



Exhibition Review

Sergi İncelemesi

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Digital Captivity**

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Digital technologies undoubtedly belong to the most influential developments of the last decades. After all, digital media have become increasingly important tools to maintain our lives in terms of communication, socialization and entertainment. For some, however, digital technologies also have a potential to damage the ‘real’ experiences that happen offline. The exhibition *Digital Captivity*, which displayed 21 photographs taken by the Turkish visual artist Erhan Us is embedded in this debate on the (dis)advantages of digital technologies. Since the term ‘captivity’ is described as a ‘situation in which a person (...) is kept somewhere and is not allowed to leave’ (Cambridge), the exhibition’s title implies that digital technologies captivate people against their will. Therefore, the artist focuses on the negative effects of digital technologies by focusing on various themes.

The first topic presented in the exhibition is the worldwide, common usage of smartphones and its impact on daily life. By exhibiting photographs taken in different parts of the world, the artist demonstrates the omnipresence of smartphones in various cultures. Moreover, the

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photographs indicate how these smartphones disturb people's daily activities: people all over the world interrupt their jobs in order to check their smartphones, while a photograph of a smartphone lying in bed shows that checking our phones has become important to end as well as begin our day.

The second highlight is the way in which real experiences are increasingly replaced by our constant demand for archiving these experiences for digital spheres. Erhan Us has captured people in places that were especially designed for people's gaze, such as the Louvre Museum in Paris, which among others exhibits the renowned *Mona Lisa* of Leonardo da Vinci. However, instead of observing the painting with great attention, the people in Us' photograph are rather putting effort to make a picture of it. Other photographs of the exhibition show similar scenes. In one photograph, for instance, Us focuses on the beautiful flowers, while the blurry background shows a couple taking selfies, totally unaware of their surroundings. Considering the common theme in the photographs, one might assume that the artist implies that pictures have become more important than the 'real', offline-world experiences.

The last topic of the exhibition is the shift in social interaction, caused by the application of digital media. In several photographs, the artist captured how people are completely isolated from their surroundings while focusing on their smartphones. One of these photographs is a family portrait of a father and his two children in a city: the father is checking his phone and not paying attention to his children. Another picture that touches this issue, is the one in which two befriended women are sitting on a bench, their handbags between them, while checking their smartphones. The composition suggests that the bag symbolizes the distance that has grown between the friends, caused by digital media. After all, some think that technologies damage friendships and even replace the 'real' friendships with online ones. Us seems to support this trend.

The implications of the exhibition suggest that Us approaches that Us approaches people's new digital habits with technological determinism, which is the belief that technology directly affects and leads society and our lives. Technological determinists therefore blame the negative consequences on technology itself (Ungvarsky, 2017). However, it is important to understand the underlying reasons why digital technologies have become so significant to maintain our lives. Although this question is not easy to answer in one paragraph, we will try to do so with the risk of reductionism, in terms of the issues highlighted in the exhibition.

First of all, as mentioned above, digital technologies are great tools to communicate. Due to the connectivity feature of the internet, people are connected more than ever. This not only enables people to coordinate their lives easily, but also gives people a sense of security. Some people keep their phones under their pillows or on nightstand, just as we see in some of the photographs, even if they are sleeping, which keeps them connected to the outside world. Due to this feeling of connectivity, people feel less isolated and therefore more secure (Clayton et al, 2015). Secondly, digital technologies - mobiles in particular - create a private sphere for its users. Due to the fact that the human brain does not differentiate between online and offline activities, it recognizes experiences such as watching a movie, playing a game or using internet as real experiences (Chayko, 2018: 61). Thus, people easily integrate themselves to the technologies, forgetting about their presence in the offline world, which

gives them a sense of privacy (Hatuka and Eran, 2016: 2194) - even if they are not alone in the physical world. Last but not least, the functions of online activities (e.g., commenting and sharing) are not limited to entertainment. After all, people participate in online activities to show what is important to them (Hermida, 2017: 41), to present their personalities and ideal selves (Chayko, 2017: 121-140). For example, taking and subsequently posting a picture of the *Mona Lisa* on social media has more underlying reasons than simply showing that the person was in the Louvre Museum. Posting the picture might aim at showing that art is an important part of the photographer's life or that he or she is rich enough to visit Paris.

Considering these facts, it is unfair to assume that digital technologies 'captivate' its users, as Us implies in the title of his exhibition. Although the exhibition should be praised for the various interesting topics it presents on the usage of smartphones, we should avoid technological determinism at all times and should not forget that technologies do not have a willpower to act by its own. Blaming technology for 'captivating' us is comparable to blaming the knife when you cut yourself with it. The consequences of our technological habits, i.e. 'digital captivity' as Us puts it, are solely due to ourselves, rather than to technology itself. If we are to eliminate the disadvantages caused by digital technologies, we have to closely examine the underlying psychological and sociological issues of ourselves.

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