Kaiero Claver, Ainhoa

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Technological fiction, recorded time and 'replicants' in the concerts of Laurie Anderson

Ainhoa Kaiero Claver

Abstract
Laurie Anderson's multimedia performances explore the impact of technology on memory and the construction of both individual and collective identity. Her stories and songs are thus related to other contemporary genres such as postmodern fiction and Cyber-punk. Her work analyses the new modes of perception which use technology and which locate the human being between the moment of the lived experience and the moment of recording, that is to say, in a virtual time in which the simultaneous presence and absence of events are mixed. All this helps us reflect on the loss of the present subject, of self experience, in the era of information and communication.

Keywords: technological fiction- postmodern fiction –narrative identity-enunciative narratology and musicology- minimal electronic music.

1. Introduction
Since her first works from the 1970s', Laurie Anderson has been exploring the experience of time within a society defined by the continuous register of events. What kind of apprehension of our historical present does the mass media offer? The written press and the audio-visual medias (television, radio, Internet) are the mechanisms that set in motion a dynamic (and even accelerated) circuit of registered and reproduced events. The information era is characterized by this possibility of access and knowledge of the most infinitesimal events grounded anywhere on the planet. And nevertheless, as Laurie Anderson points out, in this city where thousands of stories and histories take place daily, nobody can really remember exactly which one was theirs.

When Anderson transfers the practice of the record from the public domain to the private one, trying to document her own life through visual (such as photos) and/or written extracts, it seems to reflect this same sense of memory loss and of inability of self-apprehension. In her diary October 1972 [1], the events documented in a sequence for every day of the calendar resemble, following the simile established by the "replicant" of Blade Runner (1982), a torrent of moments lost in time like tears in the rain. The well-known pronouncement of the "replicant" ("all these moments will be lost in time, like tears in the rain") shows indeed the symptom of an information society in which human beings experience increasing difficulties to catch their presence in the course of events. It seems that the time of the record shaped by technology favors the dissolution of the present consciousness and of its prolongation by resorting to memory.

The dislocation of the present time through the use of technology, or similarly, the displacement of the time of the lived experience (Bergson's durée) by the time of the record, constitutes one of the most important phenomena of our contemporary high-tech societies. As such, this experience has been appropriated and reflected for numerous decades by the postmodern artistic manifestations: from the technological fictions popularized by cinema (Blade Runner among others), to the expressions linked to the avant-garde such as postmodern literature meta-fictions, performance art or minimal electronic music. All these modalities gather in Laurie Anderson's multimedia performances to compose a meditation on the loss of a present "I" experience in the era of information and communication technologies.

2. This is the Time/ And this is the record of the Time
In 1975, following a set of autobiographical works, Laurie Anderson produces Wind Book [2]. This is a book whose pages move under the impulse of lateral airflows emitted by an electrical motor. The book portrays in sequential pages different activities from her artistic life: walking from one corner of the concert hall to another, recording her voice, dancing and visualizing images. The book is an installation, in which the record and the impact of the technologies are thus totally integrated. The book is a simple representation of the "replicant" pronouncement: all these moments will be lost in time, like tears in the rain.

In the case of Laurie Anderson, the "replicant" is not a simple way to express the loss of identity, but a perfect representation of the perceived life dedicated to music. The book becomes a way to disseminate the music that she composed and to preserve the memory of the many living moments that she has experienced. The book is a memory sculpture, it preserves a moment of personal and collective history. It is an enunciation of the present subject, and of the subjectivity of the human being in the era of information and communication.
This continuous register (by means of photos, videos, etc.) of the present moment has become a more and more habitual practice of our daily life. The “recording obsession” marks the entrance in a new way of perception that is located between the moment of the lived experience and the moment of the record, in an interstice between presence and absence that causes the emergence of temporary paradoxes. In Wind Book, Laurie Anderson indicates the appearance of these contradictions through the following affirmation: “I was waiting for something… that had already happened” [3]. The paradox arises in the form of a present moment that is revealed as already unfolded, that is, like an absent or vanished past.

In the pages of the book, and since the folios used are transparent, each present image is superimposed on the shadow of other images registered in the preceding and later pages. So that, on the same page, one can contemplate simultaneously where she was, where she is and where Laurie will successively be. Thanks to this overlap, the current figure appears off center in a succession of both past and future shadows. The present moment crumbles thus due to its interpenetration with other moments that are absent or to come. In the last instance, this present image ends up revealing itself as the trace of all these faded moments. Far from being a fulfilling experience, the image that we see “now” manifests itself as the sign of all these absences. Or, as it is pointed out by Laurie Anderson, what we believe to be living in the present is only the register of something to come… that has already happened.

This sensation that the live present time is in fact a registered time is a central topic throughout the artistic career of Laurie Anderson. The own artist summarizes it under the sentence: “This is the Time. And this is the record of the Time” [4] Certainly, the issue is under consideration by many contemporary narrative experiments both in postmodern literature and in certain popular adaptations in current TV series (Lost or Flashforwards). This issue explores the impact of recording technologies on our daily life.

Nowadays the possibility of recording our daily life (thanks to the popularity of digital cameras) makes it possible to stop living in the present moment and to experience it as the past of a future moment (when we will visualize the image). The perception of the present is de-centered in the direction of a future where we will contemplate this same moment as registered and already been. The “Now” is reified as an encoded and past image in a time that still hasn’t occurred. Consider this paradox: when the present is projected as an image of the past (say, a picture) within a time period that does not yet exist, making thus the present moment dependent on a speculative future, present events become completely de-materialized as something ghostly or hypothetical, leading one to possibly ask herself: Did that really happen? The present time dissolves in a virtual and fictitious dream time.

Inverse to this de-materialization of the present in a hypothetical past [5] current medias submerge us continuously in simulacrum of presence when exhibiting, as if they were present events (news, talk-shows, etc.), recorded events that in fact happened at some other time. In this case, what a person believed to be living in the present comes to reveal itself as a delayed broadcast. And the present of the viewer appears as the hypothetical (future) projection of an event that was produced and recorded in the past [6]. Whether through the experience of a simulated present or through the dreamlike perception (as hypothetical past) of a moment that actually occurs right now, the truth is that both technological phenomena reflect a new mode of temporality: the virtual time. The virtual time characteristic of our Information Age is the interstice in which the time of the lived experience and the time of the register are confused. At a time where presence and absence merge, resulting in the emergence of both a present absence (Virtual Reality) and a present that is experienced as a loss (as an absence).

3. The “replicant” and the loss of the “logo-phonocentrism”

Technology can cause, as we have seen, a dislocation of the experience of the “Now” and, therefore, can be the source of the lack of one’s self-apprehension as present consciousness. In other words, the lack of self-apprehension as present consciousness. In other words, technology can generate the feeling of self-alienation or estrangement.

In a performance from a show exhibited in the Artists Space of New York in 1974 entitled As: If [7], Laurie Anderson undertakes a de-construction of the feeling of a present self through the launching of a technological device. In a similar way to the development of a minimal music process, Anderson superimposes with a slight lag a sentence pronounced by a live performer with the same sentence registered and reproduced by a recording tape. “The real” time and the time of the record are overlapped, leading to a dislocation of the present time through its echo [8] and, consequently, to a de-centering of the meaning of the sentence.

PERFORMER SPEAKS OUT OF SYNCH WITH PRE-RECORDED VOICE.

We talked about simultaneously. He said, now
Tape: We talked about simultaneously. He said, now
think about what you’re saying and just
think about what you’re saying and just
say it. But I always seemed to be a little
say it. But I always seemed to be a little
in front of or behind the words. It was
in front of or behind the words. It was
hard to synchronize. Words would surface,
hard to synchronize. Words would surface,
the flow would go on, then other words would
My violin teacher told me the same thing. Concentrate on the sound, hear it, play it, all at once. (Anderson 1994: 31)

The slight mismatch that takes place between speech and the sonorous reflection ends up de-centering our attention from the meaning of the words. Perception shifts outside the meaning and what is really experienced is that sliding of signifiers referred to by the text (reference, on the other hand, grasped only when we devote ourselves to read one of the lines). That is to say, what is put forward is the staging of the material words in movement or a dramatization of the sign. Both the performer and the auditor that identifies with her, experience an estrangement concerning the words' meaning and, consequently, the feeling that she's not actually present in the speech she produces. The sense of not being present in the words that one pronounces causes a "slight" restlessness.

The appearance of this restless estrangement is due to the dissociation between the speech materiality (level of the signifier) and the level of thought or the sense. In short, to a de-construction, of the "logo-phonocentrism" which, according to Derrida, has chaired the feeling of a "self" in Western culture the author characterizes "logo-phonocentrism" as the impression we have due to the experience of hearing ourselves speak from within, of an indivisible fusion between voice (speech) and thought (logos), and thus of a total presence and transparency in our utterances. The rupture of this bond, favored as we will see later by the emergence of writing and technology, causes the dissociation of two instances that in speech appear irremediably united: the speaker or person who just speaks and the person who expresses his thought. This disconnection generates the disturbing possibility of conceiving a speaker without logos (a "replicant"), as well as an enunciator that does not need the speech to transmit his thought (telepathy).

Note that this phenomenon of the breakup between speech and thought is a recurrent topic both in postmodern meta-fiction and in technological fiction. This dissociation allows us to imagine "aberrant" possibilities such as the effect of feeling that my voice actually reproduces the thoughts of another person. The alienation of being absent from the words that one pronounces give rise to the famous statement by William Burroughs, later taken up again by Laurie Anderson, that language (as manifestation of thought) is a virus coming from outer space. In other words, the words that are escaping my mouth and with which I do not feel a bond in the present are the foreign particles of a disease that is orally transmitted.

This status of marginality concerning the enunciated thoughts is characteristic of both the "replicant" or the talking machine and the fictional character. As stated by Brian McHale (1987), postmodern meta-fiction (as a fiction that analyzes the constructive resources of fiction itself) offers numerous examples on the problematic condition of a literary character that lacks a real "I". In these literary works, the character appears assaulted by an ontological uncertainty when he discovers his lack of presence in the words he utters and starts suspecting that these words derive, presumably, from some other(s) to whom he has no access (a narrator? the author?). Technological fiction, on the other hand, portrays the status of the "replicant" or the human appearance machine. The "replicant" starts doubting his own subjectivity when he discovers that his thoughts and emotions have been programmed and, consequently, begins to doubt his own presence and security in his words. In both cases, we are assaulted by the same question without an answer: Who is the person responsible for these words? Who says them?

The ontological uncertainty distinctive of fictional beings and talking machines takes place through the dislocation of a unitary VOICE that combines speech and thought and contributes to the emergence of the feeling of a present "I". As we have previously said, the rupture of the "logo-phonocentrism" implies the split of that unitary Voice in different voices: the external voice of the speech and the voice of the internal thought (logos or consciousness). This ramification that separates the speaker from the enunciator is clearly shown in fiction, where it is reproduced at each narrative level: the words of the character (fictitious speaker) could in fact be due to a narrator (enunciator), and those of the latter (as fictitious speaker) to a hypothetical external author of the fiction (enunciator). The "voice" of the character, like that of the "replicants", is decomposed in POLYPHONY of voices (character, narrator, author, programer, etc.). Thus, as Laurie Anderson affirms concerning her performances, there comes a point where one no longer knows WHO is actually expressing herself. In this pure gibberish of intermediary speakers the origin of the enunciation (the presence of a logos) seems to lose itself definitively. In the field of technology, the absence of a unitary and present voice and its ramification in a polyphony of de-centered voices is clearly reflected in that neutral sonority, constituted by a plurality of accumulated voices, which characterizes machines. The inability to discern the presence of a WHO that stands behind the voice of a machine or a fictitious character is, on the other hand, quite frightening.

The ontological instability or opalescence shown by the fictional characters and the "replicants" is related to its status as textual beings. The textual statements are not tied intimately to the circumference of the oral utterances. The mobilization of the language in the speech occurs around the presence of an embodied speaker, whereas in the case of writing, there is only a textual voice that lacks an anchor in the present experience. The temporality of this voice of the register or the writing is necessarily the mode of the absence. As a textual voice, a machine lacks a dimension of the "now" and, therefore, lacks the capacity of a present consciousness. The textual voice of a machine or a character is a voice without presence or even the voice of a non-person. It is the impersonal and polyhonic voice (without logos or present consciousness) which intimidates us in the terror genre.
In 1966, the linguist Émile Benveniste explored in his theory of enunciation the way a subject position is constructed in speech. According to this author, the language has a series of empty forms (the shifter: from personal pronouns such as “I”, “you”, etc. to space-temporary terms such as “here/there” or “now/then”) that each speaker can appropriate and set in motion around him at a particular given time. Each speaker enters language as a presence, assuming the position of an “I-here-now” who marks the point of reference for the semantic articulation of the utterance: for example, the term “after” refers to a later time from “the now” or present of the speaker who has assumed the speech. This practice of the language always materializes thanks to the presence of an embodied speaker: we are in the scope of the speech practice as a performative dimension through which actions are produced (speech acts).

In an article published in the same year (“Les relations de temps dans le verbe français”. Benveniste 1966: 237-250), Benveniste established a clear difference between two different types of enunciations: the discursive enunciation tied to the speech and the historical or narrative enunciation (récit) more closely related to writing (domain of the document or the register). If the former adhered to this active setting in motion of the language by an embodied speaker, the latter seemed to assume the dimension of a textual voice devoid of presence. If it were a mere act of reporting. The discursive voice is for Benveniste the voice of a first present person (an “I” as a concrete speaker). The narrative (récit) voice, on the contrary, is in the verbal form of the third person in the past and is equated, therefore, with an absence or a non-person. Hence, Benveniste claimed that in this enunciated form which he associated to the written form there is actually no narrator or speaker. The historical enunciation, as textual voice of the document, implies that there is NOBODY (the third person in the past as zero mark) that is speaking. The contrast between these two types of enunciations could be outlined in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCOURSE</th>
<th>HISTORY/NARRATIVE or STORY (RÉCIT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPEECH</td>
<td>REGISTRATION OR WRITING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESENCE</td>
<td>PAST/ABSENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I&quot;</td>
<td>NON-PERSON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the last decades, the division established by Benveniste has led to a debate in the field of narratology. The controversy is focused indeed on the statute of the narrative voice in fiction. Should we understand it as the voice of a textual non-person? Or should we postulate instead the voice of a first person narrator? To this last tendency adhere, in Sylvie Patron’s opinion (2006), those narratologists who try to assimilate the fictional narrative to a scheme of oral communication.

These authors start out with the model of the factual narratives (whether historical or autobiographical) where a concrete speaker tells a story which has actually occurred. In the factual narratives we have two clearly distinct dimensions: a narrated past content (récit or story) and an act of telling that is made in the present (speech). This same scheme is transferred into the field of written fiction by postulating, on the one hand, a narrated story, and secondly, the necessary existence of a narrator telling it in the present. This time, however, the narrator of a fictitious text is not a particular speaker (the author), but a “virtual” orator located outside of space and time (in the fictional “beyond”). The enunciating voice of the written fiction appears as an empty form (a shifter): the position of a subject or a first person “I-here-now” that could be undertaken by different speakers. For these authors, the voice that narrates the fiction, whether it appears explicitly or not in first person, comprehends the perspective of a disembodied “present” consciousness susceptible of being appropriated and animated by diverse embodied individuals.

This narrative voice of a more abstract nature would be concretely incarnated through its revitalization in the present of the reader or performer that assumes the role of telling stories on the stage. Thus, in this model the written fiction is always seen as intended to be performed in oral speech. What the reader or performer do is the exercise of reciting as the present action of telling a registered story. To recite implies, in a certain way, to perform or to act the narrative voice of the story and, therefore, a sort of “game” in which the speaker identifies herself with this voice and assimilates it to her present, while maintaining a certain distance from it as a voice that is deployed in another time and space (the “once upon a time” of fiction).

This theoretical model postulates a communion with a present consciousness (the enunciating voice of a logos) that provides transparent access to the narrated story. Postmodern meta-fiction, nevertheless, questions this present consciousness (this “I”) as the center of discourse that tells a story. As pointed out by Kramer (1990), the appearance of “narrative effects” in literary fiction gives priority to the discourse or the activity of the narrative voice, interfering and thus making difficult our access to the events that happen in the fable. In postmodern works this narrating activity is constantly questioned, emphasizing the incapacity that this voice has to close the representation of the story and to apprehend itself as a subjective consciousness. The narrative voice breaks down and shows its own impotence as a textual exercise devoid of any presence.

The procedure demonstrates the immanence of the two levels separated by factual narratives: the story, and the narrating voice and act of narrating, are effects of the same process of writing. There is no position of a transcendental subject that is beyond the world of the narrated story. The story and the consciousness that tells it are product, shadow or effect of a material writing of words. As in that suggestive image of The Matrix (1999), what is actually “present” is this scene displayed by the movement of falling signs. Or similarly, both the story and the discourse that describes it are programmed within a textual game devoid of any presence. The present speech is revealed, in the end, as a register made in an anonymous and passive voice (the non-person).
storyteller in first person, it is only as an internal shadow to the fictional world created by the writing. As we can see, this theoretical model is located in an internal perspective to the text, from which it is impossible to leave the sign and reach a presence (the author, as the programmer of the writing, appears here as a radical and inaccessible externality). As stated by Sylvie Patrón (2006: 130), writing, as impersonal textual voice or zero mark, is the weapon that allows an author to camouflage himself and get rid of the responsibility of being the enunciator of a narrative. According to this conception, in the world of fiction the question of who narrates or who enunciates can never be replied. There is no WHO, only a textual voice without consciousness (logos).

In conclusion, the first of the theories assimilates all narrative voice, even the passive voice in the third person, to a first person voice or a “virtual” subject position that could be accomplished by the real (the performer) or imagined (the reader) speech of a speaker. As a result, in the act of RECITING the registered voice is re-integrated into the live-speech dimension. In the second theory, the procedure is projected in reverse. That is to say, any narrative voice, although it appears in a first person, is understood as the manifestation of the writing’s voice marked by the impersonality and the absence (the third “non-person” in the past as zero mark). The appearance of a narrating voice and activity in the text is created then as a simulacrum caused by the mobilization (bringing to life) of words already registered. In fiction, all “present” speech ends up actually revealing itself as a re-produced story (past) [22].

The confrontation between these two models of written fiction that privilege, on the one hand, the mode of discourse and, reasonably, a clear testimony of a different cultural perception about writing. The former integrates the writing conception into an oral culture through the use of performance. From this point of view, the writing would be born and would be extended through oral performance. The latter, however, points at the emergency of an oral practice inserted in the writing system. We could affirm, in this regard, that this theory reflects the deep transformation caused by the development of information and communication technologies. These technologies have given birth to a new type of oral practice based on the register of writing, which is reflected both in the simulacrum of present time conversations projected by the media, as well as in the numerous machines that “speak” to us. Today’s technology has been able to project a “speech” originated from a register without a subject, that is to say, to set in motion and perform discursively a pure writing. Laurie Anderson’s performances adhere to this second conception and analyze the advent of this new culture of the written oral practice that fuses the mode of presence (speech) with the mode of absence (register). The empire of the presence is displaced thus by the new mixed modality of an absent-presence or a virtual reality.

5. Ventriloquists and puppets, electronic masks, screens and games of light and shadow: the de-materialization of Laurie Anderson’s presence

Laurie Anderson’s multimedia performances bring postmodern meta-fiction’s problems onto the stage. Anderson has defined herself as a story-teller. Her performance activity would indeed consist of this oral act of narrating a past story in the present.

As in literary meta-fictions, Laurie Anderson’s performances foreground the narrating activity, eclipsing and even interfering, occasionally, the understanding of a narrated story. This foregrounding of the narrative discourse is an aspect that ties her work closely to performance art. This new modality of theater rejects the production of a previous story to focus only on the dimension of the present performance or speech [23]. Laurie Anderson’s performances, in a similar way, often project a plane of immanence where the only narrated story is how a story is told. This operation ends up implying paradoxically, as happened in postmodern fiction, a transferring to the past of the present of the speech: the speech act (present) appears as narrated (past). Once again, the present time merges with the absent past of the narrative or register.

In her performances, Laurie Anderson dislocates her narrator’s presence; her discursive performance is transferred from the present tense in first person to the absent past tense of the non-person. The goal is not to perform a narrative voice, but to virtualize her own presence and to project her live performance within a fictional universe. For this aim she uses both classic tactics from theatrical fiction (masks, puppets, theater of shadows, etc.), and current technological procedures (electronic masks, cinema, etc.). We find here a close association between the technological time of the record and the entry in a suspended fictional world outside time and space (outside the “here-and-now” of a concrete speaker). One may even say that, in this de-construction of the present position of discourse, Laurie Anderson’s electronic performances reflect features both from the postmodern meta-fictions (as a self-reflective exercise on the form of discourse in fiction), as much as from the cyberpunk technological fictions (as exponents, at the level of the content, of a present consciousness’s erosion in the technological universe).

This dismantling of the discourse’s presence operates at the level of body and gesture, on the one hand, and of the voice projected in form of verbal speech or song, on the other. As we have said, Laurie Anderson dilutes her presence through the use of certain classic resources coming from the world of theater and from shows dedicated to illusionism (magicians, ventriloquist and puppets, optical effects, etc.). All the “tricks” and “illusions” are part of a long fiction and illusionism tradition which appears as a clear antecedent of other experiences later developed by technology.

The first of them, the simplest one, is the white and inexpressive theater mask that appears, linked to a character named Sharkey, on the tour “Mister Heartbreak” produced in 1984 [24]. The theater mask symbolizes indeed the zero mark of the non-person [25]. As in the case of writing’s neutral voice, the mask is the screen which is located between the real presence of the performer and the absence of the fictional character. The narrator’s real person is firstly dislocated by adopting this mark zero of the passive mask: her present speech appears to us as an impersonal voice located in the other time-other
This passage from the realm of reality to the realm of fiction facilitated by the mediation of this neutralizing mask, produces therefore a reversal of the starting point: if in the real world the person was present and the character absent, in the internal world of fiction located to the other side of the screen, the absence of the person is the one that makes possible the “presence” of a character. The fictitious condition of the character is made up of this combination between absence-presence, hence the unstable and opalescent ontological projection shared with the “replicant”. As we will see, Laurie Anderson illustrates this concept through the aid of visual technologies (cinema, mainly).

With the disappearance of her presence, the story-teller also erases her track as speaker. The words come now from the mask of the non-person and cut all bonds regarding a WHO responsible for the utterance. These words without origin (as it happened in the voice of writing) can later appear in the mouth of a character who acts as a fictitious speaker. What we observe then is a “replicant” or a character with no presence in some thoughts whose origin is lost. This dissociation between a hidden subject of utterance (absent) and an apparent subject of speech (fictitious presence) has been historically provided, as we previously noted following Sylvie Patron, thanks to the invention of writing. The “speech” of the technological avatars, as animated writing, would suppose another step in this direction. Nevertheless, the rupture between enunciator and speaker, made possible by writing and performed through technology, has a valuable precedent in the world of illusionism: the ventriloquist and the puppet, a universe that populates the imaginary of Laurie’s performances.[26]

The ventriloquist is that narrator who is able to dilute his presence as the source of speech, thanks to his power to utter with his mouth closed. Thus their words appear in the “fictitious speech” of an inanimate puppet. Laurie Anderson performs this same operation through the use of artisanal puppets or more sophisticated avatars created through the aid of technology. Her verbal and musical utterances are directly transferred to a human-like puppet (“Dummy”), a parrot-like electronic speech automaton or a masculine clone generated by the digital modification of her own image in video, among others. In the “Stories from the Nerve Bible” tour from 1992, for example, Anderson transferred her electronically manipulated voice to a small puppet called “Dummy” that had the same appearance as her and simulated the playing of a digitally processed violin[27]. While Laurie remained in the shadow, the spectator watched an inanimate avatar on stage simulating the playing of a live performance using the re-production of previously recorded synthetic sounds.

The operation undertaken in the case of the “audio-mask” (electronic alteration of her voice) is very similar. In a similar way to the theatrical mask, this audio mask serves Laurie to transform her present voice into the recorded and polyphonic speech of a machine. Technology makes possible the de-construction of a present self’s speech in a de-centered polyphony of voices that lacks any origin: it is the dead voice of the third person in past tense (the non-person) of the text or the register. Subsequently, and as the story progresses, this neutral speech (that Laurie Anderson displays as a masculine standard technological voice[28]) can be tinted with different colors (mainly through the contract in pitches) to mold different character avatars. Laurie does not transfer these voices to the inert figure of a puppet, but reproduces them through her own body. Thus, if in the first case the storyteller brought to life an inanimate body, in the second case Laurie appears as a medium whose organism is possessed by the dead voices of characters.

In this case, it is she who comes on stage as a puppet or a “replicant”. Her body is only a resonant box and her mouth an amplifier that serves to reproduce other’s words whose origin is unknown (there is no responsible subject in the anonymous voice of the writing). The connotation of a “speech” programmed by technology is further accentuated through the insertion of certain electronic devices in her mouth. In the video “O Superman”[29], as well as in other performances such as Home of the Brave, Laurie is transformed into a cyborg due to a neon light that radiates from the interior of her mouth when she moves her lips. Another technological experiment consists on the introduction of a small loudspeaker (from a pillow) in the mouth, to reproduce and to orally modulate pre-recorded sound[cf. Anderson 1994: 28]. These experiences illustrate literally that lack of presence or alienation from the words to which William Burroughs alluded: language appears here as an alien virus that programs our speech[30].

Technology offers Anderson the opportunity to remove both the presence of her voice and of her whole body. This effect occurs through the incorporation of other technologies different from audio-technologies such as cinema or video which are linked to the projected image. Since her first performances, Laurie has used the play of lights and shadows from films to evaporate her presence and enter fully into a fictional world. In a statement from the artist (Anderson 1994: 175) this electronic technology is associated with the discontinuous light of fire next to which ancestral histories had been told. Laurie hides her face in manifold of her performances, when she hides her body in the dark and she only illuminates certain parts (hands, mouth) through the light of a candle, or generally, of its electronic equivalent of a neon light[31]. Due to this “rudimentary” mechanism, Anderson is able to dissolve her presence and to reappear on the stage as a titillating image composed of shadow and light. This vision reminds us of the instable luminance with which Ridley Scott reflected the ghostly ontology of the “replicants” in Blade Runner.

Janet Kardon (1983: 21) notes that the use of black suits in some of their performances (as in American on the move (1979), which would later lead to her famous United States (1980-1983)) provides a certain invisibility, offering her the possibility to emerge as a disembodied voice that reproduces a text with passive neutrality. The white dress also characteristic of some of her performances, on the other hand, serves as screen on which to project images[32]. This affirmation has to be taken literally, since from the beginning of her career Laurie has shown an interest in projecting video images on three-dimensional volumes. This is the case, for example, of At the Shrink’s (cf. Anderson 1994: 84), an early work from 1975 where a little mud figure appears covered by a video image of Laurie at the psychologist, creating a sort of false hologram with sound. The idea of
screen space could be considered as a proto-virtual reality test. The goal is to dissolve the performer’s presence through her diffraction within a fictional world composed of shadows and lights. The dematerialization of the human body is undertaken, on the one hand, through the projection of its shadow (absence) on a screen. Laurie Anderson reuses here a classic technique of shadow puppetry when casting her shadow or the shadow of other musical performers upon a screen located at the back of the stage (cf. Anderson 1994: 116). In other performances, as in the case of the performance For Instants (cf. Anderson 1994: 112-113) made at the early date of 1976, Laurie Anderson is positioned between the background screen and the light projector, intercepting the emitted image. The corporeality of her figure dissolves in a double diffraacted image: on the one hand, the black silhouette (absence) outlined against the background screen, on the other, the light image (presence) that is projected upon her figure. This sensory penetration within the filmic space is usually reinforced by the scenarios projected by many of the slides, whose diagonal disposition simulates the prolongation of the scenic space (cf. Anderson 1994: 193-195).

The principle found in this dislocation of Anderson’s presence is very similar to that prevalent in the case of the mask. In both of them there is a cancellation of the performer’s presence (shadow) and an overprint of a character’s image on a mask or screen. Both in the case of the theatrical mask and in the one of the cinema screen, the character is constructed by a combination of the absence of a person (the negative or reverse of a photo) and the presence of an image. The character is a being framed with shadow and light, absence and presence: it starts from the emptiness left by a person to whom the spectral appearance of a luminous image is superimposed. To a certain extent, this is what Laurie Anderson reveals with the staging of the illusionism of cinema or photography.

This transition from the performer’s presence to the opalescent condition of light and shade, presence-absence of the image, symbolizes the entrance into a fictional world. But beyond that it is also associated with humans’ penetration into a new virtual universe unfolded through the information and communication technologies (ICT). Anderson seems to point to this in the performance “Lower Mathematics” [33] from Home of the Brave (1986). Hidden behind a white mask and the neutral and polyphonic voice of an audio mask, Laurie explains the contrast between the numbers 0 and 1. The number 0 represents the void of nothingness, which, in social terms, is equated with a non-person devoid of body and presence (“a nobody, a has-been”, Anderson 1994: 135). The number 1 symbolizes the presence and connotes the visibility of social success (“to be number one” Anderson 1994: 135).

Anderson proposes to overcome the primacy of the presence’s order due to our entry in a new digital era based on the combination of 0 (absence) and 1 (presence). One might even say that this new writing regime unfolded by the computer-machine requires the departure point O (mark zero) to register presences or ones above. The time of the register or the writing moves away from the present experience to the emergent new modality of virtual time. Whereupon someone enters this age he/she has to dilute her presence (1) to reappear as an image, sign or trace “0+1”. And thus become another ghost of the network.

6. The present of the musical voice/ the past of the narrative voice

Laurie Anderson’s work as performer not only lies in telling stories. On most occasions, she also sings. In her performances, narrated stories, sung stories and lyrical songs are linked together. The boundaries between both modalities, narration and song, can be somewhat blurred. Even the mere recitation without any intonation of a story is usually accompanied by some kind of sound environment.

But is there any difference between telling a story and singing? According to Carolyn Abbate and Lawrence Kramer, not only is there a definite difference, it is also deeply profound. Both musicologists follow Benveniste when establishing a clear separation between narrative (récit) and discourse [34]. For them, music would be located on the side of a present speech and would fall, consequently, in the antipodal side of that passive and neutral voice (non-person) of the document or the register. Kramer (1990: 185) connects music with the lyrical genre as a discursive manifestation of a present “I” that expresses itself, opposing both artistic modalities to the narrative genre.

Both Kramer (1992) and Carolyn Abbate (1991) seem to agree that music is a speech attached to the present tense. Hence this lyrical voice, this subjective “I” that expresses and unfolds her action in the present, cannot be equated with a narrative voice. Music is incapable of telling a story by itself. Because if music narrated, its voice should be compared with a recount in the third person of the past tense (absence of the non-person) that exposes a sequence of events already occurred. And music can be only pronounced in the present tense of the first person (the “I-here-now”) and perform the events at the very moment in which they occur. From this point of view, music can only act (speech) and not narrate (récit). Both musicologists take up again, partially, the dichotomy established by Plato between the mimesis (to perform an action in the present) and the narration (to report an occurred action). In other words, according to these authors music is intimately tied to the mode of presence and cannot speak in the past tense [35]. The exception to this rule would cause, as we shall see later, a complete de-construction of the musical voice.

Although music cannot narrate or speak in the past tense, it has been traditionally used to accompany narrations (cf. Kramer 1995: 111-113). We should understand, therefore, that stories have not been historically read off events by a passive voice, but that this voice has generally always been animated and performed. It is at this point where we find again that other narratological model that defended the possibility of a narrative voice in first person. Following this approach, we would then speak of two different levels: the level of the narrated fable (as utterance in a passive voice) and the level of the voice that tells us “now” this story (as discourse or present voice of the speech).

This implies a transfer from the notion of récit or report in a passive voice, to the one of RECITING as the present action of telling a story that exerts a live voice.
performed in songs (that is to say, in poetry and music) from time immemorial. Music has served in this sense to take this decisive step from the report to the reciting. This is an aspect that we can also verify nowadays in the case of cinema’s music, which often exerts the function of a voice over that presents the story (counterbalancing therefore the absence of a narrating voice in film sequences). Whether we understand this living narrating voice as a potentially already contained in the voice in third person of the story (as claimed by the model that approaches story to the acting of an oral performance), whether it is regarded as a mere compensatory supplement (as seems to affirm Lawrence Kramer, 1995: 111), the fact is that music serves to express this present consciousness that tells a story. The voice of a first-person narrator is materialized through the action of a performer (usually the song’s author) while the auditor internalizes this voice by identifying with it.

How is this subjective perspective of discourse in music produced? According to musicologists such as Kramer, Cumming or Cone, all musical compositions contain the construction of a virtual “I”, that is to say, the empty position of a subject that is brought into the performance through the presence of a concrete speaker. Cone (1974) names this subjective perspective the musical VOICE and identifies it with a dramatic character which is acted by a performer. This consciousness or subjective intelligence corresponds, in Cone’s opinion, to the composer’s voice. According to this argument, the piece’s creator would in the first place make a speech act constructing a dramatic character which is acted by a performer. This consciousness or subjective intelligence corresponds, in Cone’s opinion, to the composer’s voice. According to Cumming describes through the voices’ conduction (Ursatz) of a Schenkerian Analysis, has a symbolic function only recognizable by convention. This conduct of voices is a sort of structural plot (a kind of Greimas’ model of agents) that guides our interpretation of the directionality, purpose and meaning of the sonorous gestures.

Cumming, in fact, goes further, trying to describe how this sense of a subjectivity or “musical person” through sonorous signs is specifically built. She points to the existence of an indexical function of the sign by which the attributes of the instrumental timbre (attacks, vibratos, etc.) refers to its origin in the body and the physical activity that produced it and by extension acquires a certain natural “vocal quality”. The sensuality of violin’s timbre is appreciated as a sign of vocal quality that is compared in some way to human subjectivity. The melodic figure, as musical sign, has also an iconic function that guides our interpretation of the directionality, purpose and meaning of the sonorous gestures.

The synthesis of the vocal body (timbre), the emotive gesture (melodic figure) and the volitional agency (voice conduction) composes, according to Cumming, a figure or “musical person”. In Kramer’s opinion (2001), this virtual character constructed by the text represents in addition the cultural ideal of a normative subjectivity (“the Big Other”). The auditor who takes this place learns and internalizes certain cultural forms of feeling and experiencing emotions. Music therefore constitutes one of the most important tools of acculturation aimed at structuring an individual’s subjectivity. Of course, as Kramer says, in listening there is always a particular appropriation where the auditor simultaneously identifies with and deviates from the model.

In musical practice, however, there are also certain operations that contribute to the de-construction of this lyrical and personal voice. According to Kramer (1990: 183-189), this subversive strategy is produced by introducing some “narrative effects” in the music. As we noted previously, the “narrative effects” in literature are those which emphasize the level of the narrative voice to show that this present consciousness is only the illusion generated by the anonymous textual exercise of writing. According to Kramer this same play could be transferred to the musical field: the goal would be to show that the voice that challenges us in musical discourse doesn’t have a true presence and is only a fiction programmed by a text.

How is this de-construction of the subjective self, present in a musical performance, produced? According to Carolyn Abbate (1991: 3-29), this occurs by a dissociation of the performer’s physical voice (39) from the level of expression. The voice of a musical recital is, generally, perceived as a unitary VOICE that combines expression (logos) and physical projection (speech level). When we listen to an improvised performance, the musical voice emitted by the performer is taken as an expression that comes from him. In the case of a musician who performs another person’s piece, we understand that although the expressive voice comes originally from a composer, this one is assimilated and reanimated through the subjectivity of the performer located on the stage. The musical expression that we hear, therefore, is identified simultaneously with the subjectivity of the composer and the “I” of the performer.

The de-construction practice proposed by Abbate lies in dividing this “unique” voice in a polyphony of voices by separating the levels of utterance (expressive voice) and speech (physical voice). The singer or performer’s activity would be then understood from the exclusive level of the material signifier, as a physical voice without logos. Following this perspective, the performer is no longer a person who assimilates and performs from within an expressive voice, but rather a sort of “replicant” that vocalizes other people’s emotions without feeling himself present in them. To whom then does the expressive...
“replicant” that reproduces a registered text and projects the simulacrum of an “I” which expresses himself. Abbate even emphasizes the frightening character of this vision: the musical voice inflicts on us a physical impact without revealing a responsible subject behind. What we perceive is not a presence, but the incarnation of a sign (or of an absence).

If on a previous occasion we spoke of the performing act as the passage from the register to reciting, at this moment we see the opposite operation, that is, the demonstration that this concert or musical discourse is in fact a registered and reproduced act. Whereupon, the musical voice would no longer be contemplated as the living expression of a present subject (the performer) and would instead be conceived as the emission of a passive and unknown voice who relates or reproduces occurred events. How to perform this reconversion of the singer’s subjective voice in the singer’s objective voice of the register? How can it be shown that the present musical performance is only a past and reproduced report? Once again Laurie Anderson uses technology to make music speak in a past tense with a neutral and impersonal voice.

7. De-centering the musical present: minimal and electronic technology

A usual scene in her performances is to see Anderson playing a violin solo or singing a song on stage. Following a traditional framework of understanding (inherited from the romantic tradition), we would say that it is Laurie Anderson’s subjectivity that is expressed in the poems and songs she performs. That both in the song poetry and in the purely instrumental pieces, it is always the inner voice of the artist that is manifested. The technological devices which Anderson puts into play, nevertheless, aim at de-centering the presence of this lyrical and musical subjective voice.

The first operation undertaken was the technological reconversion of the “star” instrument in her performances: the violin. The violin, the romantic instrument par excellence, has always been associated by its timbre to the human voice and, consequently, used as a subject’s musical expression vehicle. All these qualities are mentioned by the artist when exposing her valuation of the instrument:

“For me, the violin is the perfect alter ego. It is the instrument closest to the human voice, the feminine human voice.” (...) “I like the violin because it is a romantic instrument and because you can transport it and walk around with him.” (Anderson 1994: 33)

The association between the sonority of the instrument and her subjective voice is evident in these affirmations. Anderson, however, technologically reconstructs the violin’s body transforming it from an acoustic instrument into an electronic one. As in the case of the cyborg where the technological prostheses alter the human body’s morphology, the instrument’s nature is thus completely modified.

The scope of these transformations, however, goes beyond a mere alteration of its morphology and sonority. From an acoustic instrument that produces a musical “live” speech, the violin starts to be conceived as a sort of sound reproduction apparatus. The manipulations exerted by the artist in this regard on the instrument are numerous. [40] We could mention, among others, the “viophonograph”: a violin in which the artist mounts a turntable on the body and incorporates a stereo needle in the bow; the “tape bow violin”, an instrument which adds a tape player on the bridge and a prerecorded magnetic tape (with sounds and phrases that Laurie plays in both directions [41]) where the bow bristles should be; and finally, a digital violin that plays sounds recorded and saved in an electronic system.

By using these devices, Laurie Anderson de-constructs the subjective voice emitted presumably by the violin’s body. The artist operates a radical dissociation of the expressive voice from the instrument’s body. The violin is detached from its own acoustic sonority and begins to emit prerecorded voices of an entirely different nature: other instruments - “human speech”. In other words, the violin’s body is alienated from its own voice and possessed by OTHER voices. Dispossessed of its “subjective” voice, the instrument reappears as a programmed “replicant” that reproduces the speech of others. The musical speech that is emitted in the present ends up revealing itself as a reproduced registration (récit). And the expressive voice that emanates from the violin reveals itself as the passive and impersonal voice of a sound inscription.

Thanks to this reconversion of the violin, Anderson slides the time of the lived experience towards the time of the record. Minimal procedures also help to disrupt the experience of a subjective voice’s presence. As a participant in the North American avant-garde, Laurie reuses certain resources of minimal experimental music (Philip Glass, Steve Reich, etc.) related to sound reproduction technologies. Among them is the technique of de-centering a single sonic figure in a infinity of replicas [42] which multiply both within an horizontal axis (deployment of repetitions in a time axis), as within a vertical one (proliferation of replicas in a space axis). A typical minimalist resource lies indeed in multiplying a musical figure in different layers at a vertical axis that repeat this same pattern horizontally following different pulses. As a result, the figure is de-centralized in different superposed layers that enter continuously in phase shift and relation.

This process is reminiscent of a beautiful Zen image: a candle light is reflected by mirrors located all around it; each mirror, in turn, reflects again the lights reflected in other mirrors; so that there is an infinity of lights which eventually ends up losing all sense of a central and original present light. Minimal procedures, in a similar way to the overlay of transparent images that we noted in Wind-Book, also serve to dislocate the presence of a musical figure in a space-temporary proliferation of echoes or replicas. Let us observe the radical reversal produced by repetitive methods regarding the traditional procedure of the musical variation [43].

The procedure of the musical variation privileges the mode of presence through the use of memory. Variation, as a transforming process of a sonorous gesture, is linked to the development of a
from this point of view, would offer us the opportunity to identify ourselves with a subjective consciousness that emerges and is developed throughout time. Repetitive musical procedures, nevertheless, move us from the time of the presence to the one of the record. In the musical variation the subjective voice was embodied in an expressive musical gesture that was continuously developed and branched. In minimal music the gesture is not developed or varied, it is simply repeated. The gesture is displaced thus regarding its development in the time of the lived experience and enters in the new time without present of the record. It is a suspended gesture, repeated ad finitum, which cuts all continuity with the preceding events and those who might follow it. And any action without a consequence, that is to say, that does not alter actually the state of things, is, by definition, a fictitious action. If we agree that an action implies necessarily some type of change or variation, however minimal, in a situation, then a gesture without consequence would be the ghostly projection or fictitious image of an event that did not happen or is still to occur.

The image reminds us actually of certain narrative strategies implemented by postmodern meta-fiction. In many of these fictions, we lack a frame of reference or a strategy of coherent reading (what Eco understood as “isotopy”) that could provide a directionality and a meaning to the narrated actions. This is how, with the dissolution or fading of a certain trajectory and, consequently, to the lack of a continuity and coherence, a person has the feeling that all these actions are insignificant and could actually not have happened. Even, as in the case of a “replicant”, she is not sure that they have occurred at all. Her past is then un-settled and the person falls into a complete crisis of identity and sense.

Minimal music produces a similar loss of a sound gesture’s substance. In this case, a musical sentence electronically repeated loses any continuity in other past and future musical episodes. There is, therefore, a disarticulation of the musical syntax as a frame of reference that gave the sound gestures an orientation and a sense. The sonorous figure is suspended and, in its constant repetition, it is emptied of any expression and meaning. While its present identity is diluted, the gesture begins to resurge as a ghostly sound image, as an “echo of the void” following the poetic expression of John Cage (2002), or a trace (sign) of all the past and future absences.

Minimal processes completely de-construct the figure or “musical person” referred to by Naomi Cumming. In a repetitive process activated from a violin or an electronic keyboard, as occurs in the performances of Laurie Anderson, the impression of a corporal voice (acoustic timbre), of a volitional agency (directional substance) and, finally, of a forceful impact of an expressive gesture are totally dismantled. The disappearance of this gesture impact, of its effective presence, entails the disintegration of the musical subject and of that discursive action that was made in a precise moment. As a result, the lyric “I” or present voice of music, that is, the position of a subject of discourse disarticulates. Electronic minimal music is certainly a product of the passive and absent register’s voice that relates or reproduces sound events already happened. The auditor does not find any present position of listening from which to approach the sound process. Its listening is rather un-focused and displaced towards a vanishing point perspective or a dream outside space and time. Hence, this sensation of some disorientation, as if one was floating in a weightless virtual environment.

Laurie Anderson’s songs move away and even reverse its original function of providing the presence of a voice and a narrating action. The electronic music which accompanies her stories and poems serves, on the contrary, to move the actions to another time (the one of the fiction) and to dilute any presence of a subjective “I”. An effect that we see in “Walking and falling”, a piece originally performed in United States and subsequently included in other shows. The song’s lyrics somehow make reference to the experience of insecurity that accompanies us through life. This sensation so suitably portrayed by postmodern literature of an erratic walking or a vital trajectory that, at every moment, does and undoes. A walk that is not consolidated in any defined path but rather unravels, with each step, in the abyss of oblivion. What is described is this ghostly journey which combines walking and falling, and advancing with the dissolution or fading… In short, the simultaneous presence and absence of ourselves in the course of our events.

I wanted you. And I was looking for you.
But I couldn’t find you.
I wanted you. And I was looking for you.
But I couldn’t find you. I couldn’t find you.
You’re walking. And you don’t always realize it, but you’re always falling.
With each step, you fall forward slightly. And then catch yourself from falling.
Over and over, you’re falling. And then catching yourself from falling.

http://www.sibetrans.com/trans/a10/technological-fiction-recorded-
Laurie’s voice, the presence of that lyric “I” that recites, is equally de-centered due to the inclusion of an electronic sound repeated in an infinite loop. Her voice seems to speak to us from another place and from another time, maybe from the opalescent position of a being who is and is not at the same time. As if it were a ghostly voice that emerges, like an absent “apparition”, from the electronic outline of writing.

8. CONCLUSION

The development of information and communication technologies has led to the advent of a new oral culture within the regime of writing. As a result, many of the human interchanges begin to operate through mediation of electronic reproduction devices. The relationship between human and machine is already one of the main axes of our everyday experience. Autonomous individual activities valued by our contemporary culture take place by means of an interaction with operational programs that displace inter-subjective exchanges between human beings. On any given day, a person removes money from cash points, leaves several messages in answering machines, sends electronic mails, buys products and acquires services through spending machines, etc.

The cultural centrality of this interaction between the human being and writing systems is evident not only in the relationship that we establish with machines, but also in our access to others through delayed documentation (texts, photos, etc.) or the projection of ourselves (via Facebook, internet chat, etc.) as a registered image and a trace of a vanished presence. Technology is contributing to a displacement of our habitual ways of presence and implementing new forms of “appearance” by means of electronic inscriptions.

Our daily life has even begun to orient itself recently in accordance with this new modality of being in and for the record. The continuous recording of the actions and events to document and narrate our daily life (via Facebook, a common practice. This recording obsession for the Xs opportunities and nobody is already able to react spontaneously to a unique and if the slogan “you only live once” had lost its sense in a clonical world where everybody presupposes the counted from the beginning on the possibility of reproducing and repeating this experience again. It is as an attempt of apprehending and being present in a piece of improvised music fails, because we already them with the strength of a substantial and irreversible event. The same feeling overlays us when the event that we have marked her story and her identity have really happened. As outlined in the science-fiction film Aeon Flux, technology enables replication or cloning of life experiences and makes us unable to face them with the strength of a substantial and irreversible event. The same feeling overlays us when the dream dimension of a human being who, as the “replicant”, is not very sure that the episodes that have marked her story and her identity have really happened. As outlined in the science-fiction film Aeon Flux, technology enables replication or cloning of life experiences and makes us unable to face them with the strength of a substantial and irreversible event. The same feeling overlays us when the time of the present action and the time of the narrated action. Technology submerges us increasingly in a virtual time where the presence of an effective action and the absence of a registered fact merge.

We are far away from that notion of a narrative identity exposed by Ricoeur (1990) where some effective events took place first and were subsequently related. At the time of recording, the experience and the report are confused giving rise to a dreamlike perception in which events are present at the same time that they are not. There is a sensation of living immersed in an audio-visual fiction story and to undertake actions that take place and do not take place simultaneously. The status of a virtual identity that is constructed by events whose effective experience we cannot assure has been explored both by the postmodern meta-fiction and the technological fictions of Cyberpunk.

The sung narrations of Laurie Anderson gather both expressions of the postmodern fiction to compose a poetic meditation on the ontological status of beings oriented to exist in the absence/presence of electronic data communications networks. Her work explores lucidly the impact of technology on both individual and collective memory and identity construction. Anderson shows us the central role of the sign in technological culture; the gradual substitution, in our access to the world, other people and ourselves, of co-presence by a registered tele-presence; the emergence of new ways of perception and experience located between the time of the living and the time of the record; and, consequently, the attenuation of the impact of my actions and those of the others, although, in fact, they can be mortally effective (as were the bombs dropped in the Gulf War even though they were displayed in a beautiful videogame).

Technology offers us the opportunity to “downplay” our confrontation with reality, to cushion the impact of oneself and other’s presence to the point of experiencing a kind of narcotic effect similar to that one surrounding Neo inside the virtual world of Matrix. This state of drunkenness or lethargy corresponds to the dream dimension of a human being who, as the “replicant”, is not very sure that the episodes that have marked her story and her identity have really happened. As outlined in the science-fiction film Aeon Flux, technology enables replication or cloning of life experiences and makes us unable to face them with the strength of a substantial and irreversible event. The same feeling overlays us when the time of the living and the time of the record; and, consequently, the attenuation of the impact of my actions and those of the others, although, in fact, they can be mortally effective (as were the bombs dropped in the Gulf War even though they were displayed in a beautiful videogame).

But Laurie Anderson not only reflects, from a phenomenological point of view, on the new modes of temporary perception and the new subjectivity’s precarious forms, plagued of uncertainties, that emerge linked to contemporary uses of technology. Her work also addresses other issues regarding the impact of these media in social interactions and the construction of collective memory. The valoration that the artist makes of the technological resources can’t be reduced to a Manichaeanc point of view and comprises a complex examination that includes both the liberating potentialities and the dangers facing us. This is not the place to extend ourselves too far into the propositions of this social, and even political, thought implied by her work (an issue that would entail writing a separate article). Here, a couple of important issues concerning the presence dissolution implemented by the writing technology should be pointed out.
undertakes a dissolution of the subject of discourse produced by these cultural narratives. The aim of this operation is to allow the expression of the point of view of those who historically didn't have a hegemonic presence in the construction of our stories. We're talking about all those excluded non-people (“nobodies”) who were denied the privilege to speak for themselves and sign-up as presences in history and, therefore, only appear as an absent third person about whom it is spoken or is written. Taking advantage from the anonymity offered by writing technologies, Laurie intends to remove the central presence of the subjects of discourse to bring-out those opalescent, in half light, emerging from the testimony of registered words. Technology is here used for recovering the memory of those absent and excluded third persons.

Beyond the re-construction of an historical memory, Anderson also reflects on the new possibilities of social interaction developed by technologies. In accordance with certain Theories of Difference, Anderson seems to affirm that the anonymity of writing allows for a de-construction of the traditional dichotomy between the presence of a hegemonic subjectivity (the western white man) and the absence of marginalized and peripheral people (women, black, homosexuals, etc.). According to authors such as Donna Haraway, electronic technology is a tool that would in principle guarantee an anonymity capable of neutralizing the hierarchies established around gender, race or social group, allowing therefore an access and a participation of those groups excluded until this moment. So, and following the argumentation of Anderson in “Lower Mathematics”, this technology would provide an opportunity to balance-out the presence of all human beings, by allowing them to enter the telematic networks through electronic registrations, or similarly, under a form located between the presence of a discursive self (1) and the anonymity of a third non-person (0).

Laurie Anderson’s performances, nevertheless, not only point to the liberating potential provided by these technological devices (reconstruction of the historical memory and participation of the most underprivileged groups), but also show their dangerous counterpart. The anonymity of electronic writing gives an ample cover to the practices of symbolic resistance from stigmatized groups, but also provides camouflage for the powerful ones that don’t want to take responsibility in front of the world for their acts. The dissolution of the responsible “who”, of the presence of a physical person to take responsibility for her words and actions, is a feature of a contemporary world full of media simulacrums. The technology facilitates particular companies, institutions and users with the power of acting in the shadows by means of intermediaries and fictitious avatars of all sorts. Ultimately, one discovers that behind all this unfolding of fictitious presences destined to generate confidence, there is no subject that is accountable to us. In one of the songs from the album Big Science, Anderson pointed to this fact by relating the accident of a plane without a pilot. At the moment of crisis, the present avatars destined to build trust in aviation technology (the stewardesses with their peculiar language that combines the security of the gesture, with the amiability of a smile) disappear and there only emerges the neutral electronic voice of an answering machine. Users notice then that they are in the hands of an impersonal machine that is completely indifferent to their fate. As displayed by Laurie Anderson’s performances and by certain terror films from technological science-fiction, this is the less amiable and more disquieting face of our contemporary high-tech societies.

Notes
[4] It is a recurrent sentence in several of her works. In a retrospective about her artistic career made in 1992, Laurie Anderson compiles under this same heading a work set that evokes the fugacity of events registered in the press (Anderson 1994: 12-15).
[5] The “hypothetical past” determines the existential condition of Blade Runner’s “replicants”. This temporary mark also defines, as a past story of a future still to come, the genre of science-fiction.
[8] Since the sentence from the tape has been previously recorded, the live sentence pronounced afterward becomes in fact the shadow or the repeated echo.
[9] The image of a slip of words, sounds or images is recurrent throughout Laurie Anderson’s work. This sliding, for example, is closely related to a beautiful conceptual image from Duets on Ice (1975): in this performance Anderson transforms evokes the skating movement through immaculate skids embedded on an ice block and the sonorous sliding produced by the swing of the violin bow. This piece is discussed in Anderson 1994: 39-45.
[10] This sensation corresponds with the concept of “the uncanny” developed by Freud in one of his essays. It describes the sense of alienation we experience regarding something familiar.
[13] Anderson takes up again this concept by Burroughs in one of her songs: “Language is a Virus from Outer Space” from Home of the Brave (1985).
[15] Machines reflect in this sense the indetermination of the French pronoun “on”. It is an impersonal pronoun in third plural person who points towards the indetermination of “anyone”. See Benveniste 1966: 232.
[16] ‘Opalescent’ is the term chosen by the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden to discuss the ontological status of fiction. See McHale 1987: 30-33.
[17] See the article “De la subjetividad dans le langage” in Benveniste 1966: 264-266.
identified with a present "I" that speaks. See Pattern 2006: 119.

[20] See the link established by Rivara between the nature of games and fiction statements (Rivara 2000: 279-313).


[22] In a postmodern fiction (as in the series "Lost") it is rendered continuously the sensation that "the present" moment of the narration, lived as much by the personage, as by the reader that accompanies it, is in fact a time previously registered that is being reproduced.

[23] See the section "One among the new arts of presentation" in Morse 1998: 159-163. Morse analyzes certain manifestations related to XX century's second half avant-gardes (minimal art, performance art, video facilities) as contributions that explore the simulacrum of presence from technology and the media (registered talks as live conversations in real time in our daily interaction with machines and television, etc.). These artistic manifestations focus on the dimension of discourse to show, later, that this "present" is registered and constructed. See also the analysis of Berger (1984) on the postmodern performance strategies (among them, those belonging to Laurie Anderson).

Numerous fragments from this film concert are available at www.youtube.com.

[25] We have chosen here to link the concepts of "person" and "non-person" to the ideas developed by E. Benveniste. The use of the term "person" is, therefore, detached from its Latin root in the word "personae", which means a mask used by a dramatic character. That's why we have related the mask to the concept of the "non-person."

[26] In her work's retrospective from 1992, Laurie Anderson (1994) provides at least a couple of sections about the ventriloquist (33-38) and the alter-egos (82-88). For a discussion of certain implications of avatars in Laurie Anderson's work, see Mckenzie (1997).


[28] Laurie Anderson's performances show that the supposedly neutral language of technological media is still heavily male. We could see as a sign of this the "voice of the masculine authority" that appears in mass media associated to a character of objective neutrality. See Anderson 1994: 150-152.

[29] Originally created for the United States show, this song achieved commercial success as a single in UK charts in 1981. Later it became part of the album Big Science (1982). The musical video dates from 1982 and is available at www.youtube.com.

[30] This sense of being possessed by another's logos or internal voice reappears in a installation called Hand Table where the spectator, due to the sonorous conduction made by the bones of the body, is able to hear inside his mind a recorded voice saying "Now I in you without to body move". See Anderson 1994: 47.


[33] This performance is documented in Anderson 1994: 135. It is also available www.youtube.com.

[34] See in this regard Kramer's review (1992) on the work Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century by Carolyn Abbate.


[37] Echo says concerning this topic: "Cela nous autorise à supposer que /isotopie/ recouvre divers phénomènes sémiotiques généralement définissables comme cohérence d'un parcours de lecture, aux différents niveaux textuels" ("This allow us to assume that /isotopie/ covers various semiotic phenomena generally defined as a coherent reading route, in different textual levels."). In Eco 1985: 117.

[38] To explore this relation between music and subjectivity's construction see Kramer (2001), Dibben (2006) and Vila (1996).

[39] The physical voice is here taken from a particular point of view that includes both the oral voice and the voice coming from the instrumental body.


[41] Laurie Anderson tries to produce audio-palindromes or reversible sounds through the reading of a same registered sentence by moving forwards and backwards the bow. See Anderson 1994: 36.

[42] This repetition of the same sonorous figure can occur through an acoustic repetition or an electronic replica.

[43] For more information on the de-construction of variation procedures in minimal music and its relation with the logic of the difference and repetition (Deleuze), see Mertens (1983) and the section "The logic of the difference and repetition in minimal music" in Kaiero (2008: 242-247). For an analysis on different memory constructions in the variation procedures defended by Adorno and minimal music, see Kaiero 2008: 242-247. For an analysis on the disarticulation of the space-temporary references in Laurie Anderson's music, see McClary (1990).


[45] Regarding these disruptive effects of the narrative plot in postmodern meta-fiction, see the section "Worlds under erasure" in McHale 1987: 99-111.


[47] According to Richard Sennet (2000), the inability to establish a life project due to the extreme mobility required by the new economic conditions of neo-liberalism, is leading to a crisis of meaning and a "corrosion" of the individuals character. Other authors such as Barglow (1994) points to a crisis of sense favored by the gradual replacement of the human inter-subjectivity by the interaction with machines. See also discussions on this relation between subjectivity, technology and contemporary society in Grodin and Lindlof (1996).

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