# Is art turning more shallow as it gets more hybrid?

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## 1. Introduction: Towards more 'shallow' cases for art

Art today utilizes digital interactive technologies merging the virtual and the real, while at the same time it takes elements from cinematographic narration and electronic games. With the advance of hybrid forms of art, sometimes we become witnesses of the process being more important than the form of the outcome itself. The role of the artist merges with that of the engineer, or in the place of the artist there is often a multidisciplinary team that is involved with the artwork's production. Having these traits, the artist changes profile and become an 'extended artist'. Moreover the art-world of such new hybrid forms of art opens to include more disciplines; not only artists but also computer/software engineers, game developers, industrial designers, film makers, designers of interactive media, architects, researchers, etc. Partly due to practicalities regarding the realization of the art-piece, as well as the democratizing of the 'art-world' to involve professionals with training in other disciplines, the artists are often getting more involved in the production rather the conceptualization of the art piece itself. As a consequence, we observe artworks that often lack conceptual or existential depth, but are more communicative, direct to be grabbed and handled by people, and reveal messages more direct, albeit simplified, both in their communication code and structure.

The established places where art can be viewed are also changing, opening towards more "massively accessible" and public locations: festivals, public urban spaces (ranging from city squares, streets, park benches, exteriors of building, metro stations, and other), the internet, or even the fourth generation mobile telecommunication devices (i.e. 4G mobile phones), are all becoming spaces where art can be experienced, along with the "traditional" art spaces such as art galleries and museums.

The extended artworks, are often installations relying on user interaction in certain settings, rely up to a point in randomness and occasion, and are ephemeral. It is the visitors/users

that make the extended artwork possible to materialize at the first place and their overall aesthetic-interactive experience was what makes each art-work significant. They are short lived works of art, that have time-space limitations in order to be experienced; they cease to exist and their quality echoes afterwards only in the form of descriptions, videos and photographs, but disassociated from the viewer's/visitors experience of the interaction within the installation.

Extended arts form a paradigm shift to art as we knew it. With extended arts, we witness a transition stage and it is questionable whether our old language and paradigms are sufficient to describe and understand the new emerging field. Extended arts are performed by extended artists who have to be concerned with both the system and the content. Reusability and adaptation of code, or repurposing of image elements from various online sources (i.e. in a copy-paste fashion) become part of the artwork. The extended artist may take ready made parts to incorporate and adapt in his/her work instead of creating art from scratch. Many artworks in our current frame of understanding (and language expression) we may perceive more "shallow" and fragmented, in terms of meaning and structure; yet we may need new words to describe the qualities of hybrid arts –as we are standing in a transition phase and do not have the language, nor the distance, to evaluate it.

Hybrid artwork does not yet have an established grammar or syntax, and it is not based on an established platform –which would in turn facilitate the formulation of established syntax and codes. Cinematography can be seen as an example case here, as it combines other forms of previously existing mediums, and by using this as a paradigm we hope to gain better understanding to the case of extended arts. Cinema had to address content and maniere of scripting after its format has been finalized and established.

In extended arts, the artist/creator has to additionally manage interaction. Interaction can be viewed as an added dimension to narration itself. The art piece turns from being a means towards a narration (or an understanding) to be a path towards an experience.

While the extended art evolves, the art projects seem to move from having pure and significant forms towards a simplification of intent and conception of the art piece. In contrast to the art scene until the 1990's, there is a turn towards more synergetic projects. This simplification results in a directness and clarity of expression that characterizes current art works. Stong metaphysical concepts give place to new weaker and fragmented ones. This nihilism and fragmentation is as much a cause of concern as can be an opportunity.

## 2. Cinematography: a paradigm for extended arts

Interactive Art is a hybrid form of art, that is constructed primarily by the interactive artists, in their function as composers of both the content and the engineering/application programming. This process has a lot in common with the early pre-cinematographic systems of the 19th century.

Apart from computer programming, many elements of an interactive artwork, such as for example the aesthetics or the montage, are drawing paradigms from the cinematographic

practice. In "Hamlet on the holodeck", Janet Murray (1997: 28) points at the example of the comparison of the early age of typography and the present age of digital technology, separating the technology mechanism from the content itself. In 1455 Guttenberg invented typography, but not the book itself. The books that were printed before 1501, are referred to as old "incunabula": the Latin term used indicates that the books are results of a technology that is still in a very early (infantile) stage. It took 50 years of experiments and even more time for the establishment of common ground such as the easily readable characters, the title of chapters, the numbering in pages, prologue, and the separation of the text in chapters, all of which act together so that the printed book becomes easy to read and grasp, and easy to understand as a communication medium.

The impressive videogames and the complex webpages of our current digital environment are part of a similar progress stage; this field is also characterized by a similar search for common ground that can lead to a more concise and structured communication.

Interactive and digital media use the cinematographic paradigm that refers to their construction as 'sequence'. The post-cinematographic language –that is used for non linear audiovisual systems – is based on the codes and syntax, the framing, art-direction and montage of the cinematographic language, on which it is based on. Meta-cinematic language stems from enriching the cinematographic language with new codes and with the structural methods and tools of computing/digital technology.

Interactive art as well as interactive games offer 'selection points' that lead to several plots, but those are usually comprised of shallow twists from the main course of action / the main plot. This is because of the complexity that results from the mere fact that for one storyline with only twelve crossroad-points with two selections each, hundreds of endings would be required. Therefore each cross-linking story that could be interesting enough to grasp the viewers interest, would be intensely dense and complex in its scripting and production – since authors would have to process separately each turning point and ending.

## 3. Present-date vs pre-cinematographic systems for audiovisual content.

Around 1900 the cinematographic production has reached a level, on its own merit, that it was becoming an art form itself (Benjamin, 2003: 12). Revealing of this situation is the way that two different processes –namely the reproduction of an art piece and the art of cinematography – affect the traditional art forms.

According to Couchot και Hillaire (2003: 5), the contemporary desire for digitization of every cultural product tends to eliminate Benjamin's view that the ultimate originality is what is referred to as authentic. Images, sounds and texts are unified and take part in a new medium of communication that is introduced by the new cultural practices and habits –as we witness from the interactive multimedia practice and the internet. The possibilities of the human body are being re-evaluated by the introduction of new digital constructs and mechanisms. Even the movement and actions of the body tend to get digitized through the dialogue with the computer, and be part of a process of automation.

These new ways of expression and the mechanisms involved has a lot in common with that of cinematographic projection, even in an engineering level, since it was the same problems that lead engineers to innovative solutions. In an effort to compare between Edison's constructions and present day digital visualization technology, it is noted that:

•        In many interactive filming mechanisms the participation of only one viewer is assumed. The Helmet and Dataglove, the Virtual Reality input devices, are meant for individual use only.

•        In interactive films the rate of images per second is not specific or set, but is dependent on the duration of the interactive film and the directors requirements. A limiting factor is computer memory so that the less in number or complexity the images are, the less demanding for computational power is the piece, and therefore most efficient in resources and effective it becomes.

•        The most advanced Input Output devices are those of Virtual Reality. These address only one viewer at a time that experiences the interactive piece. It is in fact this limitation has lead the idea of a projection in the CAVE construction that provides a means of collective experiencing of a Virtual Reality work.  Yet, there is still only one person that can interact with the system while the rest remain viewers and receptors of the interaction results.

Comparing recent technology to the Lumiere brothers' inventions, we note that:

•        The present date device that combines the possibility of recording and projecting sound and image, is in fact the computer. In addition to recoding, synthesizing, and projecting sound and image, the very same technology/device is the means of realizing the alternative paths of an interactive experience.

•        In 1991, Apple introduces QuickTIme, an audiovisual application, which can play short video sequences in the computer screen. Nevertheless the constraints of personal computers were such that a movie with the required quality cannot be played: the image is small, the resolution poor, and the video-duration is limited.

•        The technique of 'looping' is widely used, even at present, in interactive constructs, as a form of narrative engine (Manovich, 2001: 314). Looping can recycle the duration of a video or sound to infinity, while the viewer is invited to interact so that a new phase of the plot/narration begins. It is a technique for interactive narrative that does not have high requirements for processing or storage memory. A few images are repeated in a sequence thus facilitating the process of selection – which is in effect the realization of an interactive plot assemblage from the viewers themselves.

After the digitization of a film there are a lot of subsequent stages until the required result is achieved. The process that produces narration can be better explained by referring to respective/characteristic language and semantic rules. Starting from cinematographic grammar and syntax, the adaptation to digital media follows as a next process step.

## 4. Meta-Cinematographic expression

Present day cinematic language is being encountered to almost every technological medium that manages image in relation to space and time. Under the general title of meta-cinematography, we will attempt to address contemporary applications which are results of the cinematic culture and at the same time the "implementation" of a series of theories of the 1960 and 1970 regarding interactive reading.

Audiovisual experiences invade the life of contemporary man since his childhood, in such an extent that we can claim that many western world children are acquainted with the «rules» of audiovisual media even before they learn to speak. In this case we do not refer to the purely cinematic language, but to the televised, which constitutes an alternative application of the cinematic media on the Television screen. In 1946 Jean Thévenot forecasted in advance that television "will address, by using the means of radio-broadcasting, an audience that will expect the analogous of cinema" (Jost, 1999: 10).

Back in 1932, Bertolt Brecht had already recognized the need for a bilateral transfer of information at that time's media, writing that radio should be transformed from a distribution mechanism into a communication mechanism. He considered radio as the supreme communication mechanism of public life: a huge system of channels that would not only emit but also receive messages, enabling the user not only to listen but also to talk. The radio would, in his view, bring the listeners closer to their environment rather than isolate them. The radio would function not as a mere information provider, but would have to organize the listener to become the provider of information (Maletzke, 1991: 82).

At present, Television is considered as a distorted, mutant form of cinema. Paul Virilio refers to television as a "museum of accidents" and claims it is a "crisis media", via which the reproduction of misfortune is presented as spectacle. Yet, it is the extension of our gaze…if we look at it (Jost, 1999: 10). Television introduces the viewer, in an intuitive way, to the literacy of the moving image. Yet, it does not provide the possibility of writing itself; it is the interactive media that attempt to provide the viewer/user with the possibility of writing and producing/influencing content.

The first computer applications used by the wider public involved data entry, text input and text editing. At its early age of existence, computer's primary function was that of an advanced calculating machine. The computer's original role was to accept written information and process it, so that the person that uses the machine would no longer need to remember things. It is sufficient that the machine's operator, who inputs the information, knows how to type and read the results that the computer produces, excepted from performing calculations. The obligation for reliable and exact calculation is moved from the person to the computing machine.

One could assume that this shift in tasks could result in a reduction of human memory. Should then the claim be that the computing machine is a "container of memory"? Computer is without doubt a machine that helps its user remember things, that, through the results that it presents, indicates elements that the user may not have thought of before as being necessary for his/her task. As Florian Brody has put it: "today we have a large variety

of machines that help us remember, but only a few tricks that help us forget. We may need to focus in oblivion" (Brody, 2001: 144).

Cinema is often considered as the medium/carrier of memories, as it depicts different ages and historical events. In contract with the written text (that has always been, since antiquity, the most important testimony of civilization and human thought), cinema is a medium that is accessible, in effect, to all; yet the majority of cinematic viewers remain passive viewers, who, while they grasp easily the messages from this medium, they cannot 'express' or present their own messages in the cinematographic language.

It is the new Information Technology media that can provide to the 'readers' of the cinematographic language the possibility to be actively involved, even to the point of becoming creative authors. The very term "New media" is a relative term (Brody, 2001: 139), since a media is *new* only in the time that it is created, while it ceases to be new afterwards. Since every use of media is based on communicational conventions, a 'new medium' is a contradiction in terms.

The cinematic language was used as a means for the construction of the meta-cinematic languages, that are utilized in the so called "new media". This meta-cinematic language combines the codes of cinematic language enriched with new codes of visual/graphical symbols, and creates a new interface. Lev Manovich adopts the term "cultural interface" in order to describe a new place of human-computer-culture interface (Manovich, 2001 : 68). The term exactly describes the ways in which computer applications present cultural information and at the same time allow the interaction with such information.

Cultural interfaces are widely used and easy to learn. It is impressive, and without precedence in the history of language, that this new language has been designed from a small team of researchers and was adopted almost spontaneously from millions of computer users.

## 5. Evolution of technological-artistic applications: a brief historical framework.

With the goal of better understanding interactive cinematography, this section refers to technologies and the cultural frame through which artists and engineers have advanced the medium to the form it has today. Engineers invent and artists in principle use the new inventions. Sometimes artwork, that is impregnated by certain technologies, creates needs for new technological means, resulting to the construction of custom made machines. Engineers and artists (but also other professions, such as architects, doctors, film makers, etc) worked in parallel all these years to produce new machines, and it is important that the creation of new machines or codes is attributed to all related disciplines. Many engineering research results stem from military, industrial, or marketing needs; the flight simulator is such an example, computer aided design is another example of applications that were produced from such cross-fertilization.

Artists, engineers, art critics of the 1060s, foresaw -to an extent- a cultural future for the new information technology that included interaction and simulation. The then emerging

first age of computer graphics revealed a set of research goals, that in turn shaped the basis of the subsequent development in areas like image processing, real time interaction, 3-D simulation/visualization, animation, and realistic synthetic image. Such processes in different areas have become of central importance in the recent digital cultural forms, such as computer games, special effects for cinema, and world-experience simulation. The latter, seen as mimicry or realistic modeled reproduction of reality in two dimensional or three dimensional form, by use of the term "virtual space", stimulated even more research into digital image, after the 1980s.

Nevertheless, in the fields that digital technology was created, the applications for which it was used and the various cultural forms that emerged, greatly differentiated from the early predictions of the 1960's. It is Sutherland's predictions that capture what was to follow in digital civilization development, at the level of form as well as content. Interaction and simulation are applied extensively into the present date massive culture.

With regard to cinematography the possibility for interaction is an even more recent development. The introduction of the cd-rom medium and the digital video format (from Apple in 1995) were important factors that influenced the interaction possibility with the moving image. Digitization of images was an essential base for digital cinematography, and it facilitated the creation of novel and impressive special effects.

In parallel, two new forms of visual art, the music video clip and the commercial advertising (for television), have contributed to form certain aesthetics. Such particular forms of animation, computer games and mainstream digital cinematography are directly intertwined with "computer imaging". Some impressively realistic animation films were produced, such as «Jurassic Park» (1993), «The Mask» (1994), «Toy Story» (1995), «Mission : Impossible» (1996), «Armageddon» (1998), «The Matrix» (1999), «The Monsters and Co.» (2002), Lord of the Rings (2001), «Finding Nemo» (2003), among others. Classical cinematography (that these movies are part of), adopts cutting edge technology for the movie production; significant research was conducted in these areas, yet the final result (both in terms of content and aesthetics) is mostly commercial.

Regarding research on content but also experimentation with the design of interactive systems and experiences, there is a multitude of artworks (from artists-engineers). A characteristic example is Jeffrey Shaws Legible City – an immersive interactive virtual environment where the buildings of a city are repaced by typographic characters that make up their name (Shaw, 1998). Or Char Davis' "Osmose" that is taking the viewer into a dreamy synthetic other reality (Osmose, 1995).

The constructs of hypertext and hyper connectivity are the basis of the interaction process. A necessary condition for the interactive navigation is the non linear structure of the piece, with the model of the 'web', via the construction of a composite narrative that does not result in a singular storyline, but is composed via an associative system of interrelated interactions.

While the narrative story allows the exploration of characters and the dramatic plot the exploration of action, the simulated narrative allows the exploration of process.

Laurel introduces the notion of interactive drama, in 1986, in her phd thesis "Toward the Design of a Computer-Based Interactive Fantasy System" (Laurel 1986: 10-11) and extends this thinking further, to address human computer interaction under the scope of a dramatic experience in her later book "Computers as Theater" (Laurel, 1993). She attempts to address a narrative system, in which the player would experience a degree of interactive freedom, while going along the lines of a certain dramatic plot.

Simplifying Laurel's definition, Mateas (Mateas, 2002: ii) states that interactive drama is an interesting possible world, inhabited by computer-controlled characters, whereby the player experiences a story as a first person narration.

The computer when used as a media is not limited to the description or mere observation of behavioural elements (as it is the case with text and moving image), but it executes them in an embedded manner. As a collaborative medium it encourages the viewer/user's involvement in the process, allowing him/her to define, alter, control, and understands the procedure, in an unprecedented manner. Murray observes that this process is for the first time evaluated for its aesthetic qualities, the complex process motives becoming as enjoyable as the colors and forms. She notes that, that while there are not yet established narrative systems that utilize this possibility for the description of a composite world –with process based terms-, there is a steady progress towards this direction (Murray, 1997: 181).

## 6. Interactive narrative and its generic characteristics

At any time, the reader is ready to become an author (Benjamin, 2003: 48). Interactive artwork is characterized by the use of multiple selections during navigation, whereby the user is confronted with hypertext structures and is called to act according to the interface and the system rules (which have been designed and defined by the creator/artist). The viewer's/user's actions, and the feedback received to them, affect the formation of narrative and the plot.

As in the 1960's and 70's, when interaction happened in an analogue form, the interactive artwork makes sense only to the degree that it enters a dialogue with their viewer/receptor. The semiotic "subject" (e it visual, auditory, textual, haptic) that is produced by computing, is the result of an intervention of the user to a third non material object: the programme that processes the art-piece. The viewer, who is more than a mere receptor, has a functional duty to perform. The final artwork results from two 'creators': the artist themselves –who has conceptualized the artwork, takes the initiative for its design and defines it's functional and aesthetic requirements, and sets the programming rules and processes and the degree of the viewer's involvement; and the viewer/user who instigates the possibilities from the artwork. Without the latter the art piece remains a pending possibility, waiting to be realized and experienced (Couchot & Hillaire (2003: 109-110)

The user acts on the application, which in turn, responds, thus establishing a communication relationship: a human-machine dialogue that is articulated as an audiovisual artwork, taking multiple (often finite) possible forms, that the artist knows in advance, having anticipated in the design of the artwork the possible user behavior. Even in cases in which the application

has been programmed so that it randomly selects among elements from a certain set, it is still a finite system, the number of choices and results although based on possibility, are predetermined from the artist/creator.

The user is expected to respect certain rules, as is the case with games, so that he/she unveils the art-piece and is engaged with it. Gaming constructs are of principal importance in interactive narrative systems and extended arts, since the goal is not so much about the completion of a predefined track, but the experience of navigation in an environment that is gradually being revealed and becomes increasingly familiar.

Johnson, in his book Interface Culture (1999), points out that the interface is between the medium and the message, as this is what lies between the user and the computer. The computer acts as the medium that exchanges information with the person, in a communication dialogue, where the machine processes the human message, and transmits a subsequent message that the person will, in turn, process. Mateas (2002: 10) points out that the presentation system is the interface between the dramatic world and the player.

The nature of information is audiovisual, regardless of its content, so the user becomes viewer of an image (be it static, photographic or synthetic, in motion, typographic), and a listener, while the computing system realizes processing of algorithms or text, or film projection. The perceptual derivative (output) of the processing system is merging that of cinema, television, radio, and print media, making the computer a meta-medium that accepts and presents messages in real time. The term meta-medium is used here to express a flexible, plastic and easy to use platform that can produce several types of audiovisual information - that historically characterizes other older media. Manovich (2001) states that the post-medium subject includes language and meta-language, having simultaneously the archetypical structure of the original media (i.e. cinematographic piece, musical piece, architectural space) and the software tools that allow the user to produce structural descriptions and modify them.

In the interactive drama, (a case that was first presented in the phD thesis of Brenda Laurel), the player comes in, at the first person description, in the interactive world as the principle actor (Mateas, 2002: 22). Interactive drama approaches the genders of adventure, that are expressed via text and graphics, while at the same time is disassociated from several of their basic principles:

• It focuses on the dramatic plot mainly as a perception of narrative –rather than the literature, the visuals, or the gaming shapes. It entangles enactment, dramatic tension, and the total unity of the piece.

• It expects from the user and his/her interaction, to form a route as well as the result of the storyline, while keeping a tight plot that is predetermined from its creator. Thus, the interactive drama is confronted with a clash between the freedom of interaction and the plot of the story.

• It seeks immersion of the user, in the first person, as the viewer/user is an active participant as a character in the plot.

In every form of narrative, interactive or not, the content is of central importance. Murray (1997: 133) refers to meta-modern artists, who, in their effort to create texts that do not promote any kind of interpretation, result in causing confusion. She points out that the vague structure of such hypertexts only weakens our desire for narrative intermediation. The navigation then only aims to unfold a story stemming from our "significant" actions.

The computer as a meta media, is at the same time receiver, transmitter of the message, user and narrator, acting as a secondary author and participating in the interactive reading of the piece.

Narration is different that other forms of scripting in that it mimics actions of real life (and that is interpreted from the reader). Characters have a special place in the story, as they entangle the reader emotionally, through the presentation of facts, with which he/she is familiar to an extent, thus strengthening the narration. Characters offer perspective (main characters, antagonistic characters or narrators), and they create a kind of emotional base on which a piece is structured. Plot usually has a beginning, middle and end, defined by time sequence as well as conceptually via the montage. The scenario needs to have a central idea, and have a designated time and space; it needs to introduce a conflict of ideas through the conflicting characters, and be based in suspense, that generates dramatic interest of what will follow next in the plot. In a scenario there needs to be one or more stories and at the end a solution to the problem that was introduced through the plot. The action needs to be prepared, evolve and result in a certain 'solution' (Rafaelides (1996: 82).

The classic narrative line is used as the basis of interactive narratives, as it provides a thread of experiencing the interactive art-work. Yet, exploration of the narrative mechanisms is also in place. Search and revelation are not only limited in the scenario of the story that is the result of each reading, but it extends to the design of the narrative paths, that incur within the scenario, so that the experience of the process is equally important that the story itself.

Collet (1976: 177 – 178) notes that the film narrative is not based in the acting of many characters as much as it relied in the presence of one that is accompanied by others. The main character in film is the one that the camera follows, and thus the continuity and lenght of the story is ensured. The main character is constantly at the center in two ways: the cinematic universe is moving around him, while he is the main objective of that universe.

The user/viewer of extended artwork often becomes the main actor in the plot, in more or less a similar paradigm with that of video games. Example of extended artworks strongly based on plot, where the views becomes an actor him/herself, are Luc Courchesne's Portait One (1990), as well as the later more immersive works: Salon des Ombres (1996), and Landscape One (1998).

In interactive plot, the main character is embodied by the viewer/user, who lives the evolution of the scenario. Mateas (2002: 22) questions in what way the interactive drama, as an approach to interactive narrative, faces tension and contrast between interaction and plot. How can an interactive experience have characteristics of the experience of the classic Aristotelian drama while it gives to player/viewer the interactive liberty to have a real

impact on the story? He concludes that interactive drama is an approach among many in the field of interactive narration.

A cultural product, in order to be considered narration, needs to comply with some criteria, that literature researcher Mieke Bal (via Manovic, 2001) defines as the following: it must contain an actor and a narrator, as well as three distinct levels that consist of text, story, and ending (fabula). And the content has to be a series of interlinked facts that are caused or experienced by the actors.

Murray suggests three aesthetic categories for the analysis of the experience of an interactive story: mediation, immersion, and transformation. She considers mediation as the primary aesthetic element of interactive drama. In Immersion, the emotional involvement is important so that the viewer experiences 'purification' through the art piece ('catharsis' in film). The aspect of transformation is examined in respect to the variety offered as result, of caleidoscopic narrations, where the viewer can enter many times each of them experiencing a different part of the story.

## 7. Content-context relation in interactive art

The experience of a piece of art derives from its relation with its context, since the same object offers a different experience when it is placed in different surroundings. Furthermore, if the artwork offers the user the possibility of interaction, an augmented space is been created which surpasses the physical and blends in the virtua, whereby the human-machine communication is being established.

Edmond Couchot & Norbert Hillaire (2003: 228) note that the piece of art is being inscribed in a controversial space, where the bounds between art and its content are being easily confused, as long as the piece of art derives from interaction with its users. They question in which way can this complicated and evolutionary environment be preserved? Murray (1997: 74) explains what we mean when we say that computers are *interactive*: " We mean they create an environment that is both procedural and participatory". Procedural environments are fascinating not only because they express behaviors produced by rules, but because behaviors can be lead by human users. They respond to user's actions.

When procedural environments are being offered for simultaneous reading from a big amount of users, they are being altered in a way that surpasses the sum of the individual users' actions. Their unanticipated emerging way of evolution is explained by Umberto Eco (Couchot & Hillaire, 2003: 232) as follows: "Today, if we gave anyone the totality of memorized knowledge, even if we thought that anyone is able to create his own memory within this labyrinth, this would be inferior to social memory and we would have a society with five billion insufficient memories. Like a society with five billion different languages, each one of them being a pidgin".

The formation of a social memory that it is being described by Eco, as well as the formation of the piece of art as mentioned above, agree with the *ecological approach* of Mass Communication, according to which: "we are not surrounded by an environment, we

are rather parts of it, and the structures as well as the pressure of the system constitute important "causes" for our behavior" (Maletzke, 1991: 59).

## 8. From metaphysical thought to a new skepticism

In social perception, interpretation needs to be described with words so that it can be achieved. One can "hang the *picture* on the wall" but we do not "hang an *image* on the wall". An *image* is what comes off the *picture* (Mitchell, 2004). It took years of critical thinking and development of language tools to reflect in two sentences such an understanding of the artwork.

The procedure of naming objects and ideas – and subsequently composing theoretical constructs - serves towards the formation of meaning in art. Images were adopted in order for meaning to become clearer and reliable. An image (artwork) disengaged from meaning, gains its own territory beyond our understanding as a culture that is based strongly in language at least in the literate world. Language cannot retreat from its role and cannot disengage from the territory it has gained up to now; it cannot turn against itself. However in the recent cultural developments a "storm" of changes arises rapidly because of the advance and widespread adoption of Information-Communication Technologies (IT). The same turn towards more complexity is happening with the artistic conception and practice.

Due the rapid expansion of Information and Communication Technology, the formulation of new words (onomatopoeia) for objects and ideas though the language process, creates new vocabularies. For example: understanding turns to *inter*standing, writing to *tele*writting, books to *e*-books, *e*-clothes and so on. In the present IT digital media, art is radical in both expressing and reflecting the newly generated cultural formations.

Images, as such, were captivated in the content assigned to them by language. In this sense meaning has become more and more authoritative, and has been requiring increasing amount of artistic power to tame it; this was the situation until modernism, where art was a lot more about form rather than content. In the post-modern world, on the other hand, with the appearance of conceptual art, the discussion is becoming more about the subjective (the ego), which is what the art work controls to a higher extend.

In the post conceptual, post language, post meaning era, that happens along with the overabundance of IT; as Gianni Vattimo states: we have reached a stage were the belief in great narrations has come to an end. Vattimo refers to the "end of history" as an idea of the evolution towards a great destination (Vattimo, 1980).

The art world that we were used to has already collapsed, even though established art spaces such as galleries, opera houses, museums , still exist along with many 'younger' forms of art such as happenings, activist's art, land art, performances e.t.c.

The most radical change, according to Benjamin (Benjamin, 1936) is the fact that in the technical reproduction period the aesthetic perception is more and more becoming an abstract perception. This perception is no longer close to the art object, which in it's own essence incorporated this aura. The experience of abstract enjoinment is becoming

detached from the art work. At the edge of decadence, this aesthetic experience is increasingly realized through fragmented meanings - in the same way that moral experiences do not move towards the 'important' choices that happen at the inner space of the holistic value systems such as the good and bad (Vattimo, 1980).

This dichotomy - like with other similar dichotomies between opposites – was the basis of the formation of meaning in the literate world. But in the emerging IT world the meaning is no longer defined by opposites. The historical world as we knew it does not exist anymore and nor is the art-work that was confirming this world's existence. What could be the artwork during the post-conceptual, meta-language or even meta-image (as we still understand image) world?

The artists of the present seem like refuges, having misplaced, nihilistic existences. The extended artist, unbounded from the frame of language and history, but also expelled by the popular aesthetics and practices of the commercial technoparadise world, would reflect in their artwork a loss of direction and purpose.

However in the new emerging art scene, the artist, (who is for the first time in human history truly discharged by all kinds of meanings, representations and interpretations), come up with works beyond perception but not metaphysical. The process becomes the artist's focus rather than the final artistic result itself. Artistic practices today create causes of experiences instead of final works; create causes to speak about small unimportant things almost at the edge of nihilism, almost with silent tools. These works of art challenge reasons for appearances and disappearances, while this game reflects the present meta-meaning, a continuous shift towards all directions and possibilities.

## 9. In conclusion: towards a new opportunity for art without great narratives.

For the first time in the human history, art (as we knew it) is humiliated, or even ridiculed, for the sake of the recognition of the human in a meta-meaning world. Current art practices slowly build a place where the fragile human could survive traumatized but having cast off any guilds. Under this spectrum, artists of the present become themselves art objects, as they bring in the forefront their own mythologies. Their personal narrations, (as many narrations as many as the artists themselves) come into the forefront, while the problem at the era of "the end of all great narratives" is who would be willing to listen to all these narrations?

The most reliable evaluator and establisher of the artwork has always been Time. The artist's personal talent had to deal with this major task, to understand and accumulate the mechanism of Time in order for the art object to overrun the ephemeral and leave a mark in history. The individual artistic narrations in any form of art practices will have to deal with the same problem while there is no history or histories created anymore to leave their mark on.

This is a major step for artists towards trusting their own narrations and mythologies outside the frame of history, and this is the first time that the artistic process resembles more and

more the scientific experimental practice. As scientific experiments (such as the pre-cinematic systems that were created for scientific purposes) bring into light fragments of information about different or similar topics and gradually a new theory emerges as a result, in a likewise manner collective artworks do appear as platforms of reflection stemming from the fragmented mythologies of the individuals who created them. As this process is already happening now, it is only a matter of the Time parameter that will define if these collective works will be able to exist. Time purifies the artworks from any intentions, purposes or hidden agendas. The art object that becomes classic is because, in the passing of time, the form is liberated from the meaning the creator assigned to it. We have to trust Time that will do its job after the artwork –be it collective or individual - is completed. Time chooses whether an art object is to disappear, for many good reasons. Nowadays we meet thousands of artworks that are destined to vanish; their artists ignore the power of the mechanism of Time while working over them. This phenomenon is very similar to creating purposely suicidal art objects. Be it so, at least it shouldn't be unintentional or unrecognizable as a sign of our culture.

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