Visual methods
HYBRID RESEARCH AND VISUAL METHODS: BRIDGES BETWEEN SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Abstract: Globalized and transnational research in contemporary times requires activities not just scientific but equally social, including a close articulation (and often hybridizations) among different entities and processes. For instance: hybridizations between knowledge and cultures, theory and practice, individual work and team work, classic and digital media. In particular, it is urgent, within research communities and practices, a compromise among current scientific rationalities, new media sociabilities, and recent arts sensitivities.

Within such hybrid research posture, social sciences and other modes of knowledge must consider the emergence of novel and determinant methodologies, which may articulate the visual, the digital and the virtual. Mobile devices and mobile methods are some of the new instruments for these aims. Some examples of new methods and techniques are shown here, within the context of City 3.0 / Tourism 3.0: Sociological Exhibition, Sociological Comics; Virtual-Visual Survey; Virtual Sociological Gallery, this last one using Augmented Reality.

Keywords: hybrid research; virtual visual methods; social technologies; social sciences: Augmented Reality

1 Introduction: hybrid research for a hybrid world
We are immersed inside a globalized world (Wallerstein, 2011), where societies and cultures are redefining their boundaries. In this post-colonial
context, transculturalism is transforming, more and more, the exchange of information among western and non-western cultures into an exchange of knowledge among them (Andrade, 2011a, 2014; Barker, 2014). Such knowledge is fueled by the *mobility* (Sales, 2015) of citizens, tourists and immigrants across all cities of the planet. In particular, immigrants are controlled by politics of location (Verstraete, 2009), and are almost daily depicted by media (Marinho, 2015). These urban mobilities engender *mobile lives* (Urry, 2007; Sheller, 2004, 2006), which provoke, in its turn, a paraphrenalia of diverse risks (e.g. climate risks, poverty risks) (Beck, 1992). A particular mode of mobility is tourism, which is becoming an exponential growing industry, and even is transforming our cultures into *travelling cultures* (Andrade, 1981, 1986, 2017; Cohen, 2014; Fullagar, 2012; Molz, 2014). One of the most notable travellers is the researcher himself (Slocum, 2015). Moreover, tourism can be a decisive factor of innovation within all realms of society (Hall, 2005, 2008, 2011).

To better understand this complex, hybrid and innovative social and communicative context, it is urgent to reformulate scientific methodology. Mikhail Bakhtine (1993) suggests that dialogic imagination and the hybrid constitute adequate modes of intelligence of the contemporary world. Specific fields are already mutating their methods and techniques, such as tourism studies (Goodson, 2004), and more specifically cultural heritage tourism (Kaminski, 2014; Hanna, 2015).

This paper intends to present some *hybrid research practices* that underlie the organization of current innovative research. Within such research approach, teams may include, increasingly, members of different qualifications and backgrounds, e.g. researchers in Social and Human Sciences, programmers and designers (Andrade, 2011b, 2015).

Two short previous examples on this hybrid posture:

Illustration1: the sociability inherent to digital social networks needs to be analyzed not only in their technological components, but also in terms of
users who act and think as audiences and publics of cyberspace and *cybertime*. Cybertime means the set of rhythms associated with users’ travels in cyberspace.

Case 2: projects applying Physical Computing, besides the use of devices such as Arduino, virtual reality glasses or augmented reality smartphones, need an *interpretation of the communication* underlying the digital cultures that motivate the use of these devices, in connection with the urban and social apparatus activated by urban cultures of the 'physical' world within the city.

2 Visual methods and techniques

Hybrid research is partly founded on visual and digital modes of knowledge. As for visual knowledge, it is becoming a central mode of understanding our digital societies (Paquette, 2010). One of these visual strategies is Visual sociology (Harper, 2012). In fact, *virtual visual* is everywhere, and may be object of a confrontation between social looking/seeing and a Sociology of Looking/Seeing (Andrade, 1997b). Within contemporaneity, world visions and *interactive visualities* are articulated by *social visibilities* (Idem, 1995a, 1995b, 1997b). Such phenomena must be circumscribed through visual methods (Rose, 2016), within fields such as tourism (Rakic, 2012).

Concretely, such research using visual and digital methodologies includes studies on *mail and mixed mode surveys* (Dillman, 2009; Elliott, 2010); ethnography research online via ‘Netnography’ (Kozinets, 2012); hybridizations between sciences and arts (Leavy, 2009; Pawels, 2016, 2017). Among these innovative postures, *mobile methods* seem to be among the more promising (Büscher, 2011).

In what concerns the practical realization of Hybrid Research, many useful tools already exist: software to organize research, collect, analyze and interpret content and data, such as *NVivo*; social networks used as places of knowledge sharing, between the project team and global / local networks.
of researchers; blogs used as research journals; RSS understood as a news feed in cyberspace and a source of investigative journalism and "daily research"; wikis taken as collective writing of projects; curation of content within Internet sites, for the presentation of projects' work in progress.

However, other recent experiments are on the way. In the next sections, we will present some visual research methodology developed at University of Minho, Portugal. Their core aim is to hybridize several media into novel methods and techniques using close connections between the visual and the virtual, hopefully useful not just for Social Sciences, but as well targeting all forms of knowledge.

3 The cultural event as a social and scientific field

In October and November 2017, at Lisbon, the first actions of the project “Mobile Culture and Tourism Communication”, coordinated by this paper’s author at University of Minho, were co-organized. One of these actions was the participation in the art event New Art Fest’17, as an empirical field for the presentation of some sociological results and respective methodologies. Below are some examples of their dissemination at this event, and an illustration of direct observation at the event opening.

![Figure 1: Program and participating authors in the cultural event NewArtFest’17 (extract)](image)

The intention was twofold: on the one hand, communicate to Portuguese citizens and travellers to the city of Lisbon (tourists, immigrants, etc.) a preview of the city,
i.e. to visualize it before they look at the plurality of daily life in Lisbon and other cultural events; and, on the other hand; to disseminate a post-vision, i.e. a visual look after viewing the city in situ.

The Mobile Culture project has exchanged several core themes with the NewArtFest’17 event, revolving around the latest tourism and urban phenomena (see Figures 1 and 2).

The website of the event stated that its two main ‘flavors’ were: (a) the social-semantic city, that is the urban fabric founded on social and semantic digital networks; and (b) the ‘GeoNeoLogical city’, i.e. the polis based on the Greek concept deixis. Deixis means the articulation of space, time and logos (i.e. the language of a subject). In the post-modern city, subjects and their cultures and languages are multiple, e.g., as above mentioned, citizens, tourists or immigrants.

3.1 The Sociological Exhibition method

A cultural exhibition may be considered as a Sociological method, if it includes some sociological procedures and techniques, which contribute to the demonstration of some cultural or social sciences hypotheses. At New Art Fest’17, the author interacted with the audience through several means, inside an environment beyond the university, that is, the visual arts gallery. Both visitors and the sociologist commented, discussed, appreciated or criticized content, social objects of study and sociological methods, as if these ‘sociological objects’ were art objects. Some moments were photographd and filmed through video by the author. This dispositif, simultaneously discursive and counter-discursive, calls into question not just some traditional pedagogical methods, such as the mere use of Power Point presentations in class, but also research methodology, and the art exhibition itself. Within contemporary pedagogical and plural research domains, such processes should be more deeply hybridized, not just among the university and the art gallery, but as well within other spaces and times.

Last but not the least, this sociological work but also work of art intends, as one of its aims, to clarify the meaning of mobile art (i.e. the art works made with
smartphones and tablets), in the context of planetary social and semantic networks, and activated by citizens, tourists and, hopefully, immigrants.

Figure 2: Audience viewing the works of the Sociological Exhibition and Virtual Sociological Gallery (top) and Virtual Survey (center). Below, the author is talking with the curators of the Natural History and Science Museum, at the event's...
Please note that such artistic and sociologic proposal constitutes a *paratext*, as Gerard Genette puts it. In other words, it constitutes a set of contents that works as a sort of business card or aperitif, for the presentation of another content. This second matter includes sociological content (tourism within the contemporary city) and the sociological techniques that are presented below (*Sociological Comics*, *Virtual-Visual Survey* and *Virtual Sociological Gallery*).

![Figure 3: Sociological exhibition](image1)

![Figure 4: Tourism 3.0](image2)
4 The sociological comics technique on City 3.0 / Tourism 3.0

This technique attempts, by means of a story in the form of comics, to express: (a) on one hand, the knowledge implemented by institutions located in the communicative, democratic and digital contemporary city, such as academia; (b) and, on the other hand, the knowledge produced by urban digital citizens. However, social issues must not be only understood and used as a substantive theme to propel this “sociological story”. Social processes should also be immersed in the very mode of representing and presenting real or imaginary worlds. For example, social problems may not just be narrated, but also analyzed by means of a sociological research that uses visual and textual arguments inside comic book panels. The purpose is both to clarify theoretical concepts, e.g. ‘City 3.0’ (Sacco, 2011) or ‘Tourism 3.0’ (Richards, 2011); and to demonstrate an hypothesis, such as: in contemporary cities, tourism is essentially an activity undertaken through mobile devices, e.g. smartphones and tablets.

In our perspective (Andrade, 2011a), City and Tourism 3.0 must be grasped as ‘social-semantics’ city and tourism. They are called ‘social-semantics’ in the sense that they are based on a network of social meanings and singular semantic
interpretations about the public space of daily life. Such network is being developed by the multiple agents who intervene in the urban fabric (local residents, tourists, immigrants, etc.). This constitute a ‘geo-neo-logical’ process, as, in other words, it takes place in a specific territory (hence the prefix ‘geo’), in a period of continuous innovation (at a ‘neo’ rhythm), and implies different languages mobilized by urban actors. ‘Logos’ means the language or reason produced by social subjects. In order to visually understand the multiple connotations of concepts City 3.0 and Tourism 3.0, consult Figures 3 to 10), where they are applied to the social empirical field of Lisbon.

5 The virtual-visual survey technique on City 3.0 / Tourism 3.0

The second sociological technique used at the art gallery within the New Art Fest’17 event, aims to overcome some of the disadvantages of the sociological survey, such as the somewhat routine and scarcely motivating traditional questionnaire, often presented solely via verbal questions.

For that reason, a virtual-visual survey using 2D animated video was developed. It included central questions on two of the most relevant phenomena within contemporary economic, political and cultural situation of our global/local and transcultural network societies, that is, the above mentioned City 3.0 and Tourism 3.0.
More concretely, the virtual-visual survey poses a central question to well-known politicians: what is the main transformation that affects contemporary cities and...
related phenomena, such as tourism and immigration? See the various answers in Figures 11 to 18, which were extracted from a sociological video. Such answers are virtual answers, and they just aim to synthetize a general political posture taken publically by these famous and eminent politicians.

Figure 11 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “European countries need the United Kingdom more than the inverse, for city mobilities too. In truth, Europe should pay compensations for not letting Britain abandon Europe to its mobile destiny.

Figure 12 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “Mobile Europe must implement austerity for South European citizens, and neoliberal mobility for immigrants.”
Figure 13 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “French cities are the best tourism and immigrant destination, except for a special type of migrants, meaning terrorists.”

Figure 14 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “United Nations must be more united through the mobility of citizens, immigrants and tourists across world cities.”

Figure 15 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “I don’t see any problem if the region of Spain wants to separate from Catalonia, providing they accept to dialogue.”
Figure 16 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “My favorite sport is tourism in the Crimea peninsula and Europe cities. Instead of cars, it is more practical to travel with tanks. Thanks, Europe…”

Figure 17 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “Nuclear power is the perfect way to make equal all people and states. That’s why I want to use nuclear weapons in all cities of the planet…”

Figure 18 Text of the soundtrack and subtitles of the video: “Immigrants are all fake tourists, and I am going to fire them all.”
6 The Virtual Sociological Gallery technique on the City 3.0 / Tourism 3.0

Finally, the third technique applies recent digital technologies to sociological research. The philosopher Edmund Husserl (1975) circumscribe the phenomenological process to three key stages: perception, consciousness and knowledge of reality. With regard to knowledge, in the framework of a genealogy of logic, he analyses the pre-predicative experience, the structure of predicative thought and the origin of conceptual thought. The sociologist Alfred Schultz (1967) adapts Husserl’s phenomenology to social reality, establishing the grounds and pedestals of action by the participatory citizen in the worlds of everyday life (Lebenswelt).

![The New Art Fest 17](image)

**SOCIIOLOGICAL VIRTUAL GALLERY**
**PEDRO ANDRADE © 2017**

To see HYBRID REALITY, which is a hybridization of REAL, VIRTUAL, AUGMENTS and MIXED REALITIES:

1. Search and download the app indicated in the NewArtFest'17 apps hall, into your mobile device at:
   - Google Play Store: https://play.google.com/store
2. Open the app, choose the Augmented Reality button and search for SOCIOLOGICAL VIRTUAL GALLERY.
3. Enter the password: sociolegal
4. Focus the TARGET IMAGE in the wall, containing a HYBRID MONUMENT, which is a cultural hybridization of French Eiffel Tower and Portuguese Belem tower.
5. Search, enter and browse the virtual gallery and see:
   - the EXPO OF HYBRID MONUMENT IMAGES using Showcase button;
   - the ART WORK DESCRIPTION via Home button;
   - the AUTHOR BIO by clicking About button;
   - INFO AND KNOWLEDGE on culture, literature, the city, social-semantic networks, and on other Geo (urban places), Neo (innovative rhythms) and Logos (people languages); through the links at the left towards the SOCIAL SEMANTIC SITES named EXPERIMENTAL BOOKS and WEB 3 NOVEL.

*Figure 19: Room sheet in the exhibition*
In the case of the virtual sociological gallery technique here presented, hybrid reality consists of a mode of experience, consciousness and unprecedented knowledge of urban cultural reality. In fact, virtual sociological gallery hybridizes the real reality of exhibition visitors, to its interpretative modes and logic mobilized by the social scientist. Such modes of sociological interpretation include virtual reality (immersion in 3D virtual world) and augmented reality (experience of a an 3D virtual world with added textual, statistical, geographical and other information in real time). The epistemological and methodological consequences of this technique for education and innovative sociological research are decisive.

**HYBRID MONUMENT**

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A hybrid monument is a building that operates a fusion of several monuments. In order to celebrate a common cultural heritage. It may help citizens, tourists and migrants, to understand local or global cultural heritage, within a transcultural strategy. Transcultural means the transformation of culture into knowledge, within City 3.0 and Tourism 3.0 contexts.

Below tower at Lisbon and Eiffel tower at Paris, are two notable cultural and tourist urban icons. Through their truancy, they constitute an example of a hybrid monument. They aren’t exactly twin towers, but they testify a common cultural heritage process. Below Tower is a ship metaphor, to celebrate the Portuguese discoveries at the XVI century, which initiated the process of globalization. Eiffel Tower is a symbol of another globalization, the industrial revolution around the world at the XIX century. However, their hybridization advert us that we must both differentiate and connect all world cultures, within a dialogic, democratic and equalitarian basis.

**Figure 20: Destinations of the hyperlinks: Home section: description of the Hybrid Monument**

For example, it is possible to enliven a class on cultural heritage and tourism by presenting sources and debates using mobile devices and augmented reality apps. Or by using hardware and software, to compile, analyze, interpret and disseminate content in research projects. This can be done not just within an academic context, but also in urban places of culture where the citizen and tourist share their daily itineraries, amidst an intercultural and hybrid dialogue.

Concretely, the work of art here shown organizes content and knowledge about Lisbon and tourism in this city, through texts, images and socio-semantic sites within Web 3.0. When entering the application, the user can choose between the following links: Home: introduction to the exhibited content; About: CV of the author; Gallery: virtual exhibition of images of the Hybrid Monument; other links lead to social-semantic sites Experimental Books and Web 3 Novel, where there
are various contents about the city, culture and tourism. The *Hybrid Monument* means a merger between the Tower of Belem in Lisbon and the Eiffel Tower, which operates a link between diverse cultural heritages.

**Figure 21:** Destinations of the hyperlinks: site Experimental Books section: description of the Hybrid Monument

**Figure 22:** Destinations of the hyperlinks: site Web 3.0 Novel

Here, the sociological and artistic search/research quest is perpetrated through an augmented reality device. The visitor of the Virtual Sociological Gallery experiments with an unprecedented and seminal mix of social, virtual, augmented
and mixed realities, in a process that produces the so-called Hybrid Reality. (for more details, consult Figures 19 to 22).

7 Conclusion

Hybrid research is just one of the multiple modes of doing investigation. However, this work in progress may constitute a sound and hopefully innovative attempt to overcome the insufficiencies of research inspired by a sole scientific paradigm, or by one isolated mode of knowledge. Unlike such partial postures, which may become deceptive illustrations of scientific fundamentalism, hybrid research aims to fusion complementary and opposite objects of study, methodologies and researchers.

In fact, the author believes that, against intolerant scientific perspectives, researchers may mutate themselves into more tolerant professionals, on order to contribute to the development of scientific, technological and artistic communities who subscribe a more democratic and social knowledge across the planet.

Bibliographic references


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