

Introduction: habit, crisis and new media

MADALENA MIRANDA

Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciências
Sociais e Humanas
Instituto de Comunicação da NOVA — ICNOVA
madalenamiranda@fcs.unl.pt

ILO ALEXANDRE

Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Faculdade de Ciências
Sociais e Humanas
Instituto de Comunicação da NOVA — ICNOVA
iloaguiar@fcs.unl.pt

Four billion and eighty-eight million people accessed the Internet in October 2021, which represents 61.7% of the world's population (Kemp 2021). Likewise, in this second year of the Covid-19 pandemic, social networks grew by almost 10% compared to 2020, reaching 4.55 billion users (Kemp 2021). On their mobile phones, these users practice a sort of palimpsest 2.0: they produce and consume continuously and uninterruptedly—while always leaving a trail.

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, in *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016), argues that our media become more important when they appear to be of no importance—when they move from the “new” to the “habitual”. Technologies such as smartphones are no longer surprising to us, they have been absorbed into our lives in such a way that “users become their machines: they stream, update, capture, upload, share, grind, link, verify, map, save, trash, and troll. Repetition breeds expertise, even as it breeds boredom” (Chun 2016, 1).

Repetition plays a fundamental role in information, allowing communication to take place. “Man the food-gatherer reappears incongruously as information-gatherer. In this role, electronic man is no less a nomad than his paleolithic ancestors” (McLuhan 1967, 309). However, the constant updates prevent the habit from installing completely. For Chun, we go through continual crises because the neoliberal society we live in

encourages us to change our habits, rather than society or institutions. Defended by the economist Milton Friedman, the proliferation of crises seems to aim to change so that everything remains the same. As Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa wrote in *The Leopard*: “If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change” (2015, 31).

Chun interprets the incorporation of social networks in our habits as a defining concept of the present. On one hand “networks have been central to the emergence, management, and imaginary of neoliberalism” (2016, 16) and its dominance a structural power over the social bond.

On the other, *habitus* is placed as a central social concept, from Aristotelian *hexis* to Pierre Bourdieu theories of practice (1972), where the collective and the material conditions are crucial to the social replication. This notion places *habitus* as a practice of inculcation in the material structures of the social, foreshadowing its implications under the influence and complexity of media in our lives, present today as omnipresent as almost involuntary. Nowadays the social bond, exposed to the global stress of a pandemic moment, unarguably is crossed by the deep structures of digital mediation, declined in different layers and perspectives. On one hand the biopolitics of a global pandemic monitoring, but also the transformation of the social activities into complete mediated experiences such as work, schooling, public administration, health care, and leisure. “Habit, with all its contradictions, is central to grasping the paradoxes of new media: its enduring ephemerality, its visible invisibility, its exposing empowerment, its networked individuation, and its obsolescent ubiquity” (Chun 2016, 15).

The social interface is a digital media interface. Digital objects became central to societal functioning. Computers, tablets, mobile phones, as material McLuhanian extensions, became a more rooted reality, from childhood to elder communities. From the perspective of the practices, digital communication habits became the rule: school classes, from early ages to teenagers and higher education, work meetings, public services, e-shops, assistance services, academic seminars quickly were reshaped by the hybridity, the plasticity, and the modularity digital media communication can offer. And with it, social platforms have been installed in our lives. An Internet universal service, as a common good being discussed in the political sphere.

The persistence of new media communication installed as part of a habit, no longer new, but rather presented to the social functioning as irrevocable. But as Pedro Miguel Frade in *As Figuras do Espanto* (1992) reminds us, in a moment when photography was still a technology that caused strangeness, where thinking “the modernity of the gaze” was also a “continuous and cumulative effect” (1992, 7) of what tends to remain obscure. Cultural technologies can be paradoxically surprising when viewed from the perspective of novelty or persistence.

From the perspective of novelty and to paraphrase Simondon (2012), we can affirm that we are living in times of an amplitude of *social tecnicities* where the openness of technological structures converge with the openness of social relations, under extreme

conditions. Both apparatus intertwined with the economic, political, and ecological realms, where power structures design common life interaction and digital subjects interaction through their digital objects (Fuchs 2019).

The collective awareness of the political uses of new “habitual” technologies precipitated the first digital social movements of the 21st century ten years ago. Smartphones, “internet cafes” connected with digital social networks spread tweets, images, and videos on YouTube, based on participatory structures, making them political and destabilizing a global order with their protests. These movements surprised and liberated digital practices that punctuated a moment in recent digitally mediated History. Since then, paradoxical digital lives have evolved and “habitual new media” complexified.

As leisure or as a renewal of contemporary institutional structures, as Foucaultian regimes were reloaded by those landscapes of control (Deleuze 1992), where “attention economy” and habitual new media embody the metaphor of the serpent sustained by the unperceivable acts of our involuntary existences.

With the pandemic moment, contemporary modes of existence have raised such mediations as globally evident. The weaknesses exposed in real and organic life now appear to be mediated in the coexistence, but also in communication and even in the hypothesis of contact, through digital existence and technological mediation of habitual new media. In the context of the pandemic, “life on screen” becomes the canon of contemporary existence. Contemporary social tessiture is compound within the hybridity of this habitual connectedness through autonomous interaction zones of digital interfaces with each intimate space.

People exposing their vulnerabilities and intimacy in a public way on social media is one of Natalie Bookchin’s distinguished themes. As Wendy Chun’s artistic reference in *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016), the body of work of this artist frames and foresees the critical exposure of the collective chorus to new media visual platforms. With a generous interview under this subject, Natalie Bookchin shares her thoughts and concerns on formal practices of social and mediated experience, with a gleaning methodology from online visual fragments organized in operatic films as *Laid Off* (2009)¹ to the destiny and significance of physical barriers on her new ongoing project.

The articles and visual essay in this issue cover a wide range of topics ranging from online activism to the consumption of online streaming, the resignification of digital formats to the impact of lockdown on workers. What permeates all articles and visual essay is the central role of new media. Indirectly, crisis is also present in many of the works. Change and repetition. Kaleidoscopic responses organize this edition, reminding us of the constant reflection on media structures emerging from the tension of habit and obsolescence, newness and permanence.

¹ *Laid off* is available at <https://vimeo.com/19364123> Accessed on November 28, 2021.

A format created to support low-resolution images in the early days of the Internet, the GIF gained a new status when it began to be used to generate small animations. The narrative and visual potential of the endless and ephemeral looping of the animated GIF is the theme of Assunção Gonçalves's article: "Animated GIF circular narratives: the visibility of the invisible".

Ricardo Zocca and Moisés Martins investigate in "Sdubid, the portrait of the actuality: art analysis of Tommy Cash", the dualities and contradictions present in the music video of the Estonian artist Tommy Cash, someone that embodies in his visual works an uncanny "cinema of attractions reloaded" (Strauven 2006) in Youtube landscapes. For the authors, the misery and dissatisfaction in the song video represent the *Zeitgeist* or the spirit of the times.

During the lockdown imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a rise in the consumption of online streaming services in Portugal. In the article "Homo Streamius Lusitanus: a brief analysis on the recent behaviour of the Portuguese spectator in streaming and video-on-demand services", António Sanganha examines subscription data from national and international streaming services before and after the first lockdown in Portugal in 2020 and contrasts it with box office revenues in the country.

The "Arab Springs", the 15-M (*Indignados* movement), Occupy movements in the United States, and the Movement 12 of March (M12M) in Portugal (Castells 2015) were movements that started online or relied heavily on social media to disseminate information and gather support. But all had a large component of demonstration in the streets. In "WhatsApp and Autonomy Space: a digital ethnography on the mobilization of an activist group linked to the Movimento Brasil Livre and the Anti-Privilege Cause", Geraldo Bittencourt and Jorge Martins Rosa describe how activist groups used instant messaging services, reactivating technological affordances and agency, to organize themselves and to pursue social demands putting pressure on Brazilian congressmen.

In recent years we have seen the rise of polarized political positions as far-right cults. From local phenomenons to global platforms these groups have gained many supporters around the world, morphing media habits to their purposes. Political conspiracy theories seconded by growing antiscience movements, during pandemics reveal critical moments. In "The Predictable Universe: on the Law of Attraction and new media", Carolina Ferreira Baptista debates the Law of Attraction, regarding it as a discourse and operative mechanism to question this present.

During the first lockdown in Brazil, directors of advertising agencies stated in a news piece that their companies were prepared for remote work, there was no drop in productivity and their clients would not be affected. Missing the voice of the workers of ad agencies, Lucas Schuch and Juliana Petermann conducted a survey of people who are not in leadership positions in advertising agencies. The results are in the article "Work from home in the Brazilian advertising industry", questioning the institutionalization of remote work.

“All human activity is subject to habitualization [...] the more important part of the habitualization of human activity is coextensive with the latter’s institutionalization” (Berger and Luckmann 1967, 70-72). Representing a dollhouse as a research tool, interface, and stage, Antonia Hernández employs repetitions actions to explore the uses of a webcam in a sex website. Through humour, criticism, and habit, the visual essay “Maintenance pornography” inquires social reproduction of intimacy invasive habits in the platform economy.

In the section dedicated to reviews, two books published in 2021 bring pressing themes. Addressing secrecy and transparency, publicity and privacy, authenticity, surveillance, property, offshore banking system, activism, art, addiction and other topics, *Book of Anonymity* focuses on a concept that began to gain significance in the 18th century—during the Industrial Revolution—, and remains as relevant as ever: anonymity. The book, which has 28 essays and assembles artworks, academic articles and experimental texts by contributors with different cultural backgrounds, is reviewed by Ana Luísa Azevedo.

And Dilson Bruno reviews *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence*, by Kate Crawford. Crawford explores the ramifications and impacts of our new habits on the planet. Arguing that AI is fundamentally political, the book asks what kind of world do we want to live in. In an original composition of presentation — as an Atlas — of machine learning and its social, political and ecological implications, Crawford, as Bruno presents, questions us ultimately with what is “intelligence?”. A necessary question to address to contemporary modes of digital mediation that we have incorporated as habitual.

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MADALENA MIRANDA

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Biographical note

Madalena Miranda is a filmmaker and researcher. At the moment she is an Invited Professor at NOVA-FCSH and an integrated member of ICNOVA at the Culture, Mediation and the Arts cluster. She holds a PhD in Digital Media, Audiovisual and Interactive Content Creation, from Nova University. She graduated in Communication Sciences in Nova University of Lisbon, Cinema and Television and has a Masters in Anthropology from ISCTE-IUL. Besides Digital Media Theory and Critique and Cinema and Visual Studies, her research interests also delve into EcoMedia Studies.

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ORCID iD

[0000-0003-0066-0781](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0066-0781)

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CV

[3319-7960-1378](#)

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Institutional address

Campus de Campolide — Colégio Almada Negreiros. Gabinete: 348, 1099-032 — Lisboa. Morada postal: Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 — Lisboa, Portugal.

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ILO ALEXANDRE

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Biographical note

Ilo Alexandre is a researcher member at iNOVA Media Lab (NOVA-FCSH) and Computational Media Lab (UT Austin). He received his Ph.D. in Digital Media from Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (UT Austin Program|Portugal). He graduated in Communication Sciences and has a Masters in New Media and Web Practices. His research explores data journalism, social media, and computational research methods.

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ORCID iD

[0000-0002-1256-6613](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1256-6613)

—

CV

[4E15-DCFC-AFA6](#)

—

SCOPUS

[57191405071](#)

—

Institutional address

Campus de Campolide — Colégio Almada Negreiros. Gabinete: 348, 1099-032 — Lisboa. Morada postal: Av. de Berna, 26 C, 1069-061 — Lisboa, Portugal.