* [*The Digital Search for the Perfect Face. From Craniometry to Artificial Intelligence*], investigates the ways in which the mathematization of face structures is linked with racial discrimination. If mathematics represents the language that allows human beings and machines to communicate, then the limits of machines become evident when such digital measurements give way to biases and stigma.

My own contribution turns towards philosophical aesthetics and art theory by examining a specific case in the digital arts, that of the glitch. The paper, whose title reads *Parasites at Work. An Essay in the Aesthetics of Glitch Art*, serves a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it retraces a history of glitch art across media and genres, also offering a critical survey on glitch studies in general; on the other hand, it accounts for glitch artworks from a theoretical perspective. By drawing on the difference between a glitch and its bug, the text presents an aesthetics of parasitism, where the bug plays the role of the invisible parasite (which materially affects the artwork's code) and the glitch plays the role of the hyper-visible symptom (which is what shows at the artwork's surface).

Gregorio Tenti's *DeepDream Aesthetics. Artificial Imagination and Machine Creativity* outlines an aesthetic account too, taking into consideration the computer vision program "DeepDream". In its visionary, hallucinating behavior, the program makes images proliferate, thus showing a productive and creative attitude. To support this claim, the author critically calls into question some traditional aesthetic categories and bends them in a radically non-human

direction, offering an exploratory thesis on «machinic style» and artificial imagination and creativity.

The contribution by Claudia Blümle, *Processus de forme. Esthétique et graphisme informatique dans les années 1960* [*Process of Form. Aesthetics and Computer Graphics in the 1960s*], unfolds at the intersection between aesthetics and art history. Examining the work of the most important pioneers of computer graphics and in particular the work of Vera Molnar and her use of the grid, Blümle considers the ways in which formative processes occur in the domain of digital images. The author resorts to Georg Nees' information aesthetics and to Max Bense's micro-aesthetics (as opposed to what Bense calls "macro-aesthetics", which concerns the elements that are accessible from the point of view of perception and representation, while the micro-aesthetics «breaks down the work of art and the processes of its creation into a discrete series of states»), in order to highlight the complexity and openness of form processes that result from the interaction between order and randomness – an aspect that lies at the heart of early computer art.

Art historian and curator Babette Werner carefully considers a specific case study. Her paper, titled *Von Naturphänomenen zu digitaler Materie. (Re-)Inszenierung von Earthworks und Performancekunst in digitalen Räumen* [*From Natural Phenomena to Digital Matter. (Re-)staging Earthworks and Performance Art in Digital Spaces*], offers a detailed description and a close analysis of a practice carried on by artist Shing Yin Khor during the COVID-19 pandemic, consisting in (re-)staging iconic pieces of contemporary process-based art in the video game *Animal Crossing*. More specifically, Khor translated into digital matter *Spiral Jetty*, the well-known earthwork by Robert Smithson, and Marina Abramović's most celebrated performance, *The Artist Is Present*. Focusing on the very concept of (re-)staging [(Re-)Inszenierung], Werner shows that analog and digital space are not mutually exclusive: rather, they can coexist and cooperate in creating a «process-based living archive» that can only be established through practices of joint collection, preservation, exhibition and communication that cross the boundaries between analog and digital space.

The issue closes with the contribution by scholar and practicing artist Evan S. Raskob, whose personal experience with the technique of Interactive 3D Printing is recounted in the pages of the paper *Space as Time. A Study in Improvisational Interactive Computational Sculpting*. Raskob's improvisational performances are computational and digital, they are based on algorithms and software. At the same time, however, Raskob's artworks are also material and bodied in that the performance produces mixed-media physical artefacts. Raskob resorts to the categories and practices of livecoding and generative art

to bring together sculpture and music, since the parameters used for the digital fabrication of these sculptures do not refer to space (length, depth, height) but rather refer to time, rhythm and musicality (beats, beats-per-minute, duration, musical notes) – categories that belong to the very process of the making.

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