

Reynaldo Thompson, Tirtha Mukhopadhyay \*

# Ritual Humanity at the Intersections of Art and Technology Accounts of the Past and the Future

\*

**Reynaldo Thompson** studied architecture at the University of Guanajuato and postgraduate studies at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia in Barcelona and the University of Texas at Dallas, the latter being where he obtained a doctorate in aesthetics studies focused on Contemporary Art. He has participated in collective and solo exhibitions and curated shows in Mexico and abroad. He is currently focused on researching on art, science and technology in Latin America. His research results have been published in domestic and foreign journals. He is a member of the National System of Researchers of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONAHCYT).  
<thompson@ugto.mx>  
ORCID: 0000-0002-9334-1924

**Tirtha Mukhopadhyay** is PhD and Professor of Art and Aesthetics at Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico. He is multi-disciplinary scholar who taught at Presidency University of In-

**Abstract** In this paper, we shall refer to approaching digital art with a sense of critical reflection now that AI gains momentum and comes to its point of an almost overwhelming no-return. The Technosphere, which is already confronted by discriminatory access because of distinctive ecologies of industrial production and consumption, is defined by this always one-sided inclination and the anxieties thereof. The lack of access or deprivation of technological instruments may create absolute separation of cultural blocks and differences in people's self-esteem within a connected world. Ritualized emotive behaviors lie at the root of allegiances and culturally sensitive performances. This passionate reflex towards the living continuum of history has been fed into AI channels – that is how the glory of digital practices are defined in underprivileged economies. A good example is the basic sensor actuated installations of Fernando Palma. Once again, we refer to a specific project from Mexico, and bear in mind projects on Indigenous electroacoustics.

**Keywords** Art, Creole, Mexico, Technology.

dia (1996-2000), University of Calcutta (2000 -2016), before migrating to Mexico. He was Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Fellow at the University of California, Santa Cruz, USA. His publications include books like such as *Affective States in Art* (Proquest-UMI), *Cezanne to Picasso* (Calcutta University Press, India) and more than 50 articles on creativity, cognition and aesthetics, digital art, visual anthropology and literature, that were published by reputed publishers such as OUP, IOS Press, MIT and Atelier-Etno.  
 <tirtha@ugto.mx>  
 ORCID: 0000-0002-2707-390X

### **Humanidad ritual en las intersecciones del arte y la tecnología: cuentas del pasado y del futuro**

**Resumen** *En este artículo, abordamos el arte digital con un sentido de reflexión crítica ahora que la IA gana impulso y llega a su punto casi abrumador de no retorno. La tecnósfera, que ya se enfrenta a un acceso discriminatorio debido a las ecologías distintivas de la producción y el consumo industriales, se define por esta inclinación siempre unilateral y las ansiedades correspondientes, por lo que La falta de acceso o privación de instrumentos tecnológicos puede crear una separación absoluta de bloques culturales y diferencias en la autoestima de las personas dentro de un mundo conectado. De ahí que los comportamientos emocionales ritualizados se encuentren en la raíz de las lealtades y las actuaciones culturalmente sensibles. Este reflejo apasionado hacia el continuo vivo de la historia se ha alimentado en los canales de IA: así es como se define la gloria de las prácticas digitales en las economías desfavorecidas. Un buen ejemplo son las instalaciones rudimentarias accionadas por sensores de Fernando Palma. Una vez más, nos referimos a un proyecto específico de México, teniendo en cuenta proyectos sobre electroacústica indígena.*

**Palabras clave** *Arte, Criollo, México, Tecnología.*

### **Humanidade ritual nas interseções de arte e tecnologia: relatos do passado e do futuro**

**Resumo** *Neste artigo, abordamos a arte digital com um senso de reflexão crítica à medida que a IA ganha impulso e atinge seu quase esmagador ponto sem retorno. Já enfrentando acesso discriminatório devido a ecologias distintas de produção e consumo industrial, a tecnosfera é definida por essa inclinação sempre unilateral e ansiedades correspondentes, então a falta de acesso ou privação de ferramentas tecnológicas pode criar uma separação absoluta de bloqueios e diferenças culturais no auto-estima das pessoas dentro de um mundo conectado. Portanto, comportamentos emocionais ritualizados estão na raiz de lealdades e performances culturalmente sensíveis. Essa reflexão apaixonada em relação ao continuum vivo da história foi alimentada nos canais de IA: é assim que você define a glória das práticas digitais em economias desfavorecidas. Um bom exemplo são as rudimentares instalações operadas por sensores de Fernando Palma. Mais uma vez, nos referimos a um projeto específico no México, levando em consideração projetos de eletroacústica indígena.*

**Palavras-chave** *Arte, Crioulo, México, Tecnologia*

## Introduction

This particular paper on *Design, Art & Technology* give us a certain self-sufficing opportunity to present our dedicated investigations on Latin American and other regional non-Anglophone digital arts and media practices in the last almost 60 -70 years of history - a consistent project that we built up by ourselves, on the historical and philosophical foundations of what could offer insights and tools for a hermeneutics of Digital Art in this other hemisphere.

The otherness of this project is not a projection of the “other” through a centric view of the history and development of Digital Art in the world. All our efforts, as critics and admirers of the achievement of artists in non-English speaking, creolized cultures, as well as the Ibero-American world has only yielded a sense of confidence, and fealty to the ideals of technological media, its necessity, its presence and the transformative expressions that are possible, yet visualized as it were, from the regional axis - not just a multicultural hermeneutics -since multiculturalism itself is another Eurocentric, and probably, power assuaging terminology for the discourse. Instead, what we try to represent in this regional and creolized version of technological culture is to hold on to the essence of those cultures that are represented through the art.

The construction of a historiographical method for the interpretation of the new media art in Latin America, Asia, Africa or East Europe -in whatever dimensions and scales of achievement - that they have been now seen, appreciated and recognized - depends exactly on the commitment to the absence of commitment in venues which tend to absorb and appropriate the struggle and achievements of artists in the more dominant and hegemonically invasive forms of cultural depredation that offsets the balance of the world.

## Creole culture

The first thing that we wish to. Remind ourselves of - in this quest for a deeply regional, if creole reach out for the voice of the media arts is definition of the creole as a cultural concept. Before embarking on the idea of the cultural creole - we shall - for a moment refer to a fortuitous matter that now coincides with this even - the 4<sup>o</sup> Simpósio de Design, Arte e Tecnologia (4\_DAT). It is precisely when we are trying to consolidate our research of at least eight years of the politico-epistemological views of Digital Media and art in this other world - just, that is when we are trying to consolidate the findings of a part of a generation - and of events in the techno cultural history - that it now tends to coincide with today’s symposium.

We started with the idea to include some of the pioneers in Art, Science and Technology in Latin America and specially focused on Manuel Felguerez whom we interviewed in his house and studio in Mexico City

back in June of 2016. Loraine Pinto in November, 2022 and Andrea di Castro in June of 2016 as well.

This brief introductory talk -or better said - a summary or concluding remark on this research on sixty years of media history. This round-table session gives us a scope of this long research -the compilation of data, the attempts to suggest an archive for Latin American Digital Art, the attempt to identify pioneers of Digital Art, the recognition and treatment of the theme of the digital breach, poverty and technology, the consciousness of civilian art as opposed to the art of spectacle and false prestige, ritual art, the algorithm of popular belief configurations and templates are part of the discovery that we made in this journey for the other world. We do not wish to call it the art of the Third World -we do not wish to call it globalization. Like any other regionally expanding form, like the languages of the regions -it has a creolized component, a creolized consciousness. Linguistically a creole is a form of a native or indigenous linguistic vocalization which however uses the morphological units of a foreign language. The creole is not just typical of the Caribe and tropical American populations - the creole is also visible in the Chinese pidgin, the South Asian English, and Southeast Asian linguistic templates of their - if not vernacular but local expressions of foreign phonetic elements. This provides a very interesting parallel for the creolization of regional cultural expressions through global technological media. Hence, both local color and technological access exists through the same space of being -the same consciousness of being rooted as well as exposed, anchored and about to sail out into the world the bark of arts, as artistic pursuits have evolved in the secular contexts of human culture.

Here we shall refer briefly to this process of creolized ratification in the contemporary world- the emergence of regional, even indigenous art forms of a pre-Columbian past - or a reiki like Asian consciousness of the vibrant emptiness. Of notes -as in neural impulse art works developed in Korea, in a complete transformation of proto-Asian Buddhist or Confucian elements, The paradigm of a creolizing regional media- like the algorithmic templates developed in India or the art of native mythology as is represented through Arduino and simple circuits by Fernando Palma, in Mexico. Palma created the first shamanic digital art in a direct reference to the intervention of mystical spiritual manifests or possibilities in the receptor mechanism of the electronic chip. During the interview of Fernando Palma he revealed to us some important aspects not only of his creative process but more interestingly, the concepts and believes behind his work. In the interview he mentions:

A French curator wants to work with me, he works for the ZKM in Germany, because he thinks my work goes well with the theme of an exhibition he is preparing. The director told the curator that he doesn't like my work and the curator asks him why and he replies that he doesn't find my work scientific enough. To which the curator replies that my

work has a spiritual aspect to it and he replies that he is not looking for the spiritual but the agnostic. I mention this because it is an argument I am familiar with. My work is not interested in a phenomenon per se or exploring, trying to find the end of that strand, it is a more immediate need because what I mean is to relate it to what is happening, if the indigenous communities do not have a voice, it is stifled and growing because it is happening in the rest of the continent and on the planet and for reasons that little by little tend to be clearer, that relationship that some call spiritual although it is actually a pragmatic relationship with a discourse of knowledge around and from there comes an association with what we know today as environmentalism, because environmentalists in my opinion are urban people who suddenly react to these circumstances and find that there is already a vocabulary to talk about these things but it has always been ignored and now they talk about indigenous activists killed on a hill, in a river, etcetera, but it is not a new event, it is 500 years old, what happens is that today they can pigeonhole it in an environmental movement and they call them activists. And then in the same way in art something similar happens,[...]<sup>1</sup>

Cultural creolization represents a moment of anthropocenic importance in human culture, as it offers a new functional tool in human cognitive history. McLuhan's emphasis on digital innovation reveals a radically different epistemological knowledge structure in the world due to our abilities of coding and interfacing. Like the invention of writing scripts, or the printing press, computational memory and retrieval expanded the reach of communications in an exponential way. Our valuable take from McLuhan is that the human being is more of a *homo codices*. However, coding is also moderated by collective allegiances. Texts, scripts, codes, hardware, and clouds are like extended libraries of information for the same behavioral swarm of real life and history. We can accordingly retrieve some words of the artists Malitzin Cortes who's interest had focused on the use of code, immersive experience and one of the common subjects that we find as a guiding concern in most of the Mexican artists such as environmental concerns. Cortes explains:

I just think I always had a passion for technology, I had this great change of having internet and cell phone in your house, I remember that the first time my dad brought a computer to my house I owned it, I almost didn't let anyone use it. It was in my room and every time someone wanted to do something, I would say "let me help you, what do you want to look for" because I remember that at that time even looking for something on Google was difficult because that technology was not as well-oiled as today that almost reads your thoughts, back then you were looking for something and you had to discard a lot of options. My love for computers was always very present, [...]<sup>2</sup>

The artist continues with the description of her project *Equinopsis* (2022):

I noticed that there are almost no filters for activism, to send any message, so I started to investigate “could it be that Facebook does not allow it?” and it really is not that it does not allow it, but rather that until now it was not being seen as a tool for protest. The most I found was a girl who started to make some very simple filters, which that one is another advantage, it’s very easy for anyone to make their filter if they know Photoshop and they enter these platforms that are free. Also, it was for the LGBTQ+ community and you could have different genders, decide if you are her, if you are elle, if you are him, if you don’t identify with any of them. I found it very interesting because I had already been researching about data visualization and fast fashion. This was an approach from the university because I teach data visualization classes at Centro<sup>3</sup> I teach data visualization classes and sometimes I teach people in the fashion career. All the time we were discussing a lot the big problem, because it is a big problem that we are not aware of how strong it is.

So I said “I want to do a piece of fashion data visualization, leaving a little bit of these formats that I was already investigating”, of the graphics or putting it in sound, I wanted to do something that was more immediate when you pick up your phone and that you would not see it as something instructive, because people are shocked that you are telling them “Hey, you have to be more responsible” and that’s not the end either. In this piece I came up with a virtual fashion campaign that when you put on the filter, in addition to the fact that you can model virtual clothes or make-up, you see data about this phenomenon. Its second layer was “I’m going to do this conversion of how many people wore this virtual clothing and how many real T-shirts it would equate to.” It was all data processing, but the truth is that the piece has given me a lot more findings than I thought it would, because I also realized that it’s not really going to replace the clothes that we usually wear but it can come to impact certain dynamics that are very toxic. I found out there a statistic that 25% of digital creators or influencers and people who are mostly on Instagram or doing Facebook live and all that, buy a garment just for a post, this is an excessive consumerist behavior. There are several like virtual fashion campaigns under the premise of “If you’re only going to wear the garment once, why not wear one that’s virtual?”. A virtual blouse that has 4 or 5 colors, 20 textures and every time you come up with new content, because it is also this desire for novelty all the time, if that is your desire, I design you a filter that will give you 20 different looks and you will not have to buy 20 things that you are not going to wear again.<sup>4</sup>



No society has managed to resolve tensions between hierarchical groups with any amount of technological intervention. Fault lines form, solidify, and divide nation states from within. The horizontal cartography of political maps is undermined by vertical ecologies of indigeneity and colonial identity, poor and rich, working-class, and low middle-income class economy and privileged economic exclusion, gender, race, immigrant, and settler economies. The same divides are reinscribed on the map by digital literacy, yet the availability of technology and its cultural uses is no longer limited to certain economic states. Palma's art is a great example of that dehierarchizing creative life of technologically media art in the world – that needs to be recognized and valorized for the modern world. This is the end to which our research has been oriented. We shall soon publish our scattered and floating observations on this process of technologically empowered regional flavor and color of art, the uniquely identity art of ancient peoples in the world of vanishing Instagram you never tested– as a true test and pillar of survival, valorization and formation of a new media heritage.

One of the first artworks that or rather one of the first critical pieces on regional new media art that we published was an essay on the hybridized electronic artworks of Gilberto Esparza new Mexican new media artist the article published on the MIT platform Leonardo not only generated interest and citation but more interestingly the very fact that the genius of a new media artist was recognized in a fundamentally anglophone culture of new media arts and technologies was ample evidence of the resilience and the glory of the more peripheral expressions the 2014 essay on Gilberto Esparza fantastic autonomous auto regulatory *Plantas Nómadas*, gave us the momentum of not just recognizing but also celebrating some of the pioneering computer arts of artists from Mexico. The same emphasis animates the critical vision of the kind of art that was generated by other artists from this region of Latin America and was also manifest in our passionate essay on the contribution of Rodrigo Derteano the Peruvian artist who left robotic car to navigate the great Nazca desert and invoked the entire process of the formation of those territorial landscape inscriptions of the Nazca cultures. It was an electronic reconfiguration of a very ancient and self-identifying cultural process. Since then we have conjointly not only ventured out to identify these regional expressions of new media art but also identify artists and artworks in order to write extensively on their work there was a boat vertical chronological diachronic axis to the kind of research and compilation of data that we engaged in as well as a horizontal comprehensive extensive view of very unique variations of new media art in alternative cultural scenarios we hope to collect all the records the records and recalcitrant elements of our research into one thematic book on these creolized entities with their typical regional inscriptions.

Even as we acknowledge the presence, and multifunctional emerges of the new media arts, beyond the spectrum of arts, towards more and more commercial application in fields that dot and punctuate our consumer cul-

ture – we could continue, as within this consensual critical academy to search for answers for the future- in a world which will be largely addressed by machine learning parameters. One of the ways in which some engineers are pooling creative talent is to write programs and develop algorithms, not just for the new world but also what is in the past, and what continues to determine our lives and beliefs into the future. We may suggest correctively, in this context, that the humane factor shall never cease to influence technology -and that this recognition is central to the newer configurations and arts that will be developed in the future. The more technologically consumerist societies have perhaps lost this race -and it behooves the societies of lesser resources and lesser consumerism to search adequate answers for the arts and technology, and the intersections which make this interface valuable for us.

## Notes

1. Interviewed by Tirtha Mukhopadhyay and Reynaldo Thompson at Calpulli Tecalco in Milpa Alta, Mexico on January 06, 2019. The whole interview will be publish in a book during the coming months.
2. Interview conducted by Reynaldo Thompson on October 5, 2022 at his home in Mexico City. Here you can find additional information about her *Equinopsis* project <https://www.equinopsis.xyz/>
3. Cortes refers to the private institution called Universidad Centro where she teaches.
4. Ibid.

## References

GUERRERO, M. **Fernando Palma Rodríguez: In Ixtli in Yollotl.** (interview) 2018. (<https://revistacodigo.com/entrevista-con-fernando-palma-2/>).

THOMPSON, R.; MUKHOPADHYAY, T. Art on the Divide Line: Experiments in Art and Technology in India and Latin America. *DAT Journal*, [S. l.], v. 7, n. 1, p. 89–101, 2022. DOI: 10.29147/datjournal.v7i1.574.

THOMPSON, R.; MUKHOPADHYAY, T. Can MachinesDo Art? Non human interventions in art and fashion. *DAT Journal*, [S. l.], v. 6, n. 1, p. 19–27, 2021. DOI: 10.29147/dat.v6i1.317.

THOMPSON, R.; MUKHOPADHYAY, T. Project Sideral and the Music of Cosmic Animism. *DAT Journal*, [S. l.], v. 5, n. 1, p. 88–98, 2020. DOI: 10.29147/dat.v5i1.172.

**Recebido:** 01 de julho de 2023.

**Aprovado:** 16 de agosto de 2023.