

Old New Technologies #1

Filipe Lopes
ESMAD-IPP, CIPEM/INET-md,
uniMAD
Porto Portugal
filipelopes@esmad.ipp.pt

ABSTRACT

Digital technologies are ubiquitous in modern life. They mediate many of our daily actions, particularly those involving other humans, providing us information of all sorts and connectiveness with almost anything. This condition, in addition to the rises of artificial intelligence, the internet of things and quantum computers, has prompted many important discussions about the way humans and machines interact and relate (or should relate to each other in the near future). Yet, a common feeling of something “human” being lost is felt by many people. What are we losing and what’s the responsibility of the digital technologies? It is not an easy answer. I believe that in the past decade, the transformation of our “feeling of passing time” is perhaps one of the most noticeable traces of how computers affect our daily life. *Old New Technologies #1* is an audiovisual installation proposing to merge old and new technologies to create a feeling of “slowing down the passage of time”. It does so by inviting individuals to pick up an old rotary telephone, to dial a number from a list and to listen and see an audiovisual postcard. Take your time, recover your time, feel your body. Enjoy. Breath.

KEYWORDS

Arts and Humanities; Time; Audiovisual

ACM Reference format:

Filipe Lopes. 2019. *Old New Technologies #1*. In *Proceedings of ARTECH 2019 9th International Conference on Digital and Interactive Arts (ARTECH 2019)*, October 23-25, 2019, Braga, Portugal. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 3 pages, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3359852.3359961>

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<https://doi.org/10.1145/3359852.3359961>

1 Context

Time is not absolute, as most people are aware. On the scale of the Universe, Einstein showed that time, like space, is relative. On the human scale, it seems to take more time to do something we don’t like while it seems that time flies when we are doing something we love. While a clock seems to give us a rational and linear measurement of passing time, that feeling continues to be a sequence of experiences, thus, felt differently among individuals. Time and the perception of time is a subject that has always fascinated philosophers, scientist, artists and mankind in general, probably because we feel it passing and yet it is so intangible. We use all sorts of ways to measure time (e.g. clocks, cyclical events, seasons, calendars) but its essence (e.g. why time passes? why is there time?) still remains unknown.

Although the feeling of passing time is subjective, I believe such feeling changed significantly in recent decades mostly because of the digital technologies that inhabit our daily life. Consider the following: just twenty-five years ago it was usual to hear something like “I’m going to the internet cafe”, thus, one would be connected to the internet. In those days, anyone could be plugged or unplugged but nowadays we’re always plugged. Digital technologies inhabit us and as Roy Ascott refers, a well-known researcher and artist working within the fields of cybernetics and telematics, such condition has changed our consciousness and the way one relates with the world. It is not just a matter of “information” but also a matter of embodiment and time.

Specifically related to a feeling of passing time, modern life demands fast actions, quick answers, rapid decisions and we have become used to that “quickness”. In fact, we actually demand it! We need fast internet connections to check transports schedules, ordering food, visualize online videos, access Wikipedia articles, download movies, check e-mail and many other things. There is a perception of information being everywhere all the time. The search for immediate gratification seems to be desired by many people and, somehow, computers and digital technologies deceive us in believing that such thing is achievable. One click away! We, mostly citizens in urban centers, live in a hurry which brings up the question of how digital technologies are shaping our sense of time. For example, there are reports concerning advertising strategies (e.g. hotels, flights) which deliberately generate the sense of the lack of time (e.g. only 3 rooms left at this incredible price..., we’ll hold this price for 10 minutes...) [1]. A great number

of jobs, such as my own (i.e. higher education professor), use and depend on internet idiosyncrasies such as e-mail, skype, platforms such as wetransfer or onedrive, github, youtube, facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, broadcasting services, doodle, academia, research gate, jstor...and force us to deal with them on a daily basis. The problem here is the following: The amount of demand is enormous compared to the time we need to process the information and reply on good terms. Learning and experiencing things takes time [2]. Dedyukhina [1] points to an interesting aspect about this: “our time perception was based on the human speed (...) now we are forced to function on a tech speed, which contradicts our human rhythms”. Helga Nowotny [3] also argues that the proper time of the individual is at conflict with synchronized time of the society. The result of this is that individual free time has almost become a “luxury”. Overall, the way many technological developments have been used (e.g. ads, apps, uber, social platforms, online courses, online help...), has led to a generalized feeling of simultaneity which is traduced in a feeling of competing with the world at once [4].

In recent years, however, there has been an increasing awareness within our society about these issues, particularly concerning stress, manifested in many curious books and activities [5,6]. This is easily showed looking at the references used in this paper (i.e. newspapers). Some examples include the culture of the slow movement [7], mindfulness communities [8], book on “digital diets” and even some things like places with no internet connection becoming a touristic destination [9]!

1.1 Old New Technologies

To create art (e.g. music) in stressful time conditions is almost a process of resistance since it takes time to think, time to do experiments, time to appreciate, time to contemplate, time to read and research, time to listen, time to learn, among others. Real art cannot be learned in two days. There are no “Making Art for Dummies” or “Learn to Make Art in Two Days”. That’s just deceiving ourselves. How to deal with our human rhythm and make use of digital and interactive technologies to regain a “rhythmic human” sense of time? *Old New Technologies* are a series of audiovisual interactive works to explore ways to merge recent digital technologies with old analog technologies. My objective is to create phenomenological experiences about time and, in addition, use new technologies to slow down the feeling of passing time, as opposed to the standard situation: quickly get and send information. Lastly but quite important, these series of works are not a declaration against new technologies and computers, nor does it propose specific “slowing down” activities/recipes. My aim is to reconcile the available technologies and their artistic potential with our “human and natural” rhythmic feeling of passing time.

1.1.1 Old New Technologies #1. This installation considers old and new technologies (e.g. postcards, rotary telephone, Arduino, computers, relay, video-projector) as mediums to experience our mind-body, thus, our time. It does so by offering five audiovisual postcards to be seen and listen through and old telephone. This installation, however, lives with a paradox: In this paper I have

been complaining against our “daily quickness” but each audiovisual postcard is a small film that lasts no less than thirty seconds and no more than two minutes! How to deal with that? The issue here is not so much the time duration *per se* but the rhythmic individual feeling that is originated from a specific experience. Some things make one feel anxious and some others promotes calmness. This work promotes one to contemplate time (at least that’s my aim!). The designation “postcard” that I give, thus, relates to this small time duration as opposed to a film (i.e. usually longer durations, audience is seated, long narratives, sound played by loudspeakers, among other). The typical situation for someone who wants to experience this installation is the following: 1) enter a darkish and silent room 2) observe the big video projection and an old telephone 3) go to the telephone and pick it up 4) notice the telephone numbers displayed on the video projection to be dialed 5) dial one of the numbers 6) experience the audiovisual postcard 7) when the audiovisual postcard gets to the end, dial a new number or put the telephone down 8) sit down somewhere in the room or go away. Lastly, I have commissioned the films to photographers and video artists, but the sound/music is composed by myself.

2 Technical info

In this section I will present the technical, logistic and equipment requirements that the conference/production should provide:

- a) This installation needs a big projection surface and a video projector to handle such surface. My aim is to have a disproportion between the person at the telephone and the video projection. The image size should be overwhelming for the person holding the telephone and deliberately showed to everybody in the room, while the sound is intended to be intimate (i.e. heard only by the individual holding the telephone). (see Figure 1). Aspect Ratio is 16:9;
- b) The video projector can be hdmi or vga; The placement of the video-projector can be discussed with the production team. Resolution needed for the video-projector: 1920px x 1080 px (Full HD);
- c) Ideally this installation should be placed in a silent space, preferably in low light conditions. The telephone will be placed in a stand, centered in relation to the video projection, and the person experiencing it will be standing. It is desirable to have simple benches/couches for other people wanting to see the visual postcards or simply to wait for their turn to use the telephone;
- d) Electricity is needed to power the computer and a cable to connect the computer to the video-projector should reach the telephone stand;

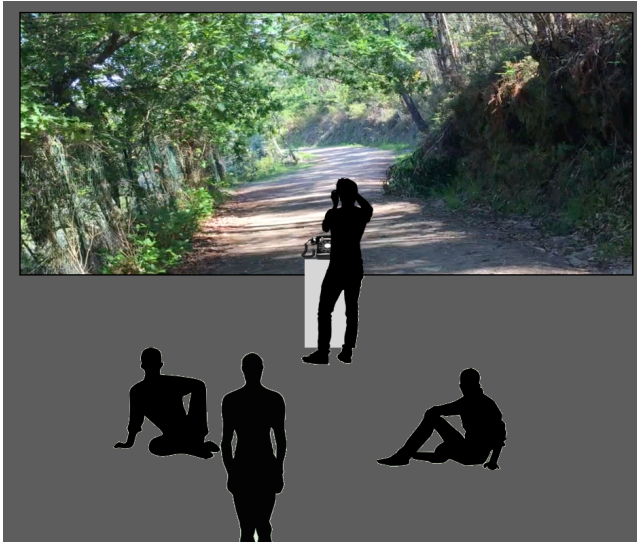


Figure 1: Space typology for the installation

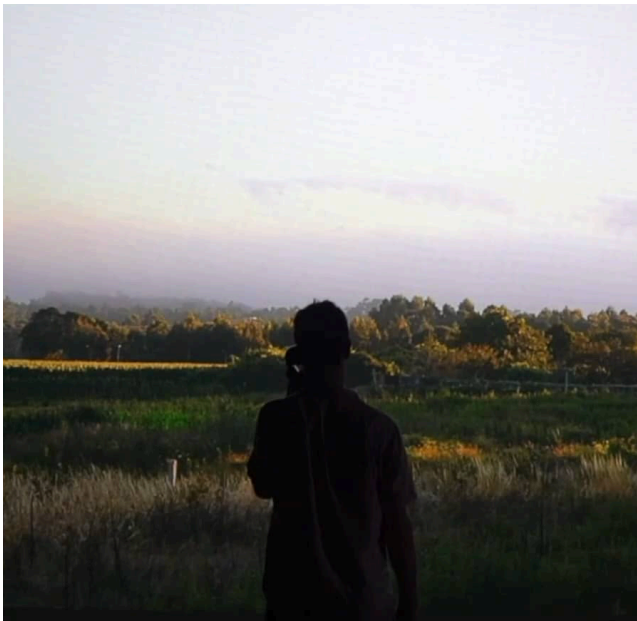


Figure 2: Demo



Figure 3: Dialing a number for an audiovisual postcard

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following people: CIPEM-Inet/md, Francisca Soares, Pedro Afonso, João Leal, Rosana Soares, Mariana Barros, Escola Superior de Media Artes e Design do Instituto Politécnico do Porto e Licínio Macedo.

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