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Latin American MediaArt: political dimensions of the archive of the International Image Festival

1st Felipe César Londoño (Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano), Bogotá (Colombia), mail: felipe.londono@utadeo.edu.co, **2nd Raquel Caerols Mateo (UCM),** Madrid (España), mail: rcaerols@ucm.es

Abstract

Working to configure contemporary visualities as a way of understanding our realities must be done by paying attention to all of them, as they weave our view of the world. What has happened in the Latin American context in recent decades in the artistic practices of media art is central to all of this, and building archives with all that has been generated - since the archive is memory - is essential to break down the hegemonic discourses that shape an unbalanced and unsustainable world.

The present investigation gathers a synthetic retrospective of these realities and configuration of visualities and contributes the processes that have marked the creation of the archive of the Festival Internacional de la Imagen, the most relevant and traditional in Latin America, posing archival challenges of a visuality in conflict.

Keywords

International Image Festival, archive, visualities, technologies of resistance, counterculture.

Introduction

In a contemporary world where the audiovisual and digital languages underpin part of the central parameters that configure our visuality of the world around us, we cannot evade and not put our efforts, as an exercise in responsibility, into reconstructing, shaping, the story of what the practice of new media art has been and is being. In this sense, the creation of media art archives is a fundamental task, being the archives the guarantors of memory and, therefore, a central issue to understand our present and to have references on which to shape our future.

This research presents the first results and advances in the creation of the archive of the Festival Internacional de la Imagen, which it takes as a reference, being the Festival with the greatest tradition and international projection in Latin America.

To understand why, its context and the need for this work, we propose a journey through the practices of new media art in Latin America from its beginnings to our contemporaneity, basing it on the establishment of categories that attempt to reflect the various tensions of specific conditions of the digital in the context referred to, forming a conceptual and semantic map that defines its own identity and visuality and expanding the boundaries of hegemonic narratives.

It is precisely this journey that underpins the meaning and configuration, its foundations, of the archive of the International Image Festival, on which we will later focus on its construction processes, its phases, remains and difficulties, with the intention of making a contribution to the creation of new media art archives, on the need for preservation, accessibility and dissemination, and with this, on the intention and need to construct the narrative of new media, as a memory of the most recent and transgressive artistic practices.

Technologies of social and resistance

The contemporary condition of Latin American media art has profound implications that transcend the use of traditional "new media" in different countries. In the framework of state policies, the region has historically suffered from isolation in the development and inclusion of technologies because it is slow to adopt the systems imposed by corporations that view Latin American countries as community structures that are not very inclusive of technological advances.

A closer look, on the contrary, reveals an important capacity for technological innovation, for the adoption of technologies and for the organisation of information, in such a way that this has made it possible to constitute knowledge networks that have benefited local developments in Latin America for many decades. Proof of this is evident in the contributions to the history of cybernetics made by artists and researchers who have been extensively documented by Eden Medina, Susana Quintanilla, José Carlos Martiátegui, Pablo Colapinto and Andrés Burbano, who have delved into the work of Arturo Rosenblueth, Eduardo Bayro Corochano, Stafford Beer, Cesar Bolaños, among others. Pioneering topics related to *neuralcomputing*, robotics, digital illustration or computer music composition show the capacity that

Latin America has had for a long time to investigate, from critical perspectives, the possibilities that technologies have when applied to the economy, design, or social development.

Critical positions on technologies have been present since media consumption itself. For Guillermo Sunkel, in Latin America it is possible to identify two theoretical-methodological positions that will be visible and give centrality to the study of cultural consumption, which is necessarily linked to art and technological creation: the first "is the shift from the study of the message as an ideological structure to critical reception" (Sunkel 2006, 18)[1]. In this way, "critical reception becomes a kind of strategy of resistance to what is conceived as the powerful influence of television" (Sunkel 2006, 20)[2]. The second position is the one that goes from popular cultures to consumption and is the one that makes possible the "revalorisation of the capacity of popular subjects to construct meanings that are different from those proposed by hegemonic culture" (Sunkel 2006, 22)[3], thereby constructing new languages.

As a result of the above, the generation of countercultural artistic practices is a central aspect that characterises a large part of the works produced by Latin American artists. The systematic denial of local technological advances by those who carry out dominant external practices generates a reaction among artists that has led to the production of works that question and transgress technologies, giving the media meanings and senses different from those traditionally assigned to them. Specifically in practices that involve digital technologies, Alonso affirms that: "artists who work with technology in countries where it is not developed or where its diffusion or local penetration is difficult, unequal or problematic assume - albeit implicitly - a position with social, ethical and political edges"(Alonso 2008, 14)[4]. In this way, "any proposal of this type produced in the countries of the region implicitly carries the tensions between the imperative of technological expansion and the inescapable reality of regional, derivative and marginalised economies and cultures" (Alonso 2008, 15)[5].

The condition of media art in Latin America is reconfigured on the basis of the local and global specificities of each country, and the strategies of resistance that emerge from them, in open opposition to the control mechanisms of governments and institutions, to the strategies of accumulation of wealth for the benefit of corporations, and to globalised production systems that do not add value to the local economies in which they operate, but perpetuate the existing conditions of dependency (Wilson 1992, 137)[6]. It is not just a matter of identifying the specific reality of Latin America vis-à-vis tradition or modernity; as Mariátegui states, "new identities are not only generated by global or local resources but by complex articulations that occur within an unstable equilibrium in the form of different visions of the same discourse, from a local contact that mediates its relationship and response to the outside (which is not necessarily linked to "the global") (Mariátegui 2005, 67)[7].

Many of the artistic works that are part of the archives of the Festival Internacional de la Imagen, and that have participated in its different editions, respond to these reconfigurations: appropriation, hacking, multiplicity, transculturality, surveillance, hybridity, which account for the immense complexity of media art creation in the regional context. And in the face of this, the resistance for independent thought in which artists such as Juan Downey, Jaqueline Nova, Rolando Peña, Brian Mackern, Fran Ilich, Arcangel Constantini, Jorge La Ferla, Iván Marino, José Alejandro Restrepo, Luis Ospina, Gilles Charalambos, Juan Reyes, among many others, have been historically linked.

A categorisation of these artistic works would reflect the diverse tensions of specific conditions of the digital in the region, which can be synthesised in categories such as:

Machines as processes of social exchange. From the perspective of both machines and software programming, the artists propose approaches to low tech, marginality, or autonomous programming, in the search for an exchange of languages that enables new combinations of communication between human beings and machines, as proposed by Gerald Raunig. For him, in line with the thought of Marx, Deleuze and Guattari, the machine should not be seen as limited to its technical aspects but as a mechanical-intellectual-social assemblage that transcends the simplistic and optimistic celebration of a certain form of machine observed from futurism to cyber-fans (Rauning 2008)[8].

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[1] Sunkel, Guillermo, Sunkel, coord. *El consumo cultural en América Latina*. (Bogotá: Convenio Andrés Bello, 2006),18.

[2] Ibid, 20.

[3] Ibid, 22.

[4] Rodrigo Alonso, "Tácticas curatoriales para el arte tecnológico", in *Prácticas curatoriales para el arte tecnológico. Calibrando / Diseñando Contextos. Seminario Internacional*. (Buenos Aires: Espacio Fundación Telefónica, 2008),14.

[5] Ibid, pag. 15.

[6] P.A. Wilson, *Exports and Local Development: Mexico's New Maquiladoras*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1992), 137

[7] José-Carlos Mariátegui. "Media Art latinoamericano: creación local, articulación global". *Arkadin. Estudios sobre cine y artes audiovisuales*, accessed september 30, 2005, http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/bitstream/handle/10915/18507/Documento_completo.pdf?sequence=1, 67.

[8] Gerald Raunig. *Algunos fragmentos sobre las máquinas*, trad. Marcelo Expósito, (review for Joaquín Barriendos, from the English version of Aileen Derieg, 2008) in http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/raunig/es

Technologies as resistance. From the perspective of ethno-cultural diversity, Latin America has a broad spectrum of cultural manifestations, and multi-ethnicity and pluriculturalism are relevant features in many of the countries. Hernández and Calcagno state that, although the region has more than four hundred indigenous peoples and many of them constitute the majority group at the national level, most of them "suffer discrimination because of their ethno-cultural belonging and survive in conditions of marginality that offer deep contrasts between the modern world and the neglected areas of their settlement" (Hernández, Calcagno 2010, 114)[9].

Figure 1. The Circle of Fires, 1979. Two-channel color video installation, with sound, 10 min. ©Juan Downey Copyright[10].

Perceptual alterations of the audiovisual. Also, through audiovisual creation, technology becomes a weapon of power that vindicates urban landscapes and culture in general. Electronic creation in the hands of artists, whether or not they are media experts, becomes a tool for experimentation that is not limited to the reproduction of reality. From it, reality is modified to make visible phenomena that are not evident through conventional media. Thus, digital video takes advantage of the languages of electronics and telematics to expand its functionalities and meanings, providing new perspectives on the problems of contemporary society.

Political dimensions of visibility. Critical awareness of the use of technology involves understanding the tensions inherent in systems of digital representation, in order to recognise the use that power makes of them. This last category

refers to a political condition that dominates a large part of the interests of artists in the region: how to make complex processes visible, both from the perspective of hardware and software, as well as the social dynamics in which this technology is inserted.

In synthesis, a large part of the works that make up the archive of the Media Art Monographic Exhibitions link with the reality of the region from a critical perspective, and allow us to observe the contemporary dynamics of society, but also the historical reflection of culture, in a line that, as Rodrigo Alonso states, expands, multiplies and even "opens unprecedented semantic paths at the time of the appearance of the works with which it operates, in an intimate and interactive dialogue with them and their makers"[11].

The Media Art Monographic Exhibitions of the International Image Festival present a panorama which, of course, are not unique but diverse and hybrid through languages, colours and symbols that show different types of intercultural crossbreeding. The reflections on history, technologies, communities, and the political and social spaces that surround the everyday life of the countries, allow us to recognise the beginnings of an intercultural dialogue that is necessary to strengthen the development of a collective identity.

The Image Festival. Archival practices of a visuality in conflict: challenges and contributions.

It seems evident that the need to create an archive was unavoidable. At the end of 2023 we began the process in the context of an inter-university collaboration project between the Universidad de Caldas -where the Imagoteca of the International Image Festival is physically located-, the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

The aim of triangulating these teams was based on sharing experiences of archival practices already developed previously, and crossing perspectives that would enrich these practices.

One of the central concerns was the configuration of teams, in which the indispensable participation of the archivist was considered. The report developed in the chapter dedicated to "Archiving and Preservation" in the *White Paper on the interrelation between Art, Science, Technology and Society in Spain* (2023)[12], shows that one of the main problems in the

[9] Isabel Hernández y Silvia Calcagno. "Los pueblos indígenas y la sociedad de la información en América Latina y el Caribe: un marco para la acción". *Revista Argentina de Sociología*, accesed october 25, 2003, http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/etext/llilas/claspo/workingpapers/indigenas.pdf, 114.

[10] Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Guggenheim UBS MAP Purchase Fund, 2014, in https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/33093

[11] Rodrigo Alonso, "Tácticas curatoriales para el arte tecnológico", in *Prácticas curatoriales para el arte tecnológico. Calibrando / Diseñando Contextos. Seminario Internacional*,13.

[12] VVAA, "White Paper on the interrelation between Art, Science, Technology and Society in Spain (2023)" Madrid: FECYT, accessed october 28, 2023 https://www.fecyt.es/es/publicacion/libro-

attempt to create art and new media archives is the absence of the scientific-technical figure of the archivist, which generates multiple problems, from conceptual confusion between archive and repository, the non-use of metadata models that are not interoperable, to real problems of accessibility in the difficulty of locating the documentation.

The problem is even more pressing when archival science and its practices are in full conversion due to the needs and challenges of the digital context, transforming archival standards into a conceptual model: Records Contexts-Conceptual Model (RiC-CM)[13].

In this sense, archivists from the General Archive of the UCM, with long experience in archival practices and with previous experience in the creation of one of the most significant archives of new media art and transdisciplinary practices of art, science and technology, the MediaLab Madrid Archive, joined the team. The idea was to work together with archivists from the Latin American universities involved, to exchange practices and experiences, as well as with the director of the Festival Internacional de la Imagen and the head of the Imagoteca, who are central to the Festival because they are the ideators and have first-hand knowledge of the Festival.

From there, a multidisciplinary team of database designers (with an eye on AI) was set up, adding services for the recovery of works affected by obsolescence, with web designers, artists of new media art practices, as the main experts in the languages of generative, processual and interactive works typical of new media art, and experts in communication for their maximum dissemination.

After the inventory, digitalisation and cataloguing work, we moved on to the design of the database, which was undoubtedly conceived as a relational database, in which concepts, practices and methodologies had to be crossed and related, as we had to respond to one of the identifying aspects of these practices, multidisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. And on the other hand, one of the central tasks in the configuration of an archive and which also marked the design of the database, we are referring to the classification table, which represents the first major intellectual task in the creation of archives.

Respecting the natural order in which the documentation was generated in the activity of the International Image Festival itself, the classification chart was configured between the creator and director of the Festival and the archivists.

The intention in the creation of this classification chart was that its configuration should be based on the account of multidisciplinary as well as transdisciplinary practices, and to the concept itself, to the genesis of the Festival's own material and documentation, that is, to show what Alonso describes as "the tensions between the imperative of technological expression and the inescapable reality of regional, derivative and marginal economies and cultures" (Alonso, 2008: 14). This is an invaluable and major task in constructing concept, theory, narrative and visualities, opening up 'unprecedented semantic paths' (Alonso, 2008: 13).

To this was added the application of different layers of search, in relation to the possibilities of artificial intelligence, with the same relational intentionality and based on the aforementioned genesis of the material that makes up the archive.
The media art thesaurus was also applied, the first and only thesaurus of new media art that exists to date and which was created in the development of the VOREMTUR project.

The intention was also to use interoperable metadata models, such as Dublin Core, in order to be able to add it to other platforms and also form a specific platform for Ibero-American new media art, in this need for collective identity and to break, necessarily, the hegemonic discourses of visualities and, by extension, of an unbalanced and unsustainable world. In such a way that the present archive is already presented as a sample and an intention to be a model of good practice in the creation of art and new media archives in Latin American identities and visualities.

Likewise, different practices were developed regarding the challenges of obsolescence in the context of new media art practices, through simulation actions and the opportunities offered by a context that questions and transgresses technologies, due to the needs of a reality that is systematically denied local technological advances, "by those who carry out external dominant practices", as we have mentioned above. Finally, the project will be consolidated with dissemination work, through the creation of a catalogue and an exhibition proposal, in addition to all the dissemination channels of the network context.

Conclusions

The first results of this research and project have been intended as a contribution to the necessary creation of new media art archives, addressing the most pressing issues of preservation, conceptualisation, international archival

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[13] Records Contexts-Conceptual Model (RiC-CM) is a high-level conceptual model whose main objective is the identification and intellectual description of records, of the agents that create and use these records or are attested to by these records, and of the functions performed by these agents and facilitated or attested to by these records. RiC-CM is the second part of the Records in Contexts standard, which currently also includes an introduction (Records in Contexts-Introduction to Archival Description, RiC-IAD) and an ontology (Records in Contexts-Ontology, RiC-O). The latest version of RiC-CM is RiC-CM 0.2, which was released by EGAD in July 2021, with comments open until 31 January 2022. (https://www.ica.org/es/records-in-contexts-modelo-conceptual).

standards that guarantee interoperability, and thus accessibility and dissemination. In addition, and being fundamental in this work, it has been developed in the Latin American context, being the object of study, the International Image Festival, due to its relevance and tradition, covering not only the digital, but also the very transition from analogue to digital, providing a privileged view. Focusing on this specific

context is a central contribution to the shaping of our contemporary visualities, as well as trying to make a contribution, from culture and art, to the construction of a world that is necessarily more balanced and sustainable.

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