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In order to explain why the art of the media weighs so heavily in the field of contemporary art, a considerable number of reasons of a most varying nature would certainly need to be examined. Nevertheless, this is not a futile attempt. Much less if we take into account that this has to do with the profound contemporary changes in the practice, distribution and consumption of art. Nevertheless, rather than making an inventory of those reasons, here we are interested in considering how some of them, perhaps the fundamental ones, meet.

The crisis undergone by the idea of art as a self-absorbed language -centered on the investigation of its "pure", that is, formal elements, which culminated with the expansion of abstractionism-, becomes visible in the nineteen-sixties, overturning the long hegemony held by the pictorial paradigm. Among one of the things that contributed decisively to the proliferation of new ways of building artistic experience was the following: a technographic medium, a century-old, such as photography which had not achieved canonical status despite its constant insistence on producing art and its relative inclusion in the modernist aesthetic territory, as well as the then emerging video medium.

Seen from a historical perspective, the nineteen-sixties and seventies represent the moment in which Western art definitely questions its age-old hold on the notions of style and mŽtier. It was reduced to a kind of specialized and refined craft-like practice even on an individual level and, thus, a generator of sumptuary artifacts. The problem at that time, rather than linking art with life - which was, after all, an avant-garde aspiration which has its two main motors in Bauhaus and Russian productivism and its ripest expression in the development of modern design -, was to investigate the relationship between the two.

In certain circumstances in which technographic media had reached a decisive position in constituting the experience of contemporary man through visual images; in which that specific experience had become at the same time a fundamental part of man's relation with the world, the practice of visual arts turned towards, with unprecedented attention, the exploration of these media. On the one hand, this represented challenging the up to then predominant hierarchies in the field of art. It was a way of placing oneself on the margins of institutional life and its historical preferences; on the other hand, by dealing directly with technological images it offered boundless possibilities of taking on new cultural challenges from art's standpoint: that is, locating modern culture and its legitimating discourse.

Photography and video would henceforth become media used increasingly in artistic practice; to which in the last decade heterogeneous procedures and digital mediums would be added, all of them linked in some way to cinema and television. Consequently, the leading role that the media hold in the field of contemporary art is a sign of the change of episteme undergone by modern culture, among whose multiple traits the following are found: the exchange carried out between the culture industry and high art; the depreciation of the unique and unprecedented nature of a work of art -due not only to its technical reproductivity, as Benjamin would say, but also to its possible technical nature- and the reduction of the aura to a temporary and spectacular characteristic of the work of art in the context of the exhibition.

Crossing Millenium - The Art of the Media - Part II

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