

## Chapter I: The Discovery



### 1 - Introduction:

The installation “Chapter I: The Discovery” consists of a sculpture representing an unidentified object in the shape of a dodecahedron and a number of videos restaging the moment of its discovery.

The mostly three-dimensional videos will be broadcast in the first room and will include sample images of the object appearing in fictitious places yet maintaining the same lighting and sound sequence. Devoid of any human presence, the spaces are subtended by a sense of timelessness that locates the dodecahedron in an indefinable fictional space-time.

In all the videos, the alien entity reproduces the same light and sound animation, expressing a state of waiting by emitting a signal of presence. The sculpture itself—a machine located at the entrance to the second room of the installation—is discovered by visitors in the same state.

The sculpture is a polyhedron-shaped piece, a regular dodecahedron whose edges are fluorescent lamps. Through musical algorithms, the structure outputs a sound sequence and lights up simultaneously. When visitors approach the faces of the dodecahedron, it produces several sequences generated by the machine depending on the distance between the faces and the visitors. As the viewer gets closer, the machine

detects the movement and tries to engage in communication by generating a light and sound code. If the sculpture is surrounded on all its vertical faces, it will respond by entering a symbiosis and releasing its maximum energy.

## 2 – The Dodecahedron Symbology

In “Chapter I: The Discovery” the visitor discovers a sci-fi geometric object which outputs a code consisting of light and sounds. This weird dodecahedron-shaped machine is a polyhedron which forms part of the five Platonic solids or convex regular polyhedra.

Theories about the formation of the cosmos have always considered polyhedra as vital figures. For instance, according to Pythagorean thinking the four regular polyhedra are associated with the four elements (Earth, Fire, Water, Air), whilst the fifth dodecahedron is connected with the universe. The Platonic model of the solar system derives from the study of Platonic solids by the astronomer Johannes Kepler in the 16th century in order to define the laws governing the movement of the planets around the sun in the solar system.

Historically, the first sculpture of a dodecahedron is thought to be the anonymous Dodecahedron dated from the second century B.C. exhibited now in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn. However, it was in the Renaissance period when artists and scientists became more profoundly interested in Platonic solids in general and by the dodecahedron in particular. An example of this development is provided by the drawing by Leonardo da Vinci titled “Duodecedron Planus Vacuus”<sup>1</sup>.

As we see in art and culture in general, the foundational nature of the geometric element contains a manifest mystical load<sup>2</sup>. This feature of polyhedrons is also reflected in the sci-fi imaginary, where they embody configurations of artificial intelligence and even poles of mystical energy. For instance, we can recall geometric shaped monoliths, of pyramids, cubes and other polyhedrons in the works of Moebius, Philip K. Dick, Arthur C. Clarke...

In other words, in this work the choice of the dodecahedron as a sculptural form is grounded in its symbolism in science fiction and in popular culture in general<sup>3</sup>. My goal is to use the symbolic potential of this figure to favour its conscious or unconscious mental association with images from that popular “subculture”.

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<sup>1</sup> Michele Emmer, *Art and Mathematics: The Platonic Solids*: Leonardo, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Autumn, 1982), pp. 277-282.

<sup>2</sup> Another more recent example is the use of the dodecahedron in works by Dalí, “*A la búsqueda de la cuarta dimensión*” and “*El Sacramento de la Eucaristía en la Última Cena*”.

<sup>3</sup> There is abundant new age literature on the importance of polyhedrons as elements of life energy. Just google, for example, terms like: sacred geometry, vibrational medicine, psychogeometry...

## The Discovery of Otherness

The videos in the installation dramatize a fiction on the discovery of the dodecahedron-machine as if it were a scene from a thriller or sci-fi movie, where the tension lies in the encounter of the hero with an unknown, alien figure. What is the figure all about? Is it an animated object? What could it do to us? What can we do?

Within the context of the work, rather than answering essential philosophical questions—such as, How can technological advances be controlled? On what ethical bases can its purposes be chosen? Who is entitled to decide on the ultimate mission of machines? Can machines destroy us?—this installation, on the contrary, is about reformulating those modern philosophical questions through the use of images associated with the popular culture of science fiction.

This installation questions the viewer's perception about the truthfulness of what is shown, outlining a journey from the initial visioning of a series of videos with synthetic images and ending up in an encounter with a physical interactive object which co-opts information flows, sound and light transmission.

A journey of discovery is predicated on this route drawn between the two rooms and the two media of representation, the animated image and the plastic image. During the first part of the installation, the viewer can watch and listen to the fictitious discovery of this object at the remove of a videographic representation. By dividing the scene into several settings and through the use of subjective views, the viewer repeatedly discovers the object, thus gradually becoming the subject of the action.

In the first room, the ambiguity perceived by the beholder lies in the verisimilitude of the images, in the virtuality of this representation. However, in the second part of the installation, visitors find themselves directly confronted by the object, discovering its reactive qualities and thus forced to question the veracity of the experience as a whole.

## Science Fiction

The sculpture responds to presence, demonstrating a will to communicate. The resulting interaction and behaviour are an imitation of artificial intelligence<sup>4</sup>. They are expressed as extremely simple rules capable of generating apparently complex behaviours. But, what is its degree of intelligence? Is it a tool for communication? How autonomous is it? Is it alive? Does it exist?

The work also addresses feelings like the irrational fear of 'the other', of the foreigner, of the barbarian, from which the image of the humanoid, of the robot, of the unidentified object is derived.

Accordingly, the installation renews an age-old cultural groundbase, questioning the limits of our notions of artificial intelligence and cutting across our collective imaginary of science fiction.

As a whole, "science fiction names a contemporary mode in which the techniques of extrapolation and speculation are utilized in a narrative form, to construct the near-future, the far-future or fantastic worlds in which science, technology and society intersect."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "Narratives of Artificial Life" in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, pp. 222-247.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Thacker, *The Science Fiction of Technoscience: The Politics of Simulation and a Challenge for New Media Art*: Leonardo - Volume 34, Number 2, April 2001, pp. 156.

Some research into the ties between science fiction and present-day society question the critical space left for this art genre at a time when the distinction between technological function and technological reality is increasingly constricted and vague<sup>6</sup>. From this viewpoint, science fiction is losing its ability to imagine a multiplicity of potential futures for mankind, even claiming that in the society of simulacrum, hyperrealism is the only possible science fiction.<sup>7</sup> In other words, against this theoretical backdrop, there is no room for fiction or for anticipation or fantasy. Nor is there space for the transcendent. In consonance with this philosophical representation, the expression of digital art is reduced to resorting to radically new uses of the latest technologies and through a detailed description of reality. A recurrent perversion of this art genre is that creation ends up being a demonstration of technology.

And even though technology embraces more and more fields of the human, accentuating our cyborg nature<sup>8</sup>, that does not imply a reduction of the imaginative space about future technological worlds. On the contrary, it expands the questioning about those dualities that are built into Western philosophical thought (man versus nature: man versus machine; the physical versus the non physical<sup>9</sup>). Science fiction is a genre that is capable of questioning and of destroying those conceptual constructs. Imagining the future also brings with it a revision of the past, of origins<sup>10</sup>, in an apparently historically inexhaustible process.

To my way of thinking, science fiction not only continues to question present, past and future and will go on doing so, but variations of the genre are bound to exist just as there are manifold theories of culture. The strategies to narrate fictions and to question the present will require the use of futuristic, retro-futuristic, hyperrealist depictions of the current, past or future technological society.

Therefore, science fiction is the perfect framework for art expression with new technologies, for it precisely questions the role of science and technology in the definition of the human. From this viewpoint, science fiction proposes a theoretical backdrop fostering an exploration of the very nature of digital art. This not only allows us to draw parallels with present-day society, but also to reinvent trajectories crossing the past, present and future of the relationships between man and technologies. Just as otherness will continue being a fictional space, through a more or less remote, a more or less exotic, a more or less cybernetic "other."

We might well maintain that science fiction is a reflection of the becoming of cultures and that its capacity to imagine is unpredictable. We can classify the science fiction of the past, but not of the future. Science fiction mirrors reality in the same way as reality mirrors science fiction. As such, the relationship is confusing, with one continually projecting onto the other. For a proper understanding of it, the relationships between different types of cultural production are crucial.

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene Thacker, op. cit., pp. 155-158

<sup>7</sup> J. Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Science Fiction" in *Simulacra and Simulation*: University of Michigan Press. 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*: Routledge, New York. 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in op cit., pp.149-181.

<sup>10</sup> Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr, *The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway*. Science Fiction Studies 18.1991.

## **Technique: Invisible Sounds**

*Sonidos Invisibles* [Invisible Sounds] is based on signal loop processes: a computer (digital device) is connected to a number of electronic elements (analogical devices) that generate light and sounds. The aural elements are reintroduced into the computer using microphones, and are processed in real time (amplification, sampling, signal processing, synthesis...) to construct a sound work on site. These will be synchronous with the visuals generated by the light elements. Thus, the amplification of almost imperceptible processes allows me to set in place a play between the nearly invisible and immaterial nature of sound and electricity, and the light signal of the fluorescent tubes.

The result is the interconnection and feedback of analogical and digital signs, generating two types of questions to be resolved: first of all, the relationships of causality will be mixed up with their resulting synchronies; secondly, the sound, with its invisible nature (at least in Western popular culture), becomes visible thanks to the use of light devices as a source of sound.

### **Credits:**

Author: Félix Luque Sánchez

Software and hardware: Félix Luque Sánchez

Design of dodecahedron: Damien Gernay

3D videos: Iñigo Bilbao

Video camera: Nicolás Torres

A co-production of the Francophone Community of Belgium  
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With the collaboration of iMAL

### **Author Bio:**

Félix Luque Sánchez (Oviedo 1976) is a new media artist. His works and installations have been presented in art institutions like Transmediale, island6 Shanghai, iMAL and at various contemporary art institutions in Spain, including LABoral, Mercat de les Flors, Metrònom, CCCB and MACBA. Félix has received a number of scholarships, including a Phonos grant for audiovisual and musical production for young artists (2002-2004), and the Digital Art scholarship of the Belgian Ministry for Culture for the Francophone community (2008-2009). In 2009 he has been nominated for two majors awards in new media art: transmediale 2010 (Berlin-Germany) and the Multimedia Award from the Fondation Liedts-Meesen (Gent-Belgium).

From 2001 to 2007, he was a faculty member at IUA, the Audiovisual Institute at the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona, carrying out didactic and technical functions at the university's Digital Arts Master and Postgraduate Programme of Musical Composition with New Technologies. He is also engaged with sound design and the development of customised technologies, hardware and software for artists and art institutions. He currently lives in Brussels. <http://www.othersounds.net>