

■■■
**THE CREATIVITY OF THE
 CONNECTED MULTITUDE AND
 THE MEANING OF ART IN THE
 CONTEXT OF THE WEB 2.0**

[JUAN MARTÍN PRADA]

Within the context of what we can identify as "Web 2.0" there are various service platforms such as: Myspace, YouTube or Flickr, for example, that allow their users to participate in a communitarian manner, cooperating and sharing files, photographs, videos, etc. Furthermore, it also allows for their transformation and reissue (for example, in Jumpcut) thus transforming the user, who is no longer a mere consumer of information, into a content provider. Therefore, at least ideally, "Web 2.0" would be the web "for" the users, simultaneously generated "by" the users themselves, on the basis that all of its services improve the greater the amount of people that use them. The large blogs that allow for the uploading of photographs and videos, as well as the enormous development of "do it yourself" platforms, which currently proliferate around the Web, have become fundamental catalysts of this process.

The fact that anyone can produce and distribute any kind of visual and audiovisual material has brought about an intense and unstoppable process of socialisation of creative practices. "Amateur" creations are now a statistically significant part of the contents available on-line. This process clearly contrasts with the professionalism that characterised the 20th Century at all levels. At present, the older concept of the individual, as the exclusive location for "artistic talent" and the accompanying suppression of that talent within the "great masses" has lost its meaning. It is now part of an increasingly distant past, after the extreme attenuation of all divisions of labour (wherein

Marx specifically identified the main cause of this suppression).

The transformation of consumers into producers of contents has undeniably always been the focus of much interest. For example, for Guy Debord, in "Theses on the Cultural Revolution," the freedom to employ time was impossible without the modern instruments for the construction of modern everyday life. It was only through their use, he continued, that one could move from a "utopian revolutionary art to an experiential revolutionary art" [1]. On the other hand, the transformation of the crowd into an autonomous agent of production, as proposed by Hardt and Negri could be channelled, by attempting to obtain free access and control over the primary means of biopolitical production, and therefore the production of subjectivities. These subjectivities include the production of knowledge, information, communication and emotions, which basically, constitute the main elements of the contemporary productive fabric.

Similarly, we must recall that only, an increasingly smaller part of the aesthetic innovations that occur nowadays, do so within the context of professional and industrial relations. Indeed, many of these innovations occur within the "social fabric" composed of users, that is to say, after the process of industrial production. Much has been said, of the emerging process of "democratisation of innovation" [2], or of "open innovation" [3] linked to the "customer-made" formula, which also implies the active cooperation between companies and users in the production of goods and services. What we are observing, is the transformation of consumers into producers of specific products, leading to a confluence of consumers and producers, in other words, the creation of "prosumers."

Clearly, this contradiction between producers and consumers is not inherent to the current digital media. While this is certainly true for creative fields, it is even more so in the

information field. The “blog” phenomenon is undoubtedly the clearest example of the emergence of a massive “amateur” production of information and opinion. Nowadays, practically none of the large media outlets ignores the blog phenomenon and they all include blog sections. Furthermore, so-called “citizen journalism” or “participative journalism” and spaces such as Wikinews [4] have rapidly proliferated. In such spaces, the readers write the news and articles themselves, and it is they who decide what news items are covered.

Nevertheless, there are many who see the growing hegemony of “amateurism” as a risk, considering that the cultural and aesthetic model of “Web 2.0” is akin to that of an ochlocracy, that is to say, mob rule, one of the specific forms of democratic degeneration [5]. Such fears rest on the underlying suspicion that people, despite the availability of every possible resource, have nothing to say or, what is worse, are “unable to make the necessary social use of them” [6].

Faced with such considerations, the only sensible option seems to be to view the field of participation, opened up by the evolution of networks, as a horizon laden with possibilities to convert many of the social and political goals, raised, many decades ago, by Debord and Enzensberger, among others, into realities. Furthermore, we can claim that at present the Web has, possibly reached the first phase in the true fulfilment of its communicative and social possibilities, offering us a glimpse of what may one day be the observance of the motto expressed by Dan Gillmor, which identified “us” with the “media” (“We, the media”) [7].

The connected multitude heads the political level of its new collaborative paradigm, the Web’s second phase, expressing and sharing their creations in different networks. This constitutes one of the clearer steps towards the effective existence of a social model that considers democracy of the multitude (following Occam, Marsilius of Padua or

Spinoza, among others) as the absolute form of politics. According to this stance, the connected multitude, the infinite multiplicity of active singularities, can be considered, taking into account their more emancipatory and creative potentials, as the origins of a form of politics “of” life, and not “about” life, in other words, a clear demonstration of the introduction of the “power of life”[8] in politics.

The connected multitude represents no threat whatsoever, to individualism, as their structure does not imply homogeneity. This multitude is very different to the concept of “masses” used by significant sectors of political thought in previous eras. On the contrary, we must consider its presence as the expression of the possibility of more effective and promising resistance against the destruction of individual singularity and attempts at undifferentiated unification, the perennial goals of traditional mass media outlets.

Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that “amateur” creative production is plagued with repetition and imitation. Furthermore, cases of singularity are always statistically minute in that field, as compared to the number of participants. Moreover, behind the repetitions and uninteresting creations we must also be capable of sensing the vitality that underlies this explosion of free creativity and public sharing, as well as imagining its full potential, in Blochian hope. This intensification of the creative exercise by the entire world does not seem sterile at all; neither does the independence of its productions from any receptive professional context and all kinds of retributive interest beyond that of its free public broadcast and circulation.

Thus, an entire spectrum of “social” opportunities has opened up on the Web. These opportunities stem from the creative and communicative potentials embodied in the infinite number of social and cooperative networks that constitute “Web 2.0.” This progressive undifferentiation between

information emitters and receivers entails, above all, that both the production of representation as well as the ordering and organization of contents is no longer a monopoly of professionalised sectors.

Anthropologically speaking, the most outstanding visual characteristic behind the majority of images and videos seen in “photoblogs” and “videoblogs” is that they neither, depict other possible different worlds, nor, variations, or extensions, on this one. Instead, the images reflect the world we currently inhabit. In this sense, they are images of our life in this world, a life that tries to gain intensity through permanent self-representations and visual recordings of its occurrences and pleasures. Millions of photographs and videos of all kinds of things and all kinds of moments escape the outdated privacy of private photo albums and are available to millions of people. This establishes a community of spectators who are simultaneously part of a representation, which is a reflection of themselves.

Each photograph, each video that is “uploaded” onto the Web is a small sample of its authors’ lives, who aim to rub some of their enthusiasm onto others by sharing these files. Therefore, the goal may be to establish some kind of “communion” with others as to the experience shared in that specific file, rather than the mere public display of the experience in itself. Indeed, every expression of life, especially images of enjoyment, will always seek endorsement in the collective. Furthermore, now is the moment where this is actually possible.

On the other hand, many critics of “Web 2.0” also perceive within this interest in images, videos, narrated experiences, opinions or the private lives of others, something similar to what has already observed in the “Big Brother” phenomenon on television. There is a certain passion for all that is not worthy of being read, seen or listened to that is transforming the Web into an endless registry of the most irrelevant events, within the overwhelming logic of “you

are the information.”

In any case, there is a patent, yet voluntary disregard for privacy at all levels. This may be because we are increasingly incapable of understanding and valuing it, as it rapidly disappears from our lives. Nowadays, the multitude of users of the main participative Web platforms upload videos and photographs of their most private experiences, making them public, with no qualms, actually enjoying the process, of allowing access to their private life to anybody who finds it or seeks it out. We may be able to explain this, as the effect of a new stage of the exteriorisation process. McLuhan already pointed out, in the 1960s, that humans were starting to wear their brains outside their skulls, and their nerves beyond their skin [9]. What followed was the tremendous exteriorisation of memory through the development of personal digital storage systems. Nowadays, this externalisation takes a further step, as users store their files in memory systems that are no longer theirs. The collective memories of the large “Web 2.0” platforms have become gigantic filing systems. These systems break down any relation of necessity or dependence between privacy and private or limited access spaces.

In this new context, the most effective critical attitude requires thinking in terms of creating something new, as in the production of alternative imaginaries. This proposition’s precedent is clearly rooted in Foucault, for whom political resistance, conceived exclusively in terms of negation, would only represent a minimally effective form. Foucault understood political resistance as the creation of new forms of life, of a new culture, where minorities would have to assert themselves, “not only as far as their identity but also as a creative force”[10]. Overall, the influential propositions put forth by Hardt and Negri follow the guidelines laid out by Foucault. They also contemplate the development of an alternative ontological base, centred and sustained by the creative

and productive practices of the multitude, given that its constituent power would be the product of its creative imagination, which would configure its own constitution[11].

The development of the current web's participative possibilities has undoubtedly enabled the construction of new circuits of value and meaning, endowed with great creative autonomy and a significant subversive quality. The creative potentials of diversity and the connected multitude hold an enormous potential that is already starting to activate itself, despite the fact that most offers for participation in "Web 2.0" respond to a well-studied system of economic management. What emerges from this overwhelming power of collective sharing and creation is incomparably greater in this new stage of the Web, than what has been neutralised along the way due to the corporate parasitism that lives within it. The networks' potential for producing difference and singularity are far greater than the trend towards repetition and imitation of stereotypical professional and commercial models that, nonetheless, at least statistically, are behind most of the contents that are currently available in these networks.

Furthermore, it is patently obvious that given that professional visual artists are not responsible for much of the visual production that can be enjoyed and shared on the networks, this raises an enormously significant challenge in the field of "non amateur" creation. We could venture to say that at present, we are glimpsing at a model of political culture that is akin to that which Rousseau seemed to suggest in his "Letter to D'Alembert" (1758) when he proposed that public celebrations replace theatrical representations. "Place a post crowned with flowers in the centre of a town square, gather the townspeople, and you will have a party. Do something even better: offer the audience as the performance; turn them into the actors." [12]

Nonetheless, recognising the relevance of Rousseau's suggestion does not imply that

the role of what we might consider as "high interest" artistic practices has dissolved into the infinite flow of images and visual productions that are not allegedly artistic or purely "amateurish." Furthermore, the possible differences, which are increasingly confused, in the fields of network "art" and "not art" are a matter of nuances in terms of the intensity with which each creation reveals and expands the essential aspects and potentials of life and the possible critical consciences of these connected multitudes.

The most effective artistic philosophy would not limit itself to be a part of the productive multitude's expression of vitality. It would aspire to generate the most intense evocations of the infinite wealth of diversity represented within the connected multitude, while simultaneously highlighting the underlying multitude behind each individual subject that comprises it. In this sense, if the "on-line" multitude is composed of infinite subjects who move and meet, like atoms, according to always exceptional and untimely clinamens, the demonstration of emancipatory potentials may turn out to be an essential mission of artistic practices. These emancipatory potentials, although still dormant, underlie the exceptionality and singularity of these clinamens.

What we could define as "art" within the context of "Web 2.0" is, in brief, that which heightens our belief in the potentials of the connected multitude, in their possibilities for the free production of critical thought and new life. Thus, artistic practice, this optimal form of resistance within the context of the new networks, would be an extreme anticipation of the multitude's constituent power. In other words, the best artistic propositions, constant manifestoes of the demands of interpretative thought, of critical and meaningful communication anticipate the world that the multitude might construct. The most interesting works of art, should always offer, at least, a glimpse of the poetic reconfiguration of the connected collectives' social interactions.

For all these reasons, one of the crucial aspects in assessing, the greater or lesser, interest of creative productions in the Web is the degree of intensity with which creations express and anticipate a form of "liberated freedom." As opposed to freedom as a purely strategic corporate stance, which, let us not forget, is what the majority of "amateur" creative production have to bow down to.

In this manner, the success of a specific artistic proposal within the context of "Web 2.0" would depend on its capacity to evoke, within the singularity of the specific production that is the work in itself, not only the abstract nature of a global space's life, but above all, the tensions of renewal and transformation, of criticism, enjoyment, greater freedom, and more singularity that are inherent to the "on-line" multitude.

Therefore we must never think of art in the Web as a transcendental element of life, but on the contrary, as an element that is capable of penetrating it, affirming the existence and power of difference, diversity and the exceptionality of each of the infinite elements that comprise the infinite number of connected lives. Indeed, art is that which reveals the common underlying elements of this world of singularities: a need to live life more fully, with greater shared and solidary expressions, a life that coexists with that of others, not through homogeneity but through the enjoyment of difference. To gain awareness of these "common" elements through the celebration and recording of infinite singularities, is, to some extent, a step towards a form of resistance that anticipates that which is put forwards in the slogan "Another world is possible", and which as Negri pointed out, implies "an exodus toward ourselves"[13].

Moreover, given that within this second stage of the Web, vital interrelations are economically fully productive, the need arises to establish a new theory of value, as the new informational economy, based on

the production of social networks, focuses on increasingly immaterial labour, generally focused on emotional production, the manipulation and management of emotions and sociality. It would therefore be legitimate to state that the nature of the production mechanisms of collective subjectivity is already intrinsically emotional. Consequently, within the emotional application of social relations, we expect the new cultural and entertainment industries to have a heightened potential to transform social concerns and an even more important lucrative potential. The artistic projects that explore the world of social networks, the places, and forms in which these encounters take place, dialogues and exchanges on the Internet, are ultimately, approximations to the problems that have arisen regarding the emotional nature of biopolitical production. It is practically impossible to question the fact that the possibility for effective political resistance, in the context of the connected society, must be set in the appropriation and recognition of the emancipatory potential of the principles that are crucial to productive biopolitical dynamics, such as affection, cooperation or friendship. To rescue them from corporate domestication is the mission of the new resistance, which must highlight their potential for the production of a new community, for the generation of an active implementation of the principle of what is common. Artistic creation (let us not forget that the aesthetic experience has traditionally been considered as being pure emotional) may be one of the best means to carry out this rescue.

NOTES

[1] Guy Debord, "Tesis sobre la revolución cultural", in *Textos situacionistas sobre arte y urbanismo*, La Piqueta, Madrid, 1977, p. 122.

[2] See Erik von Hippel, *Democratizing Innovation*, MIT Press, 2005.

[3] See Henry William Chesbrough, *Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating*

and *Profiting from Technology*, Harvard Business School Press, 2003.

[4]<http://wikinews.org/>.

[5]See, regarding these aspects, Andrew Keen's book *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture*, Doubleday/Currency, New York, 2007.

[6]Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media", in John Thornton Caldwell, *Theories of the New Media*, The Athlone Press, London, 2000. p. 68.

[7]See Dan Gillmor, *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, O'Reilly Media, 2004.

[8]According to Roberto Esposito, "if as Deleuze believes, philosophy is the practice of creating concepts appropriate to the event affecting and transforming us, this is the time to rethink the relationship between politics and life in a way that, instead of subjecting life to political leadership (which occurred over the last century quite clearly), introduces the power of life into politics." Roberto Esposito, *Biopolítica y filosofía*, Grama ediciones, Buenos Aires, 2006, p. 17.

[9]Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1964.

[10]Michel Foucault, *Dits et Écrits*, IV, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, p. 741.

[11]Michael Hardt - Antonio Negri, *Imperio*, Ediciones Paidós Ibérica, Barcelona, 2002, p. 43.

[12]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Carta a d'Alembert*, Editorial Tecnos, Madrid, 1994.

[13]Antonio Negri, "El arte y la cultura en la época del Imperio y en el tiempo de las multitudes", *Caosmosis*. [On-line], URL. Address: <<http://caosmosis.acracia.net/?p=660>> [Consulted on the 9th of December 2007].



NANO AESTHETICS : TRANSFIGURING CULTURAL MATTER

[M^A JESÚS BUXÓ I REY]

There is nothing new in combining science and art. Nonetheless, to explore and apply technological advances in the name of artistic innovation, and furthermore, to use their aesthetic potential to promote dialog between science and society is a novelty. At present, artistic experimentation finds inspiration in theoretical and technical know-how, it employs devices, instruments and laboratories to test, heighten and develop artistic productions and to execute installations and performances. To enter into fields such as genetic engineering, nanotechnology and robotics in search of innovative aesthetics, implies the transfiguration of materials, the renovation of techniques and new artist-audience networks, which in turn helps to bridge the gap between science, technology and society.

Within this framework, this paper focus on nanoart defined as artistic creations in the context of nanotechnology and the manner in which such productions, with the help of advanced laboratory microelectronics, aim to bring innovation into scope of aesthetic experience by recreating originally invisible landscapes. In refining public sensitivity towards techno-scientific progress, nanoart enhances knowledge accessibility and its future scenarios.

The social impact and artistic interest in nanoscience and nanotechnology emphasises the concept of invisibility, the biocompatibility of organic and inorganic materials and the interdisciplinary complexity of their theories and properties –chemistry, physics, electronics, optics, materials science, robotics and medicine among others- [1]. Most of the existing bibliography on nanoscience and nanotechnology dwells on the miniaturisation of materials and devices aimed at the manipulation of atoms and molecules in different combinations for their activation as surfaces, nanotubes and nanoparticles and placing them in very precise positions by means of assemblers. Crucial applications for industry are developed in this manner, such as