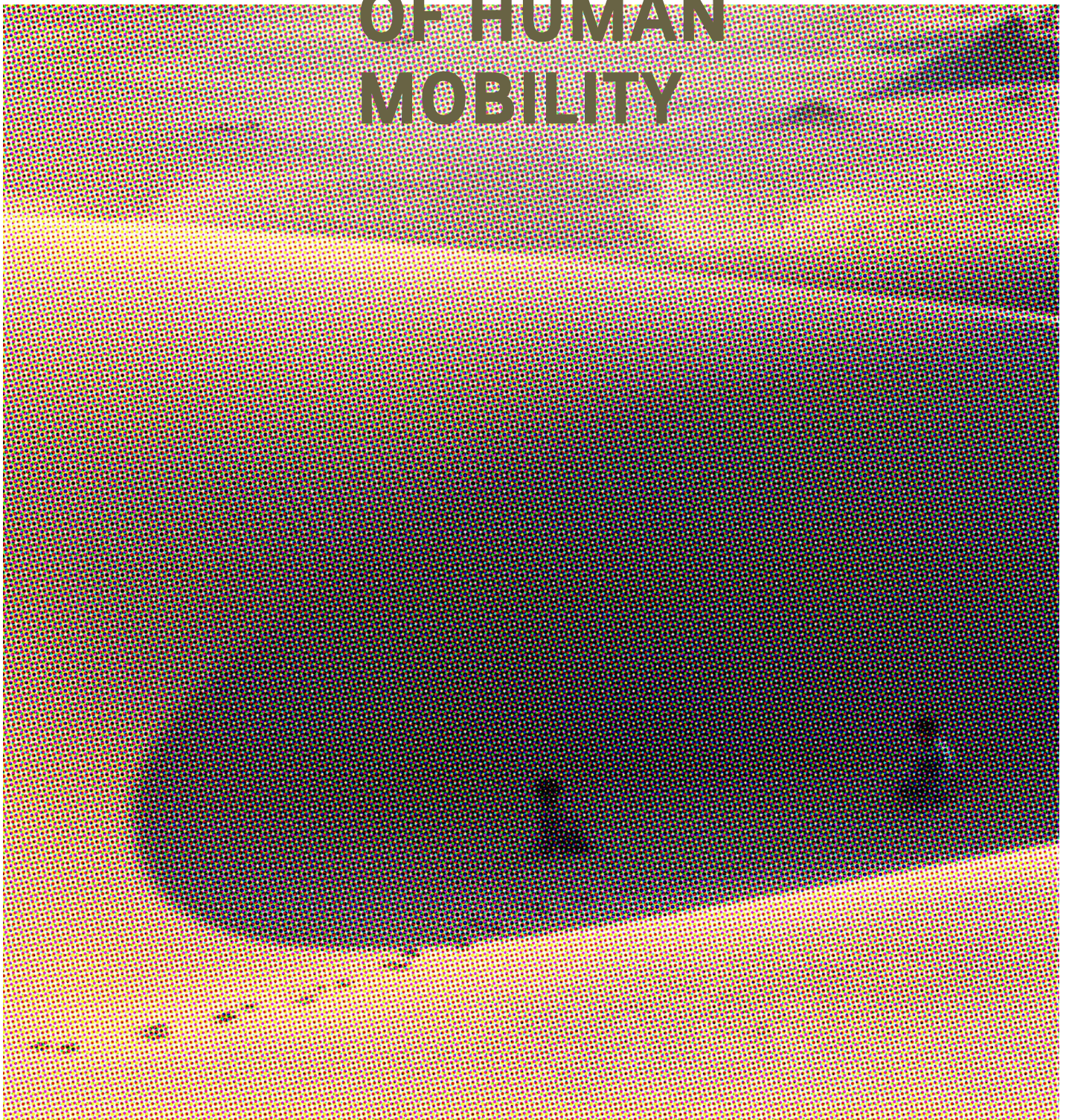


**Edited by**

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz  
Flavia Stara

**Szczecin**  
2022

# **SPACES OF TRANSFERS AND VISUAL MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN MOBILITY**





Publication prepared within the project (Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Arts and Social Science) , which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020, research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 734602.

Title: **Spaces of Transfers and Visual Management of Human Mobility**

ISBN: **978-83-63072-38-4**

Edited by: **Aleksandra Łukaszewicz & Flavia Stara**

Scientific reviewer: **Elzbieta Perzycka**

Published by: **Academy of Art in Szczecin**

Language correction: **Marlene de Wilde**

Visual identification: **Anna Witkowska**

Editing: **Natalia Janus-Malewska**

Cover photo: **Fabio Carbone/ Flavia Stara private collection**

DOI: **10.5281/zenodo.5849420**



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The texts published in this publication has been created as a part of the project TICASS – Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement NO 734602.

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**WYDAWNICTWO  
AKADEMII SZTUKI  
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**Edited by**

Aleksandra Łukaszewicz  
Flavia Stara

# **SPACES OF TRANSFERS AND VISUAL MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN MOBILITY**

**Szczecin**

2022

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# Designing and Living in New Realities

## Keywords

mobility  
interdigital communication  
visual languages  
transits and permanence  
relational slowness

# Interdigital Humans: Visual Codes, Mobility, and Relational Fragility

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## **Abstract**

The intersections and interferences between human and digital mobility give rise to new paradigms devoted to speed, fragmentation, and change in the categories of time and space. Relationships are increasingly mediated by images and communication channels that do not necessarily provide feedback, defining, in fact, target subjects rather than active interlocutors. In this way, there is an impoverishment of meanings, a reduction of multiplicities, and a homologation of heterogeneities increasingly simplified by technological transparency and self-referential individualism.

In today's complex society, we can imagine scenarios of communication and permanence in aspects of life that envisage logics that are not exclusively linked to efficiency, and that allow us to rediscover the density of reciprocal ties, enhancing human opacity and the slowness of lived and narrated experiences. Therefore, in order to initiate dialogue between relational interdependencies, languages, and forms of communication, it is necessary to creatively remain in contexts and design times and spaces for listening and reviewing one's self with others and in different situations.



## Rapid travel interference

Relationships among people within various contexts represent a dual intersubjective and situated perspective. The growing opportunities in and need to move within large, delocalized geographies are intertwined with long-distance contacts in close interconnection between people and places. In this way, technology hybridizes space and time: time accelerates, and space shrinks in view of an efficiency of mobility that enables people to make rapid transits.

Access to information changes the strategies and requirements of communication, shifting the priorities of the informational function from community sharing to individual understanding within the community. Those who come into possession of data and news are part of an ingroup with which they do not necessarily interact. On the other hand, those who, for various reasons, do not access information by means of technology constitute a marginalized outgroup controlled by those who hold the power of information (Bauman 2007; 2011).

In today's competitive environment, is it possible to imagine a hybridization between the informational and relational functions of communication through a paradigm open to the sharing of multiple meanings? This question refers to the collective construction of knowledge where priority is given to interchange and interdependence and not to the supremacy of the individual (Morin 2000). The participatory dimension requires much more time, experiences of sharing, mediation of conflicts, and open and divergent dialogue between parties leading to revisable hypotheses. Choosing the community perspective means placing oneself in dynamic situations that, while not guaranteeing permanent and definitive solutions, can become more articulate and sustainable.

Thinking about the ways in which we move through space, using it as a temporary container to explore as many edges as possible, often alone, we can consider the objectives of mobility:

- If it is simply a transit between places, we will try to reach our destination quickly (e.g., a commute to school/work).
- If it is a journey of exploration, the effectiveness of the experience is conveyed above all by encounters (e.g., a journey to unknown lands).
- If embarking on the journey itself is the goal, we will immerse ourselves in a permanent transit to reach our destination (e.g., planning the itinerary of a voyage of discovery).

The speed or slowness with which we travel through places influences our approach to discovering ourselves, others, and different contexts.

The way in which we occupy spaces with our bodies can, on the one hand, communicate the desire for transparency and invisibility that accompanies transits, and on the other hand convey the desire to linger in environments to discover them through different channels of communication. We can glimpse a sort of relational architecture that we intentionally express through gestures, proxemics, the forms with which we populate the places we design, the silences that give voice to others, or the words that determine belonging and differences.

Often, as we move around, hunched over devices that act as our interface with the world, we do not meet others, at least not those flesh-and-blood people who pass us by and are mostly – and who remain – strangers. While walking, we talk to the contacts in our address book or listen to music; while on the bus, we type messages, read short texts, and press “like” on social networks; while driving, we talk through our earphones or on speakerphones. In the meantime, other lives flow around us anonymously, without leaving a trace, without creating interactions, destined to disappear into the oblivion of uncoded, recorded images, stored in digital archives that inexorably erode our analogue memory (photos 1-2).

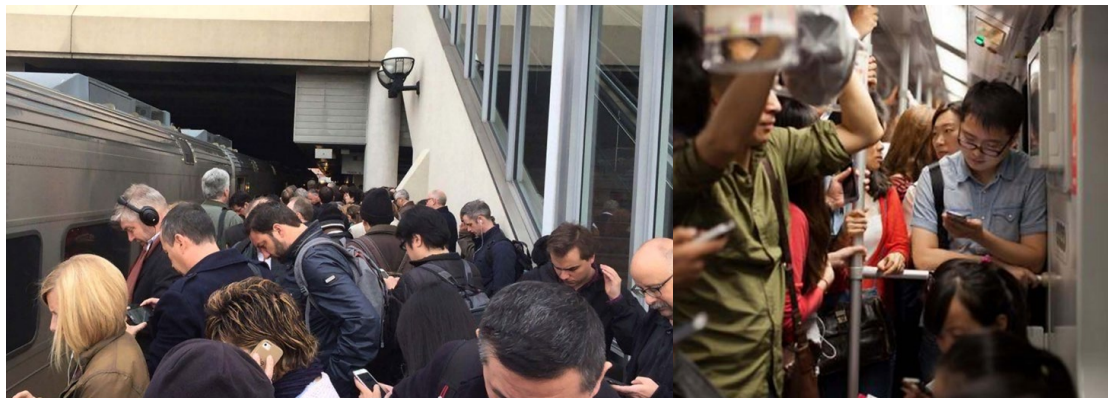


Photo 1. Hyper-connected absences and indifferent transits

In 2019, the Province of Bolzano (Italy) launched an information campaign: “Stay Smart. Use your mobile phone consciously” to communicate the risks of excessive mobile phone use. Four key points were posed:

- ***Are you there?*** The risks of hyper-connection and distancing from daily reality.
- ***Driving while chatting?*** The risks of car accidents caused by incorrect mobile phone use.
- ***Are you on the right wavelength?*** An invitation to use the Wi-Fi

network to reduce electromagnetic pollution.

- **Social Zombies!** The risks of mobile phone addiction and consequent social withdrawal.

At the same time, fuchsia foam layers were wrapped around lamp posts at eye level in pedestrian areas of the city, attracting the attention of passers-by and going viral on social networks. The stylized silhouette of a little man walking with his head bent over his mobile phone prompts passers-by to reflect on the excessive use of mobile phones, which makes people lose sight of real life.



Photo 2. #staysmart<sup>1</sup>

The horizon expands on digital maps and large atlases where we place and see ourselves in motion, represented by darts and coloured dots that find their way thanks to satellite reflections (photo 3); meanwhile, the perception of the representations of reality made by others, narrated with numerous languages and creative ways of communicating that cannot be synthesized in the cold two-dimensionality of a touch-screen, shrinks and flattens.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.provincia.bz.it/informatica-digitalizzazione/digitalizzazione/stay-smart.asp>

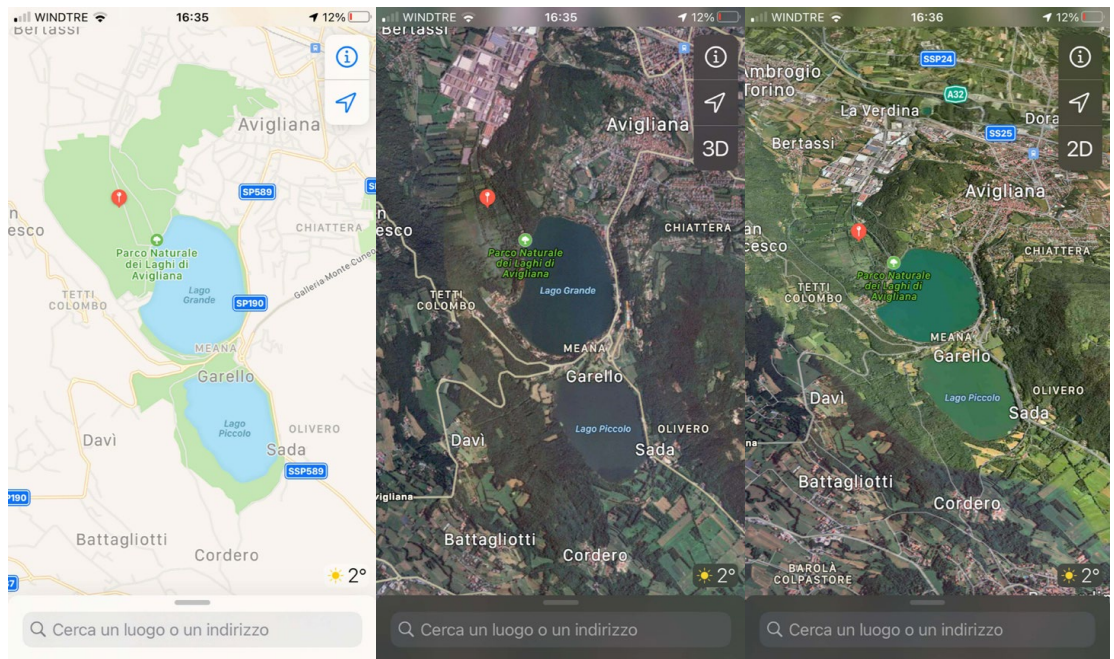


Photo 3. Human positioning in the light and shadow of maps and satellites

Digital connectivity alone does not replace human interdependence, and it is interesting to articulate a critical thought on the intentionality of mobility management modes, which are increasingly aimed at speed. There is definitely a gap between technology in the service of efficiency, always and in any case designed by people, and the poetics of the relationship (Glissant 1990) spread across the mesh of face-to-face interactions. From a socio-educational point of view, it is more interesting to expand analyses and research aimed at investigating possible "interferences" and viable hybridization aspects.

## Slowly immersing oneself in plural contexts

The routine transit through spaces that assume increasingly habitual and worn-out forms can be thrown into crisis by an invitation to slowness by those who seek out unfamiliar territories, challenging the instantaneous rapidity of time. It is in these intentional slowdowns that we question different personal representations, co-constructing them in a decentralized way through interactions with otherness and elsewhere (Adichie 2009).

Some examples of suspending rapidity are dwelling on details considered insignificant, the increasing visibility of the dynamics of mobility, the intersections, and the dimensions that make up the weave of the social fabric and understanding the countless expressions of belonging within which our existence is articulated.

It is about being willing to live immersive experiences in the ordinariness of everyday life and initiating a dialogue between the independence, dependence, and interdependence of communication and relational channels. In this way, the exploration of one's self, of relationships, and of the real and virtual places in which we usually move is initiated.

At this point, an interesting question emerges: Is it possible to hybridize transit with permanence? We have to operate between the generality and the particularity of information and communication channels that need different lexicons and the ability to position oneself as an interlocutor and not only as a target subject.

The polyphonic reading of languages and meanings opens up plural mediations and describes the different potentialities of the human being, especially if placed in the paradigm of decolonization (Ngũgĩ 2015). This opens up different scenarios of participation and use of reality, between codified information and meanings of experience, in a constant challenge between lived time and inhabitable space. Imagining forms of communication that intercept different perspectives and enhance the nuances of human presence and plurality means actively developing a mobility from the self, creating places of encounter along with dialogical and problematizing proximity (Mayo 2013; Cadei & Deluigi 2019). Even though mobility scenarios are delimited by the variables of time and space, the human landscapes and their relationships can create interesting resonances aimed at continually encroaching on and overcoming the limits of ethnocentric or self-referential visions.

A very peculiar case of digital mobility worthy of note concerns the lockdown period experienced during the COVID-19 health emergency. Millions of people continued to feed interpersonal and professional communications and networks through digital media, bringing out opportunities for interaction as well as human frailties, learning opportunities and personal discomforts, individual retreats and social withdrawals, communicative creativity and new exclusions. Private spaces, such as the home, have been put under the spotlight, sometimes even with a certain intrusiveness, and the limitation of physical mobility has led to the dilation of time, transferring relationships into iconic and multiple communities in which new crises in the dynamics of mutual recognition and interaction have been generated (photo 4).

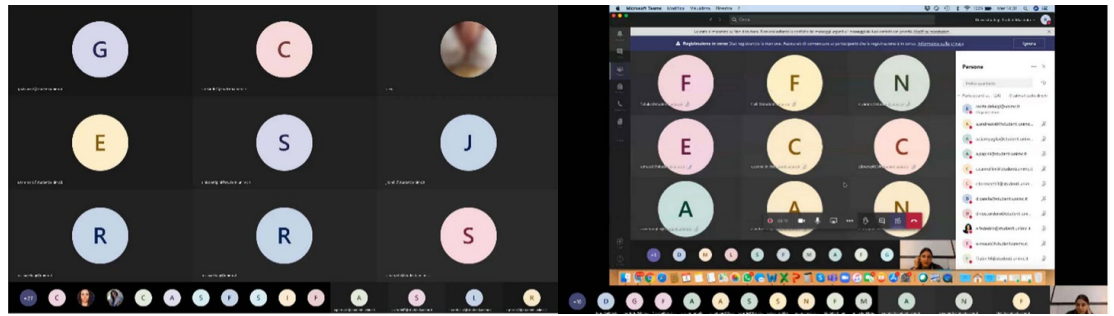


Photo 4. Human icons

In this current complexity, crossed by liquidity and strong negative emotions (Bauman 2005; Bauman & al. 2015; Benasayag 2019; Benasayag & Cohen 2020), we can refer to the paradigm of "interdigital communication" (Murero 2012) highlighting how post-digital media are more and more embedded in everyday life. Our movements leave (in)visible traces, which are even more interesting if we focus on communication and relational experiences.

Interdigital communication recalls how the population of an interconnected world communicates in plural ways, exchanging content and staying in touch through increasingly "social", dynamic, multimedia, interactive, interdependent, multisensory, convergent, and mobile media. This gives rise to a dynamic process, synchronous and asynchronous, taking place between two or more interdigital agents connected in a network, in mobile or fixed space in which digitized communication flows are condensed, preservable, shareable, and modifiable (Murero 2012). Media relations and multimedia information sharing constitute a communicative system whose logic is important to understand in order to design inter-communal ecological divergences and niches that bet on the development of networks and citizenships open to change.

We are still immersed in hyperculture (Bertman 1998), where the human cost of speed clearly emerges in a society organized around economic power and which demands instant gratification and obedience. The various forms of homologation to which we scrupulously adhere have generated a constant adaptation to technological innovation, neglecting an ethics of the human being that is more attentive to relational depths, preferring the consumption of immediate sensation. All this generates various forms of survival, deforming the human horizon towards the achievement of goals that redefine personal identities and forms of democratic communities.



Photo 5. Gali May Lucas, *Absorbed by Light*, Amsterdam 2018.<sup>2</sup>

In this regard, one of the installations that grabbed the most attention in the 2018 edition of the Amsterdam Light Festival was a piece by artist Gali May Lucas (Design Bridge) (Photo 5). Created with the help of sculptor Karoline Hinz, "Absorbed by Light" comments on our society's increasing addiction to our mobile devices. Placed outside the Hermitage and on view through January 20th, the light sculpture plays off the theme of that year's event – "the medium is the message"<sup>3</sup>.

In this work of art, the real protagonists are all of us, depicted in an everyday life where the mobile phone becomes a prosthesis of our body and mind. The work emphasizes the illuminated faces of three life-size people sitting on a bench in an all-too-common position, hunched over, heads bowed, eyes fixed, and faces illuminated by the mobile phone screen: an image that becomes rather disturbing when it gets dark. The work invites us to reflect on it and to be reflected in this image, and passers-by are invited to sit on the bench to take a fresh look at their own relationship with digital devices.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://karolinehinz.com/project/absorbed-by-light-iii/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://arrestedmotion.com/2018/12/showing-absorbed-by-light-amsterdam-light-festival/>



Photo 6. WEB 0.0

Another interesting project, called "WEB 0.0", was realized in 2016 for CVTÀ Street Fest - Civitacampomariano (CB) (Italy) (Photo 6). Civitacampomariano is a small village in the southern part of Italy with just 400 inhabitants, mainly elderly. In this village, rich in folk traditions, the Internet is a partially unknown world: mobile phones work with difficulty and the data connection is practically nonexistent. The provocative idea is to show that these virtual functions, considered by the vast majority of the population as necessary and essential to everyday life, also exist in the country, where the connection is hard to reach. This sort of Internet "in real life" is able to demonstrate that in traditions and popular culture, these instruments, though in other ways, have always existed, allowing people and families to have cultural exchanges, meet at the bar, and live the town's streets (Urban Contest Magazine)<sup>4</sup>.

Instead of heading stubbornly along the information highway, we can decelerate our lives to generate individual and social dissent, claiming the opportunity to live with intensity on fragile, precarious, slow paths that require an uncertain pace and the possibility of stopping to reflect, an inalienable part of life for every human being.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.biancoshock.com/web-00.html>



In this regard, we need only think that time in industrialized and economically advanced societies seems to be a luxury. The hypothesis of moving from an addiction to speed to a slowdown calls for new planning regarding the quality of subjective and collective life. On the contrary, more and more often sucked in by the devices with which we simplify and codify reality in its immediacy, we neglect the urgency of interpreting and rereading it in a more in-depth way, subtracting space from the uncertainty of surprising human opacity and amplifying the value of the efficiency of technological transparency.

## Digital transparency and human invisibility

The procedural nature of digital devices has altered the ways in which thought is constructed and articulated, inviting people to acceleration and the logic of transparency and mechanicism, reducing the creative potential that is a constituent element of dynamic identities. This lack is especially noticeable in communications that involve self-sufficient messages and do not require critical feedback, only confirmations and endorsements.

Face-to-face interactions, analytical skills, dialectical exchange, and visions of the future have been replaced by phantom interlocutors immersed in a continuous present that can always be viewed through a screen. The subject has given way to a digital swarm of anonymous and isolated individuals, who move about as chaotically and unpredictably as insects. What happens, then, when a society renounces self-telling in order to count "likes"? And what are the consequences of the mutation of the private sphere into a public sphere that cannibalizes intimacy and privacy? (Han 2017).

Knowledge is apparently more accessible (to certain sections of the population), but there is a risk of falling into the conception of "depository education" (Freire 1987; 1997), which involves an accumulation of ideas chosen and passed on by others. Moreover, given the amount of material available, it is complicated to validate the reliability of sources and to have sufficient mental storage space. The seduction of instantaneous communication modes hinders the conscious choice of reliable content, and in so doing slows down the processes of interpretation and systematization into complex paradigms of articulated and non-sectoral knowledge.

The illusion of monitoring everything, also thanks to technology, highlights transparency as a false ideal, becoming in fact the reference background of the most pervasive and insidious cultural forms of our time (Han 2015). Seeing everything and being seen and X-rayed in every fold of one's existence is not always and only a value. Claiming the right to opacity for all (Glissant 1990) means opening up to the hybridization and creolization of cultures (Baron 2011), and therefore of images, messages, and meanings, without imprisoning humanity in the logic of total understanding. It is a question of not setting oneself the objective of understanding in order

to reduce, to take possession of the others, to bring them back to one's own scales of values, but of articulating plural reflections in order to design scenarios of inter-in-dependence (Panikkar 2009).

If we want to redesign community dimensions in which there is room for heterogeneous singularities, which do not revert to the reproduction of the same, we will have to move towards porous cultures and rhizomatic communications open to metamorphosis and revision. A viable route is represented by participatory planning, and the activation of communities understood as places of relationship and intersection between opacities in research. The encounter between bearers of different cultures, origins, traditional roots, and future uncertainties calls for the ability to not overdo the immediate synthesis of different instances. Only the encounter with the other, which is both destabilizing and enlivening, can give each person their own identity and generate real co-constructed experience.

In order to combat the expulsion of the other (Han 2018), we need to recover intersubjective particularities and invest in relationships understood as essential links in the weave of a social fabric ready to welcome the uncertainties and precariousness of human beings. Urban space becomes social only if we move away from hyper-productive and competitive paradigms that feed on marginalization and the distancing of the weak. The ideal of smart cities must be based on relational cities in which there is time to listen to each other, time that is increasingly individual and increasingly taken up by hasty and technological mobility, which leads irreparably to the impoverishment of our lives.

In this haste, images play an essential role, and not having a grammar to decode them, interpret them and produce different meanings (Fleming & Lukaszewicz Alcaraz 2018; Lukaszewicz Alcaraz & Stara 2020) means turning into silent and inert masses that behave implacably. The masses are a black hole that absorbs without giving back; their power lies in the desire for the "here and now", the "all and now", and information, instead of transforming mass into energy, produces even more mass (Baudrillard 1978). Thus, social places become empty spaces devoid of desire, containers of superficial transits, elements in which a human presence that does not produce and does not generate profit is disturbing unless it becomes itself a source of income, through welfare, or an element of a submerged and invisible niche.

The real crossing must be done together, with an intra- and intersubjective mobility that creates new readings of the contexts and generates more sustainable forms, starting from the design of community themes in which communication has spaces and times to pause and generate reflection. The educational horizon that can be pursued is that of a critique of *homo videns* (Sartori 1998), in close connection with the countless functions of the media, including a different approach to the construction of accessible knowledge with which to dialogue responsibly.

It is therefore appropriate to analyse human mobility in real and virtual environments (not intended in a dichotomous sense), also starting from the

multi-modalities with which the tools of visual communication capture our attention, effectively conveying their message. In this sense, it is useful to develop a reflection on visual communication from an anthropological point of view, investigating the object-commodity with the same modalities generally reserved for people, identifying a strategic dimension in which power and conflict, tradition and change, and homologation and syncretism are concentrated (Canevacci 2001).

## From the scent of time to the density of ties

The present time, lived in haste, quickly becomes a past without sediment. Caught up in the anxiety of reproducing daily survival processes, we lose sight of the essence of existence, which needs slower rhythms not dictated by hyper-productivity and successful performance. We are inevitably consumed by consumption itself; human identity is disintegrated, proceduralized, reduced to activities to be performed in a contemporary society that demands adaptation, homologation, and adherence to the model of having more.

One way of becoming critically aware is to linger, opening oneself up to the possibility of taking a long look at the world so as to give time back its permanent slowness, which smacks of remembrance and memory. The gaze immediately calls to mind the posture we assume in the world and about which we will have to be more aware, even from an educational point of view, to understand which horizons of meaning we are drawing and which paths of reciprocity we are following.

If we do not listen attentively, and for a long time, to the contexts in which we pass, we will not be able to grasp the trajectories that each subject carries out individually, adapting to or moving away from social standardization. The first movement to make is towards ourselves, as agents of transformation and subjects capable of deconstructing the static nature of concepts, representations and categories portrayed in striking images that do not impact the quality of relationships or discourage the co-construction of knowledge.

Stopping, waiting, lingering, moving slowly, in small steps, being willing to go back, retracing one's steps, diverging into other trajectories, lengthening one's stride, finding shortcuts, going around the roundabout twice to decide where to go... these are not just physical movements but the call for questioning human mobility, the ability to lose oneself in order to find oneself again, the possibility of pausing in the discovery of oneself in unfamiliar spaces (Deluigi 2020).

The image poetically described by Byung-Chul Han (2017) brings to mind the enchantment of lingering so that things reveal their beauty and essence, settling in time. The author tells of the incense clock of ancient China (*hsiang yin*, 香鐘, 香钟, literally, "perfume seal" or "fragrance clock")

(Photo 7), which measures time with the burning of a fragrant incense seal. At the end, a special remnant is left, an aroma that fills space, that lingers in the air in a suspended and dense moment that opens up to happiness. In this way we return to giving a form, a value, a weight to time, stimulating the perception of the senses and the density of a memory that takes on non-linear and geometric forms, like those of analogue or digital clocks. Surplus over measurement; meaning over necessity; emotional value over efficiency; personal meaning over common logic.



Photo 7. Hsiang yin, 香鐘, 香钟

The dynamism of interactions takes on a variety of irregular forms in immersive experiences and new trajectories of discovery of self and others in the contexts in which we move. Among the images that catch our attention and that lead us on paths that have already been designed, we can still look for and create spaces in which we can go beyond uniformity and absolute rationalization in favour of different interpretations that enhance interdependent subjectivities.

The density of the bonds in which we are involved, although always precarious and unstable, calls for the possibility of placing uncertain situations alongside the search for stimuli and creative energy. The crossing of borders, thresholds, and frontiers (geographical and relational) constantly challenges our glossy certainties and invites us to reformulate thoughts and languages that know how to linger, open up to the unprecedented, and create scenarios of cultural and social participation. The heterogeneity of the experiences in which we are guests also brings us back to the continuous challenge of intensely living the time available in an attempt to generate habitable and hospitable places. Finally, the narrative modalities that we will choose to describe the complexity of these processes will allow for dialogical reflections and scenarios of creative action whose reverberations will become an orientation for new and different inter-human mobilities.

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- 4. *Human icons*: Stream
- 5. Gali May Lucas, *Absorbed by Light*, Amsterdam 2018: <http://karolinehinz.com/project/absorbed-by-light-iii/> - Photo credit: Richard Rigby.
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