Video games taken seriously: the ludic subject in Arlindo Machado
O game *levado a sério: o sujeito lúdico em Arlindo Machado*

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Abstract: Arlindo Machado was a pioneer in questioning the automatisms of the society of the spectacle, and his ideas open up for a dialogue with new forms of image production and consumption, as well as for the existential mode of the human gaze. Although excluded from the array of the most cited authors in electronic game studies, Machado's intellectual path proves to be an accurate and pioneering reference in the identification of limits and potentials of audiovisual automatisms. As with cinema, documentary, or video, his critical legacy invite us to take games seriously as technical objects prone to creative reinventions that may redefine visibility in the society of the audiovisual spectacle.

Keywords: videogames; post-cinema; semiotics; information technology; audiovisual.

Resumo: A obra de Arlindo Machado questiona de modo pioneiro o automatismo da sociedade do espetáculo e suas ideias abrem-se para o diálogo com as novas formas de produção e consumo da imagem, assim como para o modo de ser do olhar. Apesar de não figurar entre os autores mais citados no campo dos jogos eletrônicos ou *game studies*, a trajetória de Machado revela-se certeira e pioneira na identificação dos limites e potenciais dos automatismos audiovisuais. Assim como os casos do cinema, do documentário e do vídeo, o *game* é levado a sério nessa obra crítica propícia às reinvenções criativas que redefinem os horizontes do olhar para a sociedade do espetáculo audiovisual.

Palavras-chave: *videogames*; pós-cinema; semiótica; tecnologia; audiovisual.Subjetividades pós-cartesianas

Post-Cartesian subjectivities

Arlindo Machado did not go into the video games universe extensively. In his Lattes (last updated on March 31, 2020), there is only one orientation on the subject among 43 doctoral theses (GOMES, 2008). Obviously, this does not reveal much about the intensity, density and relevance of his work for thinking about video games. On the contrary, it serves as a stimulus for new generations who, without access to him at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP) or at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), already dare to project the same appeal to serious treatment in the universe of video games that he managed to provocatively call to video, TV, post-cinema and his own gaze.

But if Arlindo himself did little for game studies, he did not ignore them – he even renamed a graduate student of his as "Renata Games", who ventured into the game *Alice* (a game released in 2000, for PC Windows and Mac OS), had her thesis *Agentes Verossímeis* defended in Communication and Semiotics by PUC-SP (a study on video games, narrative and construction of autonomous characters) and was awarded the Honorable Mention at the Capes Theses Prize 2008 in the area of Applied Social Sciences, in addition to having been the only graduate student awarded in the Communication area.

"Arlindíssima"[2] to the core since her Master's (also at PUC-SP, where she produced the dissertation *Imersão & Participação*, about video games, narrative and *Umwelt*, under the supervision of Arlindo Machado as well), Renata "Games", in her statement in the *Dazumana* podcast, informs that when searching for the meaning of narrative in video games, she shares with her supervisor the reference to Janet Murray, who, in *Hamlet in the Holodeck: The future of narrative in cyberspace*, points to narrative in cyberspace as a challenge to the invention of new conceptual anchors.

Arlindo Machado's Lattes curriculum reveals a few other participations in the video game studies field: he participated in the Master (*Games 3D, Aspectos de Desenvolvimento*, 2007) and doctorate (*Estados Superpostos: Proposta de Modelo Matemático para Games 3D*, 2012) boards of Marcos Fernandez Cuzziol (supervised by Gilbertto Prado); and in 2005 he supervised Aleph Teruya Eichemberg's Master's (*A Experiência do Tempo Morto no Cinema e nos Games*, 2005, in Communication and Semiotics at PUC-SP). It should be noted that his Lattes has no reference to *transmedia* – which is not surprising for someone who was a pioneer in thinking

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[2] In Portuguese "lindíssima" means "very pretty", so "Arlindíssima" plays with being pretty and also a member of Arlindo´s circle of disciples and friends.

about transgenic art (BRITTON, COLLINS, 2003). Machado politicized audiovisual innovation, instead of worshiping technique for the sake of technique, approaching Vilém Flusser and George Simondon.

His influence on Brazilian academic production on video games, however, is greater than what the Lattes form itself reveals. He was passionate about technological acceleration and its effects on time, subjectivity and the artistic reinvention of audiovisual media and processes. From the analysis of serial narratives in their categories and modalities to the very attitude of attributing (ethical and aesthetic) value to the products of the mass audiovisual cultural industry and its margins, gaps and disruptive, critical and disalienating potentials, Arlindo Machado has become a mandatory reference in bibliographies of many researchers of the ludic-digital phenomenon.

Janet Murray herself, when dealing with the transformation in the narrative paradigm associated with the emergence of "cyberspace", resorts to an image derived from cinema, or at least from a cinema that approaches science (a theme also dear to Machado, Simondon and Flusser), guided by agonistic narratives that are structured or easily adaptable to the video games format (Murray's book is from 1997, the Portuguese edition was published in 2001 and does not deal with the issue of video games directly).

The holodeck is a device derived from the hologram, a scientific source of inspiration for the gadget that became one of the icons of the *Star Wars* franchise (which dates back to the 1960s). It was already an augmented reality or virtual reality device, that is, a technophile or even technicist counterpart of the experiences of "expanded consciousness" that moved the youth of the "peace and love" generation (as opposed to the Cold War, to the space and arms races and the prohibition of nuclear wars in outer space). The holographic method was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1971, received by its inventor, Dennis Gabor, a Hungarian Jew who fought in World War I and dedicated himself to the study of the properties of high-voltage electrical currents, a technique that would lead to the electronic microscope and to cathode tube televisions and plasma screens powered by radio frequencies. This coincides with Arlindo Machado's interest in the technological processes associated with the production of television images and with his attention to Nam June Paik's experimental work, which interferes with the operation of cathode tubes.

That would be known as the "Videomakers' Bienal", in which Paik's work *TV Garden* (1974) "surprised the Brazilian public by placing monitors amidst a vegetation of potted palms and artificial plants" at the 13th Bienal de São Paulo, in 1975.

Figure 1: *TV Garden*, 1974. Video installation by Nam June Paik.[3]

At the same time, the first consoles with the Pong video game (launched by Atari in 1972) reached the homes of the globalized upper middle class.
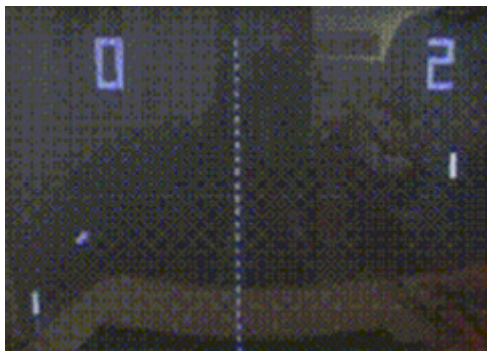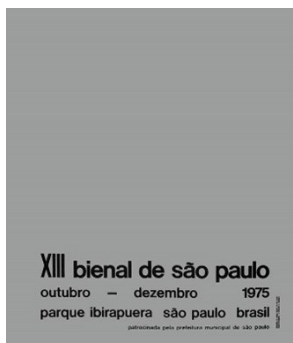

Figure 2: Pong Screen (1972)

Figure 3: Poster of the 13th Bienal de São Paulo (1975).[4]

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[3] Available from: https://bit.ly/3iG9PDq. Access on: Jun. 14, 2021.

[4] Available from: http://www.bienal.org.br/exposicoes/13bienal. Access on: Mar. 03, 2021.

For Arlindo Machado, the essential experience is the contact with the "post-TV" and its temporality. The combination of Pong and Nam June Paik was both transformative and intensely technological and imaginative. The image no longer represented, it set itself up as a relation and process of interference on the meaning of what was projected in the black box, a narrative completely dependent on the receiver's capacity to actively place himself in the planes of imagination and of an unprecedented agency.

Both on the Pong screen (Figure 2) and on the Bienal poster (Figure 3), there is an invitation to fill out – with the gaze, attention, body and mind – a screen that is presented in two colors, in a mixture of mirror and black hole. The poster created by Rogério Batagliese and Maria Elisabeth S. Nogueira has already been dissected as a "large sheet of metallic paper, clean, that serves as a mirror for the spectator to look at himself" (BIENAL 50 ANOS, 2001, p. 298).

It is "a graphic piece open to multiple readings: it can be understood as a translation of the new cultural moment, in which the limits between what is and what is not art are increasingly difficult to define; or as a message that the ultimate nature of art is to reflect the world around it; or even as an allusion to the country's political situation, in which there are no longer any alternatives for discourse other than to reflect the real in its most concrete and immediate dimension" (Bienal 50 Anos, 1951-2001, p. 298 apud http://www .bienal.org.br/exposicoes/13bienal/cartazes/4239).

It is also the end of the "Miracle" that is approaching, the democratic experience that revives, the oil crisis that is being announced, as well as the amazement, the plunge into psychedelia and the consolidation of the cultural industry supported by consumer credit and worldwide debt.

The video is a game, the game is a video. On the one hand, advertising quickly appropriated all these languages and techniques, defining TV time in dollars per second. On the other hand, the crisis of representation was accelerated by means of technical devices and new black boxes that amplified virtually ad infinitum the challenges posed to image thinkers since the end of the 19th century, especially in photography, the primordial terrain of Arlindo Machado's studies, willing to show the load of affections, desires and anxieties inseparable from semiotic machines and audiovisual agencies.

From photography to video, from video to… *video game*? Today maybe Arlindo Machado published a book with the title "the video game taken seriously".

In 2001, Arlindo Machado summarized little more than a decade of research after the publication of *A Arte do Vídeo*, a recollection of the 1980s, when "the issue

of enunciation constituted one of the themes that most mobilized cinematographic theory" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1). And he goes on to report that the decline of this theoretical strand began in the early 1990s and was "the result of the first theorists' inability to see cinema as a hybrid medium and, on the other hand, because cinema itself began to transform itself from the hegemony of television and the emergence of new media" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1).

The goal of Machado would be, then, "to check what should change in the theory of enunciation from the consideration of new ways to produce and consume audiovisual messages introduced by electronic and digital media" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1). And he mentions video games when declaring himself interested in "taking up the immersion techniques, experienced in pre-cinematographic shows, such as 19th century panoramas" to check "how they are taken up in current video games and virtual reality devices" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1).

He was in tune not only with Janet Murray, but also with Brenda Laurel (1991) and Allucquère Rosanne Stone (1996), who deal with interactive narratives and the phenomenon that "English-speaking peoples" call *agency*, that is, "the effect of subjection of the spectator necessary for the illusion of immersion" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1).

Subjectivation and submission are a two-way street in which the very notion of author will be diluted in networks of apparatuses that produce technical images not necessarily aligned with democracy, emancipation or creativity.

In short, it is about defining a research horizon on "technical images" (an expression enshrined in Vilém Flusser's work) in which "new regimes of subjectivity" are introduced (a theme that would gain strength in the reconsideration of Gilbert Simondon's work about "individuation"). Arlindo Machado's theoretical arsenal in the early 2000s already points to the question of the relationship between video (and art) in increasingly sophisticated mechanisms of immersion and subjection.

In addition to Janet Murray's reflection "on the mechanisms of immersion and the ways the reader/spectator interacts with the potential situations accumulated in computer memories" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 1), it would be necessary to summon Sherry Turkle's ideas about "the virtual personalities (avatars) that inhabit the so-called cyberspace and the development of multiple identities in computer-mediated interaction situations" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 4).

In 2001, Arlindo Machado was already connected to the emergence of video games. He was then transitioning from holodeck and holograms to hologames. The locus of the so-called "hypnotic fascination" of cinema shifted to other screens,

located in domestic environments or new entertainment spaces (just remember the LAN house era), and the audiovisual experience becomes determined by serialization and fragmentation, so that "the spectator himself, with his remote control, introduces a new discontinuity through the practice of zapping" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 3).

Technically, the remote control is very close to the game controller, practically the essential icon of the playful era (which initially required only the use of two hands and started to include more and more participation of the whole body, until reaching the head movement and of the eyeball itself in the 3D immersion helmets).

The movie screen is transparent, while the video screen (and, therefore, the video game screen) is opaque, small, shattered, without depth, little "realistic" and has a "precarious illusionist power", as Arlindo Machado himself noted in 1988 in his *A Arte do Vídeo*. This is what the Pong screens (Figure 2) and the Bienal poster (Figure 3) display analogically.

The work of bewitching happens in other places, involves other relationships and arrangements, other times and rhythms (flows) and a gigantic advertising machine that supposedly places each player's body in "control" of the audiovisual experience.

Therefore, it is not by chance that "the new media that emerged after cinema did not stimulate reflections related to the way subjectivity is constructed in them and, consequently, a theory of post-cinematic enunciation was never formulated, at least not in such a systematic way as it was in literature and cinema" (MACHADO, 2001, p. 3).

Technical images and the game of auratic individuation in the icon

Arlindo Machado never ceased to question the centrality of the technical apparatus in the formulation of this necessary new "theory of enunciation" in the digital sphere. His investigations range from Walter Benjamin to Janet Murray and Jean-François Lyotard, in a way that space and time, as well as the doses of technique, spell and agency associated with the operation of a world of behaviors, ideas and financial circulations determined by technical images come to depend on a new formulation in which the "subjective regime" or the "new figures of subjectivity" are dissected in the foreground, looking for an anatomy of the human being in digital networks.

Thus, he starts to seek a new ethics and aesthetics for the electronic age. After all, "instrumental support seems to summarize the simplest aspect of the problem" (MACHADO, 2002a, p. 20), while the greatest artistic challenge is to divert technology from its industrial project.

A Benjaminian interested in a positive dialectic, Machado proposes that the semiotic machines themselves be used to overcome our condition of "employees"

(Vilém Flusser's term) and enter a reinvention of the aura at the extreme vanishing point of art at the time of its technical reproducibility.

In the 2000s, his research would definitely dive into unraveling these new types of subject/subjection, agency and identity multiplication, since "immersion regimes" and "agency modes" expanded the subject's immersion modalities in images.

The world is dynamically altered by our participation, as there is an ongoing negotiation with each contact with technical images. Therefore the black box is myself.

The relationship between representation and interaction/interactor has become more fluid, porous, fragmented and complex, conditioned by the symbolic nature of the avatar or by the perspective chosen for the camera that reveals the digital metaverse.

Would Aristotelian poetics be still operating in video games? Is the game just a specialized form of dramaturgy still conditioned by classical narrative strategies? The fact is that there is no longer a single way to make the narrative in a game evolve. There will always be places and even characters that will remain unknown after the interactor reaches the end of a video game. There is no one-way street in a playful universe.

The novelty is in a "subject hyperbole": a kind of "radical and self-referential narcissism, in which the only possible identification is that of the subject with himself" (MACHADO, 2002b, p. 6), even though the use of masks is an infinitely expanded resource of carnivalization. Mikhail Bakhtin is mobilized within the scope of his theory of composition of multiple identities, so that the observation of the computer world updates the theory of the carnival mask, represented by the avatar that fulfills a role "more properly psychoanalytic than political: it expresses a crisis of identities that have not yet taken the form of a critique of customs, but which is disguised in projections and metaphors of a Freudian nature" (MACHADO, 2002b, p. 11). This relationship between mask, interface and media digitization is, therefore, a Machado's perspective that is quite appropriate for a critical dimension of game design, which involves the construction of characters and avatars and the manipulation of subjectivity technically created by the staging camera of each level of a game.

For Bakhtin, the mask has "a political and demystifying sense in carnival culture, allowing a divergent look at the world, a look not yet framed by the halter of

civilization, in order to make sensitive the relativity of values and the circumstantiality of powers and knowledge" (MACHADO, 2002b, p. 11).

However, in the computer world, the mask represented by the avatar "plays a psychoanalytic rather than a political role: it expresses a crisis of identities that has not yet taken the form of a critique of customs, but which is disguised in projections and metaphors of Freudian nature" (MACHADO, 2002b, p. 11). This is a pertinent interpretative horizon in a society in which the interface replaces the mirror and millions of children and adolescents form their identities projecting themselves in post-human playful configurations centered on the diffusion of digital black boxes, a perspective also adopted by Manfred Fassler (2000).

Arlindo Machado, since his interest (still in the 1970s) in the film-essay, in Eisenstein's work and, ultimately, in the relationship between thought and moving image, seeks a new theory of the post-subject that defines itself in the midst of metamorphoses of the technical image.

The "deviation" potential of the "industrial project" in the society of the spectacle lies in the agency made possible by the open game in the fragmentation of identities whose emancipatory horizon depends on social, political and semiotic processes.

The clues are in Arlindo Machado's resumption of the views of Flusser and Simondon, which already illuminate such a demanded perspective of a new theory of enunciation derived from the technical operations shaped in the cycles of image and imagination.

This necessary economy of audiovisual individuation is at least suggested in texts by Arlindo Machado that deal more directly with the gaze and the imperative of deprogramming semiotic machines. From this perspective, he goes against the grain of what some readings of his work claim, such as Feitosa (2008), who points out that "it is good to mention, the author works from the perspective of cinema as a kind of founding reference of all audiovisual, even in cyberspace" (p. 3).

The need, formulated by Arlindo Machado himself, for a new theory of enunciation was explicit, that is, the recognition of the fundamental crisis that prevents cinema theory from reaching the new electronic age. Machado goes beyond cinema and TV and demands that the theoretical proposal based on the history of cinema and its thinking be expanded or even abandoned. The need for a post-cinema must be taken strictly and literally. We have to take the video game seriously.

But how to go into game controllers, consoles, black boxes of playful interaction (from X-Box to 3D helmets gamification) to rediscover the creative aura

that Arlindo Machado's campaign for life propounded against the submission of art to the time of advertising and the functional subjection of identities to alienating hegemony projects of the cultural industry? In other words, how to effectively bring the electronic age closer to new ethics, aesthetics and techniques with authentically democratic and emancipatory horizons?

The displacement proposed by Arlindo Machado as a condition to overcome the cinema era requires a broader critique of technocentrism and a new theory of subjectivation mediated by images and imagination as processes open to reinterpretation, deconstruction and interference analogous to that produced by Nam June Paik about the cathode tube of TV.

Vilém Flusser has been a fundamental reference in this search since 1997, when Machado presents *Repensando Flusser e as Imagens Técnicas* at the event *Arte en la Era Electrónica: Perspectivas de una nueva estética*, held in Barcelona, at the Centre de Cultura Contemporania, from January 29th to February 1st, organized by Claudia Giannetti and promoted by the Goethe-Institut of Barcelona (MACHADO, 1997a). In that same text there is a reference to the then known work by Gilbert Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets téchnique* (1969). Machado's starting point is the "level of technological competence" required of contemporary artists who venture "with technological devices or processes" (p. 7). That is, the focus is shifted from the consumer/interactor immersive experience to the aesthetic experience production space-time and the ethical implications of surrender to the empire of technology.

They are more "Germanic" reverberations, Heideggerian textures, it is a phenomenology where the relationship between technique, language and humanism takes the foreground, a territory clearly addressed centrally in Vilém Flusser's work. It is a new anatomy of the relationship between body, image and thought that refers to the tragic fate of technique in the throes of Enlightenment mythology.

Would the black box from which there is no longer a possible association between artwork and aura still be the possible horizon of creativity, of an imaginary capable of freeing itself from the algorithmic programming implicit in the production of technical images? Can the artist who deals with technology overcome the condition of being an employee of the great cultural spectacle industry?

Arlindo Machado is preparing (and preparing us) for a debate that goes far beyond cinema, especially at a time when the video game becomes the principle of imagery organization of the public sphere and private life becomes the tragic stage

of gamification programmed in time, space and emotions, conditioning the very thinking, politics and the possibilities of socialization, employment and health.

It can be seen that Machado followed theoretical paths that were already far from methodological and even purely pragmatic issues of cultural production in order to attack "important and strategic philosophical problems to define the status of art in industrial or post-industrial societies" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 2).

The fearless freedom game

For Machado, "one of the most acute formulations of this problem was made by Vilém Flusser". He deals with this important Czech thinker as someone "who lived 31 years in Brazil, having been the main intellectual mentor of several generations of Brazilian artists who faced the challenge of technology" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 2).

Machado refers, then, to *Filosofia da Caixa Preta* as a "profound reflection on the possibilities of creation and freedom in a society increasingly centralized by technology." In the late 1990s, shortly after Flusser's death, Machado reiterates that he "still remains, in circles that discuss the art of the electronic age, a little-known thinker, but whose fundamental contribution in this field demands urgent rescue" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 2).

This rescue effectively requires the competence to carry out a new form of "iconic coding". It is, therefore, *in nuce*, an invitation to rescue Flusser as the founding thought of the image socialization capacity of certain scientific concepts, inasmuch as audiovisual production is inseparable from mathematical operations and algorithms, of which electronic games are one of the most finished examples.

Flusser, like Machado, perceives the potential of game design as a highly practical/technical or methodological competence, but also as a new way of enunciating and negotiating the relations and operations of the imagination that connects each individual to their own world. Both Flusser and Machado address phenomena and processes associated with the evolution of the technical image and the "black boxes" with which they are produced, but they still left a source to be explored when it comes to better understanding game design.

A game design with a Flusserian-Machadian perspective has as its creative horizon the iconic representations mediated by devices. It is no longer about innocent duplication of the world (because between them and the world stand abstract transducers, the concepts of scientific formalization that inform the operating semiotic machines like the camera and the computer), nor about completely relinquishing the hypothesis of creative intervention in machines and

their distributed connection systems through tangible infrastructures and intangible superstructures. Therefore, a semiotic machine condenses in its material and immaterial forms a certain number of *potentialities.*

Freedom and creativity are possible because each technical image produced by a semiotic machine represents the realization of some of these possibilities. However, by definition, this realization does not exhaust the universe of technical, material and immaterial possibilities, since such machines can only operate as processes, in networks that may become more or less flexible and open. No database will abolish chance, history and ethics.

Indeed, machines and programs are "creations of man's intelligence", they are "materializations of a mental process", "thought that took shape". It is enough to challenge the *repetition* power of *these machines and software, to refuse* the "indiscriminate repetition" that inevitably leads to *stereotyping,* that is, to the homogeneity and predictability of results, avoiding "the multiplication around us of prefabricated models, generalized by commercial software" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 4).

Machado's game design proposal based on Flusser is clear: if "it is natural and even desirable for a washing machine to always and invariably repeat the same technical operation, which is washing clothes, it is not, however, the same thing that is expected from devices destined to intervene in the imagination, or from semiotic machines whose basic function is to produce symbolic goods destined to the intelligence and sensitivity of man" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 2).

We are left with the "insurgency against this stupid automation", against the robotization of consciousness and sensitivity to "replace the issues of *freedom* and *creativity* in the context of an increasingly computerized and technologically-dependent society" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 2).

How to achieve this creative competence and avoid the robotization that has now become the rule in social networks and even in cultural industries? It is necessary to overcome the very hypothesis (with which Flusser himself would have flirted) of limited possibilities of intervention on semiotic machines. It is necessary to rigorously regard these machines as artifacts with which and against which games are set up and cultural negotiations can be reopened.

After all, Flusser recognizes that there are regions "in the imagination of the devices" that remain unexplored, "regions that the artist preferentially navigates to bring to light images never seen before".

Quite faithful to this vision of Flusser, Arlindo Machado concludes that in the limit-situation, "the relationship between user and device appears as a game"

(MACHADO, 1997a, p. 5). Because Flusser "recognizes that this game takes place in a superlatively concentrated way in the field of experimental art, where the artist struggles to divert the apparatus from its programmed function and, by extension, to avoid redundancy and favor invention" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 5).

Will there be, at the end of history, the predominance of the technological universe that incorporates the discoveries and deviations of artists towards their programmed ends? After all, if "every new route discovered" is added to the universe of possibilities of the device(s), then ultimately "semiotic machines feed on the concerns of experimental artists and use them as a feedback mechanism for their continuous improvement" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 6).

Arlindo Machado, taking up Nam June Paik's insight (which, "with the help of powerful magnets, diverts the flow of electrons inside the iconoscopic television tube"), states that the director does not only fulfill "possibilities" of the medium. He is "crossing the limits of the machine and radically reinventing its program and its purposes" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 9).

Is it necessary to know how to program, that is, to enter the black box as deeply as possible, to "whiten it"? Yes! But metaphors of the order of Space are of little use in this context. It is not about an "entry" or an "opening", but rather the integration to processes of individuation and *transindividuation* in which the technical process and biopolitics are part of transparent, desiring and creative operations.

Gilbert Simondon, whose works have only recently gained greater visibility and relevance in numerous fields of science, art and politics, continued along this line. *Transindividuation* is an operation that refers to *conatus* as discussed, for example, the tradition dating back to Spinoza, as suggested Marilena Chau (2019). Here, it is necessary to return to the pre-Enlightenment moments of scientific reason itself or the geometric method, possibly taking up Machado's insights, who spoke of Eisenstein having as horizon the emergence of a *geometry* of ecstasy.

We conclude this section with Machado/Flusser: artistic and critical activity is fundamentally contradictory and playful. It is about "rethinking the very concept of art, constructively and positively absorbing the new formative processes opened by machines". But it is also the case of "making also sensitive and explicit the purposes embedded in most technological projects, whether they are of a warlike, police or ideological nature" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 11).

Art confronts humanity with the challenge of being able to live freely in a world programmed by devices. "Pointing out the path to freedom" is, according to Flusser, "the only revolution still possible" (MACHADO, 1997a, p. 11).

Looking at the gaze: time, space and playful transindividuation

Arlindo Machado's research and reflection gain full meaning only in the horizon of audiovisual playfulness in its challenges of reframing subjectivity, narrativity and the very possibility of overcoming functional alienation towards freedom, creativity and digital emancipation in a context of playful transindividuation in the society of the spectacle.

His work also investigated research on the relationship between video games and documentary, more specifically on the phenomenon known as "machinima". In this aspect, the question of the relationships between body, truth and technique is raised again, which takes the foreground, going back to Spinoza's distinction derived from an immanent proposal of processuality between body, action and affectivity.

In *Novos Territórios do Documentário*, Machado (2011) again invites us to perceive the limits of the traditional categories of classification of audiovisual narrative, shedding light on the metamorphoses of the documentary genre. As in other critical review works, what appears as *new territory* leads us to a radical review of tradition. Possibly what Machado said about the documentary is also valid for video games: it is a form that "has a basic problem: we all talk about it, but we do not really know what it is" (p. 2).

The various possibilities of widening, inverting or even perverting an impossible precise concept of what a documentary would be do not resist either the epistemological investigation of its concept, nor the illusion conception that any technical apparatus would have the gift of capturing the truly real reality. In this process of conceptual erasure, Machado moves towards animation and video games as cases of overcoming the traditional definitions of documentary.

The greatest example of this convergence between video games and documentary is the *machinima* genre. The first film recognized as machinima was made in the game Quake, released in 1996. Machinimas can also be created from real-time interactive virtual environments that allow you to record game action. There are games whose purpose is to create machinima and, recently, the engines have emerged in response to the obstacles to filming: these is game creation software, which constitutes an innovation in audiovisual production that each day makes less visible the separation between real "filming" and the production of "special effects". Machado points to the politically based machinimia.

Another eloquent example of the erasing of gender boundaries driven by gamification is the *Second Life* platform, in which the documentary maker Gabriel Mascaro starts to "live" working as an avatar of… a documentary maker.

Arlindo Machado's reflection on the "end" of documentary takes on the bias of an expansion of the social, ideological, aesthetic and ethical conditions in which technological innovation is appropriated by new perspectives. It is the emergence of a new look that emerges in the foreground and, in this sense, the playful aim becomes more defining of the direction of contemporary audiovisual than the strictly technical consideration of this or that "black box".

The theme is taken up again in *Máquina de Animação*, a text published in a special issue of Cinusp's magazine about Machinima (apud MORAN, PATROCÍNIO, 2011). Again, the oscillation occurs between the importance of cinema in the overdetermination of new forms of audiovisual creation and the inevitable emergence of a totally new audiovisual culture, shaped by the technological transformation that, in order to be creative, will require a new look whose frontiers in relation to cinema we are still trying to distinguish. It is Arlindo Machado's view of cinema and its evolution that is required if we are to take games and video games seriously as well.

Machado's acute observation refers to a form of perversion of video game technology by filmmakers, so that games are a finished example of the Flusserian-Simondonian operation of technical reinvention based on new relationships between individuals, techniques and affections. This dialectical perversion of technique is inseparable from culture, referring again to what Simondon defined as "transindividuation".

Furthermore, it is not simply about a new way of making movies (as if everything that is new in audiovisual technology should respond or gain intelligibility status based on cinematographic behaviors and aesthetics), because after all it is also about a "new way of playing" (MACHADO, p. 93 apud MORAN, PATROCÍNIO, 2011).

The video games become full-fledged "a new possibility of producing audiovisual content." As he had done with video and television, Arlindo Machado takes the video game seriously. From the algorithmic entrails of game design, a new agency opens a clearing in the being and time of the technical image, changes the relationship between body, mind and semiotic machine through an "opportunity to create a new concept of cinematography based on video games, perhaps even a new medium" (MACHADO, p. 93 apud MORAN, 2011).

Machado proceeds to draw revolutionary conclusions from every technical detail associated with audiovisual production anchored in playful digital narratives: machinima videos are a "curious surprise in the world of video games and also an innovation in the field of cinema, which seemed paralyzed by a certain creative inertia" (MACHADO, p. 97 apud MORAN, 2011). Digital playful transindividuation is associated with an iconomic irruption, there is a political and even sanitary economy in the new procedures in which the value of things stems from a relationship between technical image and vital processes of transindividuation (it is no longer necessary to face snakes, heart attacks and feed armies to shoot something like *Apocalypse Now*!).

It is thus evident that "a technology is defined not only by its producers, but also by its users, who can redirect its functions through differentiated use". The same happened with the video clip and the VCR in their portable versions, which were "originally designed as monitors for training in companies and sports, but ended up becoming the engines of a great cultural revolution" from a "deviant" and "more advanced" use by the community of its users (MACHADO, p. 98 apud MORAN, 2011).

There is a "negotiation", an operation open to creativity, deviation, perversion and deconstruction of mass consumerism even within semiotic machines – and video games served for Arlindo Machado as perfect examples of these broader theses about the relationship between image, imagination and technique.

Arlindo Machado's look at cinema against photography, which combines rational and enlightenment techniques that at the same time serves a certain obfuscation and opening to access the ghosts of the unconscious, reverberates in his analysis of the transition from cinema to gamification that marks the contemporary destiny of post-cinema. Video art and video games are part of the same technical and historical transition of the 1970s, in which the Cold War gave way to virtual, cultural and digital wars.

Over the last few years, his texts have advanced towards this new theory of enunciation that presupposes a creative bet on the trans-individual appropriation of the black box from a critical review of the gaze itself. In 2019, these clues are offered in *A Visão sob o Enfoque Audiovisual*. A stage of "critical review of premises" opened up for Machado, so that almost 20 years after his work on reviewing the theories of enunciation and cinema, he directs his vision to Gaze itself, moving towards a "review criticism of the main recent theories about the way the eye interprets the world" (MACHADO, 2019, p. 1).

It is in vision that the double inscription of the inside and the outside takes place. If he does not mention Simondon or Flusser, he takes up biopolitically inspired

concepts such as Jacob Johann von Uexküll's *Umwelt* (author of the late 19th century), which are relevant in the work of philosophers of creative and open protention. They place the technique that translates into audiovisual prostheses in the living context of the connection between image and imagination, in which observation implies interactions between the observer and the observed system. Again, science, biology and culture are united in a relational, procedural vision, open to deviation from industrial and alienating programming, which makes Arlindo Machado an essential reading for the universe of video games understood as the most advanced frontier of audiovisual capitalism or digital icons.

As in Espinosa, for Arlindo Machado the eye itself thinks, and bodies and cognitive systems are historically defined as creative fields, as open as a game that is situated at each moment on the border between rules, programming and artifices and ecstasy, desire and fantasy. The mind cannot be thought of as purely rational and instrumental. As in the playful situation, each individual thinks with their senses even in the process of interacting with others, real or virtual, programmed or not. In Arlindo's look, the whole body is a thinking being and the look itself can be on the fingers, sensitive enough both to enable the reading of the Braille code and to dive into increasingly complex ways of "controlling" the digital or hybrid playful experience, with helmets or chips implanted in the body.

In every game, as in Flusser and Simondon, it no longer makes sense to get lost in the labyrinths of subjectivity. In Arlindo Machado's final reflections, the search for emancipatory subjectivation refers to the basic idea of the "complementary unity" of subject and object, without subjectivism or objectivism in favor of an understanding of vision as a process that articulates uncertain operations between bodies, minds and communication systems.

It is in this trans-individual dimension of the playful subject that the deviant possibilities of future semiotic body-machines are projected. Arlindo Machado's gaze places future screens at the service of the freedom of bodies, minds and desires.

This look requires reading between the lines of his texts and a careful examination of his references, especially by gradual, subtle and documented shift of his perspective over the years, whether in terms of object (photography, film, TV, post-TV and video games and quasi-performances) or in terms of philosophical references (from more Anglo-Saxon references to a more continental and Germanic orientation, following the "affective turn" of contemporary philosophy as in Simondon).

The shift in Arlindo Machado's work had as its horizon the overcoming of the focus on audiovisual media, supports and processes to aim at the conversion of the audiovisual itself (when it moves from narrative or enunciation to the gaze itself) into an index of political, social, ethical and aesthetic shattering of individuation.

It is necessary to align its trajectory with this contemporary and purposefully anti-Cartesian (in some senses even anti-Marxist and libertarian) recovery of affects.

His work and his gaze sought not only the emergence of means and relationships between subjects and objects, but also the focus on overcoming the bad dialectic, the infinite bad and the bad conscience inherent in the labyrinths of technical or merely instrumental subjectivity.

The option is to approach authors attentive to the internal ethnography of technical objects in their relationship with individuation and transindividuation – the case of Sherry Turkle. Turkle's work points clearly to an ethnography of technical affection dating back to the same *Start Trek* of Janet Murray's holodeck, in her work and even more radically in her autobiography, in which Turkle projects on our relationship with technical objects and semiotic machines the affective gaze of "empathy", which she herself acknowledges is rooted in the *Empath* episode of the series. The *Enterprise* crew comes into contact with a female extraterrestrial being who has the gift of feeling and absorbing the pain of others as a resuscitation "technique" (TURKLE, 2021, p. XIX).

Arlindo Machado does justice to a Spinozian distinction that goes back to the principles of modern science, according to which it is essential to distinguish between "machina" and "factory" and, thus, it is not surprising that he himself turned his attention to the eye, the brain and the biopolitical relationship between body, mind and technique.

Against Cartesianism, Spinoza presents as the first truth the "I am" without any reference to *Cogito*, the "relationship between being and thinking being established by a proposition and its demonstration and not by an intuition… Spinoza does not write *Cogito ergo sum*, but *sum cogitans*. I am by thinking" (CHAUÍ, 1981, p. 65-66).

Arlindo Machado (associated with Merleau-Ponty's contributions) could have written "I am by looking and, therefore, we are by thinking". Arlindo's beautiful look is a thought of the technical image that makes sense only in the dimension of affective construction, always collective and intimately, organically linked to the fabrication of the imaginary and freedom, not just an alienating, repetitive and industrial machination.

His gaze points to a contemporary movement that goes beyond the audiovisual, technical and alienated subjectivity to invite us to rebuild, as players who negotiate positions and visions, a more emotionally resolved humanity.

This new disposition requires, after all, that "taking it seriously" means exactly the opposite of what it seems to say. Taking photography, TV, cinema and video games seriously requires overcoming the technophilic discipline, that is, abandoning the employee's confidence in the precise and thingifying result of gadgets.

The technical reproducibility of the work of art does not condemn it (or the artistic and audiovisual process) to an inconsolable loss of a supposed paradise of authenticity, as long as we adopt a perspective mediated by diversity and biopolitical questioning, and as long as black boxes are opened for new moments or auratic powers (JANSEN, 2018) capable of contributing to democratization through the creativity of a player-artist who enters a game or video game as someone who takes real life seriously.

The approach between games and, in general, digital play life, art, narrative and a de-alienation of technology will never lose the auratic potential that emerges with each improvisation, each move, each representation or live performance, in which no database will abolish chance, freedom, imagination, criticism and creativity as exercises of the very playfulness taken seriously.

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