

# Art in Face: The Role of a Play and Digital Art in Arts Education

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## Abstract

The role of new media in arts education is an essential feature which innovates the existing artistic tendencies and creates a platform for the perception and reflection of the public and virtual space. The representative signs of the living reality are transformed into the digital form which is often defined by the conceptual idea. The definition allows a free, yet clearly specified activity which uses the principles of a play. The boundary between a play and digital art is rather thin and the inspiration in playful, not in players', tendencies seems to be the motivating element refreshing the fading conception of arts education which stressed classical artistic means of expression. The use of smartphone applications is changing the basic shape of arts education into the form preferring the use of this century's new media.

## Keywords

Game, art education, new media, digital technologies, social media, motivation, pop culture.

## Resume

*The role of new media in arts education is an essential feature which innovates the existing artistic tendencies and creates a platform for the perception and reflection of the public and virtual space. The representative signs of the living reality are transformed into the digital form which is often defined by the conceptual idea. The definition allows a free, yet clearly specified activity which uses the principles of a play. The boundary between a play and digital art is rather thin and the inspiration in playful, not in players', tendencies seems to be the motivating element refreshing the fading conception of arts education which stressed classical artistic means of expression. The use of smartphone applications is changing the basic shape of arts education into the form preferring the use of this century's new media.*

The article deals with the use of new media as a means of artistic expression (and motivation) which allows the pupils and students to participate in an artistic activity through the environment which they daily use for communication. Art in Face refers to the use of smartphone applications in the current arts education. The interaction which occurs in the digital space is not based on the face-to-face communication but on the GIF-to-GIF communication. The main principle of this communication is the speed at which the data are passed and the interaction taking place online. The usual (verbal) communication is substituted by the image, textual or face-call form and is digitalized into communication representatives. Through the means of digital images (GIFs) it is possible to work with the current generation which usually considers these three the fundamental items: phone, wallet/purse, keys. Most of the people always have a mobile phone at hand and unless the battery is depleted it is possible to download an application and try its functions even in arts classes.

## New Media Approach with the Use of Social Media

The digital space or interface can be compared to a digital play which is defined by a certain environment. If a play puts the finishing touches to our being and the being is built upon the phenomenon of a culture and its community, at present, the culture reflects higher “digital” values. If both the culture and a play are built upon the form of social games, the self that is discovered, presented and modified will crystalize into an imaginary (cheap) shape which does not allow the shape of oneself as an “image defect” (understood as a photograph with a defect). The elements of a play balance between an experiment and daily routine, however, Olšovský<sup>1</sup> remarks that through an experiment we can get beyond our own boundaries (transcendental overlap).

New Media approaches (based on Manovich who introduced the term “media revolution”) are not only based on the “new media”, the form of which is known from the previous centuries (e. g. classic photography). New media cease to be understood as static and begin to create/form themselves.<sup>2</sup> There are principles of new-media space which, to a certain extent, work with chance and error. The identity of the medium (web interface) and its creator are being changed through the digital media. All participants in the web space are becoming its creators – this is one of the thoughts that should be passed to all age generations that daily work with web and social platforms. The impacts that the world of the Internet brings are often being put in the background in the pursuit of social (virtual) success<sup>3</sup>. Young people create their identities through social media accounts. When Manovich talks about the ways of manipulation and preservation, he also mentions the tendencies to think through space. We can see here a

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<sup>1</sup>Olšovský, J. (2006). In J. Nosek, Game, science and philosophy (p. 99). Praha: Filosofia.

<sup>2</sup>The difference defined by time and technological advancement can be outlined in a simplified way. Reality, space, manipulation, identity and mask are transformed under the influence of new millennium into digital reality, digital space, digital manipulation, digital identity and digital mask.

<sup>3</sup>In case of human psyche, the negative presentation may influence the perception of one’s self and people around.

relativization of an image which allows to work with a limited time.

Since people ask in galleries what to look for in the images, it might be possible also ask what to look for in the mobile communication. The adaptation and acclimatization to such a style of communication becomes more acceptable and understandable compared to an abstract image. The art is based on the principle of self-presentation. It creates its own artificial space in which our identity and intimacy become a public matter, similarly to the posts on the Web. Through the portrayal of one's self/publication of one's own post, users become a living online link. People become searchable content whose frauds the recipients cannot yet judge in a relevant way. The emerging fictional identities are a good topic for arts education classes in which one can work with on the development of the creativity and information manipulation as well as with the overlap of social networks into both our daily and creative life. It must not be forgotten that human beings project themselves into the digital/new media world and to a certain extent, they explore their own creative tendencies.

A lot of attention is paid nowadays to the digital age and digital technologies not only in contemporary art but also in education. In the last few year, a continuous development of the society which is closely connected to the technological development can be observed. Opinion-wise, the society is on the crossroads – one part sees this era as beneficial, while the other sees rather the quality of the classic media and sees the impact of the digital world which brings some difficulties. Instax, GoPro, smartphones – all the above are examples of the shift from the work with an analog camera to the new technologies which can also become a way to classic media<sup>4</sup>.

Working with new media is not only about the knowledge as such, but it also necessary to use the knowledge to gain the skills to work with them – to use the knowledge of new media

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<sup>4</sup>The hidden curriculum of artistic activities is their educational aspect which is not concentrated on the “creation of art” but it helps students understand various principles and relations (decoding of the connection between reality and common sense).

in a practical way. The use of the easiest means of technology leads in the contemporary pop culture to many outputs the quality of which, however, does not reach the professional level as we know it. The examples of such artists are MAI, Nicki Minaj etc. who despite a low quality of the work created an artistic output on a global scale.

The expression “new media” also points to digital media that are saved in a binary code. Lev Manovich<sup>5</sup> has already focused in his theoretical publications on the form and the outputs of new media. From the perspective of new media’s principles, he mentions numeral representation, modularity, automatization, variability and re-coding. Digital forms are a part of the virtual space. Virtual reality is based on the simulation which re-creates the feeling of a real perception and creates a mutual interaction between the space and the participant.

The web interface becomes a place where a user tries to create an online identity whose shape is partly transferred into the real life. The word “partly” points to the possibility of post-production which changes a physical appearance into an eye-catching profile on social networks<sup>6</sup>. After the upload of a post or an image, the factor that is paid the most attention to is the number of likes on Facebook and other platforms. The community of our “friends” then evaluates our work with a few clicks. It is becoming easier to access one’s social media profile than attending an event or a meeting. People live through social media profiles ignoring the interpersonal communication and intentionally seek a non-face communication.

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<sup>5</sup>Lev, M. (2001). *The Language of New Media*. London: The MIT Press Cambridge.

<sup>6</sup>Amalia Ulman can be mentioned as an example from the art circles. Beside installation, she devoted herself to performances, video-art and net-art. Another great source of inspiration can be Cindy Sherman whose activity can be followed on the social media by any teenager. Cindy Sherman shares on the social media primarily photographs related to a change or deformation of identity.

## **Digital Culture – New Media, Digital Technologies and Social Media as a Motivation for a New Generation of Art Activities**

“The technology is born and later disappears in the peripheral areas; the web pages are released, they prosper and fade, yet the Net still remains since we are the Net. We that communicate in natural, more intense and more effective way than ever before in the human history.”<sup>7</sup> The quotation shows that the form of the contemporary society, newly perceived as a digital social form which shifts from letters to text messages, from a smile to an emoticon, and from a hug to a GIF. Another thought of Piotr Czernski is the stress on the realization of one’s presence on the Web. Not only did we grow up with the Internet, but it is possible to say that the contemporary society is the Internet. The photos or pictures used in the Internet interface are representatives of a spoken word. The communication with GIFs and other picture formats becomes the carrier of thoughts which can be misjudged due an error in the communication channel or wrongly processed information.

Digital or Web interface is becoming our life, a living culture on its own that has its own rules, inhabitants and space. The digital reality is influenced by social factors (culture, race, age, country, traditions, trends, etc.). Although it struggles with the loss of privacy and a possibility of the misuse of information, the topics such as a change or substitution of identity cannot be forgotten. The digital reality refers to an artificially created world built on an illusion, fictional life, without us in the reality, and with us in the digital space.

Huizinga connected the culture and a play into one. A play has been a part of culture ever since as the most natural of human expressions. For human beings, a play is a certain function that makes sense, reflects life activities and creates an immediate image, the form of which always has a meaning. Even in a daily life, a play is encountered in many different forms, yet,

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<sup>7</sup>Czernski, P. (2014). We, kids network. In M. Meixnerová, # mm net art - Internet art in virtual and physical presentation space (p. 72). Olomouc: PAF.

in the relationship to the virtual reality it transforms into the form of a digital play. A digital play is built and based on the creation of an imaginative space which reflects the philosophy of a play which besides others was relying on the creation of a play space which is defined by the specification of rules and leaving behind chance as an experiment. Huizinga further defined a play as a form which makes sense and has a social function. Through the connection of a social interface with the principles of a play, the use of digital reality may be considered as a motivational element, or possibly as the main topic for arts classes<sup>8</sup>.

The role of New media in the current perception is an indispensable feature in the arts education that brings a “young wind” into the often stereotypically-conceived class which can innovate existing artistic tendencies. The use of smartphone applications changes the basic format of arts education into a form that prefers the use of the new media of the current century. The progress pace of these means of expression cannot be stopped, and to a certain extent, it can't be slowed down either. The adaptation of students goes beyond the capabilities of generations with finished education.

The arts education in the Czech Republic lacks a connection with the contemporary media. The contemporary media use all the forms of new media which are through new technologies modified into other forms allowing markedly different form of outputs compared to classic media. The contemporary media have not had a clear-cut position in the arts education. Its instability originates from the lack of knowledge of current technologies. The classes in Czech schools emphasize the classic media (painting, drawing, collage etc.) into which film and photography may be included. The stereotype is maintained through the aestheticization of recordings which should have a perfect cut, clean sound etc. The knowledge of the technological procedures guarantees a certain form of the Wanted. The form of an artistic expression falls into the

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<sup>8</sup>If naming other topics which can be used during with work a certain age group during a class on artistic means of expression, hiding, self-image, communication, visual communication, digitalization of daily tasks or paraphrase may be some of the examples.

category of documentary which appears to be an equivalent of technical perfection rather than into the sphere of originality and experiment. The output is the aestheticized learned skill. The satisfaction with one's own self-image will disrupt the need of digital (aesthetic) beauty through artistic activity.

Visual diary or a time-lapse is one of the main topics where the mobile technologies, especially smartphone applications, can be used. It is not necessary to use standard computer software, it is possible to work with imperfections and acknowledge a low picture quality as well as the commercial world of pop culture. The immediacy and speed of smartphone applications serves as a motivation which in the end leads to a creation of a file which can be intuitively modified, and thus, a play with a digital space is created<sup>9</sup>.

The digital space is not a creative platform only for the pupils and the students. Digital literacy demand is due to the outside pressure growing also in case of young children who promptly use smartphone applications – in their case it is a child play and a sort of a free time activity. The work principle and possibilities of such applications is nevertheless the same.

At the beginning of the study, a change of communication from face-to-face to GIF-to-GIF was explained. This form of communication which is used in a daily conversation can be transformed into an art story. A lesson which was based on the GIF communication can be shown as an example. The students were given three simple questions: “Where to go for lunch”, “what to do after school” and “what to do during the holidays”. The goal was to find out how students interpret visual communication. Three groups of students participated. Each of the communications was based on different visual signs which created the form of a non-face communication.

The form of these art activities allows to use a certain amount of creativity. It was obvious

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from students' work that they daringly use their surroundings and were noticing original aspects that people usually miss. The speed of the recording allows other work such as post-production and more development in digital work.

## **Arts Education in the Context of Pop culture**

The space which is defined in terms of the use of smartphone applications in the arts education classes maps the means and offers possible activities in which it is possible to edit the identity of an individual, eventually work also with their characteristic features (appearance, voice, moves etc.). It is possible to use the outputs for further editing and use them for manipulation with one's own image as well as the image of a group. It is possible to emphasize certain topics and situations which "newly" arise and influence their surrounding in a more targeted way, e.g. ten years ago when numerous platforms were just born or in the phase of development. To make a connection with the reality, in other words the connection of us as individuals with the "mentally mature" subject. The use of such media and means which the young generation these days understands can lead to the inclusion of a higher number of students compared to the numerously repeated painting of a still-life.

Not only in the practical but also in the theoretical part of the class, it is necessary to connect the big theoretical unknown of the social context of the artistic world (using the digital media) with the above mentioned world of pop culture which came about in the 1980 s. It was the beginning of experiment with technologies, starting with the availability of cameras, hardware (Nam June Paik, Vašulka, Knížák) etc. There were also instances of visualizations of audio recordings. This era allowed the connection of various areas of technology into one whole.

The motivation consists of the connection with the common pop culture available through the media – music videos, films, tabloids etc<sup>10</sup>. The virtual reality is thus a result of the inter-

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<sup>10</sup>We do not receive pop culture only in the visual form but also in the audio form. In practical artistic activities

action with a daily life. The reaction to the current time, place and space becomes the outcome material for the digital image. The basic theory results into the communication connection with the computer, however, nowadays, the teenagers culture connects with smartphone applications and social networks which work with the platforms strongly connected to smartphones. The randomness can thus make us the witnesses of phenomena we do not expect, that connect us with different cultures, different opinions, different aspects of behaviour and social environment etc., and allow us to look into, get to believe, get to understand and empathize with the stories.

Through the publication of a photography or a post on the social networks we deliberately organize or transform the web interface into which we are incorporated, and we create our own image and the image of the society. With a classic self-portrait we dispose of the feeling of shame which often do not allow us a public presentation since they are presented in the raw form. Yet, the deliverance of one's own identity and the acceptance of a new better appearance is only a common caprice of the society which desires beauty, superficiality and is aimed at the successful. The artistic creation resigns from the existing parameters and brings novel pieces of knowledge not only from the topical perspective but also a technique as an output which is naturally a part of author's work. Maria Lassnig worked with the topic of self-image for years which allowed her to record the time, the continuity and the sincerity. Seeking the answer to the question of whether we are inside or outside the canvas, it is possible to follow the question of many theoreticians. Is a selfie (a digital work with an identity) or a social profile considered an acceptable form of arts presentation?

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which take place in the art education classes at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University, one source of inspiration can be mentioned – a famous artist and an important figure of last decade called MIA. Another source from the area of pop culture may be American singer and composer Lana Del Ray, and finally a band SSION.

## Conclusion

The contribution demonstrates in the context of a play and smartphone applications a possible teaching form using smartphones or above-mentioned smartphone applications. The classic media cannot be absent, yet, may be supported by the new forms and methods. Again, what shall these ideas lead the students to? What happens during this kind of artistic activity? Is it only a form of picture digitalization? What is the digital image based on?

The digitalization in the form of post-production of a portrait is based on the change of identity. A change as a digital mask which does not hide the reality but changes its visuality. The creation of a new image of oneself, or its editing, we unfold the risk of these days which creates false assumptions about the perfection of the world. The perception of one's own identity transforms into a mixed identity, changed identity, fake identity. The artistic creation leaves the search for the Beauty (mostly) and searches in its conceptual/post-conceptual layer the boundary of its limits and margins. Impersonalization enters the creation, yet, the personal stays in the picture. Again, we return to the question, whether inside or outside.

The choice of topics in arts education is the fundamental goal in the concept of work with smartphone applications when it is not only about the classic motif since its overlap has both classic and digital form – the destruction of records (mechanical and digital), the identity exchange, hiding, self-image, communication, paraphrase, visual communication, digitalization of daily activities. Rather than the term “digital space”, a more proper term may be a “visual reality” or “the visible on the social networks”.

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