

I SAGGI DI LEXIA

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Meaning–Making in Extended Reality

Senso e Virtualità

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Unsatisfied with Space

Hyper–Readers in the Cybercosm of the 21st Century

HUMBERTO VALDIVIESO*

ABSTRACT: In contemporary times there are no linear structures in the reading exercise. Today everything is distorted and augmented by the various directions that texts and hypertexts propose to the reader. However, a semiotic study of the contemporary act of reading is not an analysis of the structure or the referent but a semiotics of dispersion. The current reader is a hyper–citizen and therefore a hyper–reader. He is connected to multiple textual universes and a type of hybrid reality where bytes are integrated into atoms. This figure appears in the context of hyperlinks, augmented reality scenarios, hybridization with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and navigation practices dominating the symbolic speeches and the emerging aesthetics of the 21st century. This paper explores, through this disruptive figure, two different aspects: at first the idea that no image of reality is a truth but a network of possible arguments, secondly that the cyber–cosmos of the 21st century is, at the same time, the sum of all the destinies and all the origins that can have an argument about reality.

KEYWORDS: Semiotic; Hyper–Reader; Reality; Virtual Reality; Contemporary City; AI.

After all what can be said about the act of reading, I remain with an idea of Roland Barthes (1987), coherent with this disquisition: “reading would be that place in which the structure transforms” (1987: 49). Reading, in that sense, is not a discipline but a form of desire and fight; it is not an order but a deformation, not a matter of sight but of the whole

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body. It is not a mechanic act but an organic experience, not a registration about the order of the content but a subversive intervention of both thought and senses about the text.

Probably the most disturbing thing about reading is not the journey that the eye makes through the linear pattern of a syntax, but that where this linearity is affected and extended to infinity. Reading includes certain distortions provoked by our human condition, for the way in which space and time are inhabit. It is all about constants interruptions: tiredness, laughter or tears, commodity, concentration movements, thirst, thinking pauses and the need to go backwards to find a clue, or forward searching for the next cut. Comments on the margin, alternative ideas, underlines, appropriations, quotations, conceptual relationships; that is to say, the cluster of everything that we take after the act of reading: the experience and the interpretation.

No lecture ends at the border of individuality. Its performance continues in public or private discussions, in specialized criticism or in social networks where it expands in the form of a comment. Reading is an active process, that is why it is essential to empower it in a way of semi-osis: read–interpret–expand. All lectures result in writing and in a way of expanding what was said about the world, the reality and the history. The experience of a human being with a text is to be enlarged, to evolve in other texts. The effect produced by the sum of all those experiences and interchanges, of all those lectures and its implications and of the possibility of affecting and disrupting what is already mentioned results to be the sense of reality: the world's appearance, its argument.

Reading is always a double road distortion: inevitably the text and the reader are being affected. Both of them suffer a disturbance, since space and time, necessarily, rearrange by the given interchanges of that relation. Another scenario occurs with the structure of that 'reality' because in the flux of that instant, where the reader and the text admixed, a shift occurs in the argument about the world we inhabit. Reading is to be in discomfort with the space and to live with fulfillment the becoming of the present time. This seems to be reaffirmed more and more in our contemporary world.

Steven Pinker assures that "narrative is a way to explore the vast space of humans relationships in the secure enclosure of mind" (Lago, 2012). Nevertheless, can we even understand that this strength of the

narrative is linked to the experience of the body, of the space where we move during a reading or of the connections between them?

The psychologist at Harvard University also explains that “immersion in imaginary worlds allows us to cherish the possibility of miracles, magic, the possibility of extending the limits of the world by violating the laws of physics, logic and psychology” (Lago, 2012). The issue, then, is whether we can make the whole of our experience a way to cherish those possibilities. Not to leave it in the mind and allow it to occupy all the spaces of ourselves and the relationships it has cultivated.

This idea asks to take his image out from the body-book dichotomy and place him in the space of all existence. To insert him, at least, in the urban context and make an immense text from his whole existence whose main goodness is to be read and written at the same time, to be lived and disturbed at the same time. The reader is a cyborg connected to multiple technologies and a collective consciousness called contemporary city. The technological environment of this century is a hyperconnected and variable sensitive density. Therefore, that cyborg is not necessarily a subject expanded by outlandish gadgets but someone embedded in a digital ecosystem. Read and believe at the same time: this can be conscious or unconscious.

For example, when it comes to fiction texts, many are rushing to point out the assembly of history as an absolute to be consumed: the strength of its structure, the semantic fields of content — social, moral, political or psychological, among others — and how the reader gets involved within the momentum of his channel. This is certainly essential and there is no doubt that it will continue to function in that way. But if we go beyond the idea of a reader as a consumer of closed texts, that idea can change. Not only because of interactive strategies where stories change due to the consumer decisions or because of the analyzes made with AI, but for those who are responsible of the reading of reality and fiction in order to assemble them in a hybrid text that will later be shared and expanded on the networks.

An emergent generation of readers–producers is betting on science fiction, not as the materialization of a utopian or dystopian reality in a book or a film, but as the dematerialization of the present reality in a process where take part: objects of the current world, images of current texts, today’s technologies and software. This is the case of the group of

young Nigerians called The Critics. They produce science fiction short films made with cell phones, and publish them on a YouTube channel. Their reading of reality is made of fragments: common objects such as damaged phone casings, wastelands of the city, special effects, sceneries, combat choreography or imaginary media taken from famous sagas of science fiction cinema. All assembled in editing software and returned to the world through the networks.

The current scale of human perception is not the one that dealt with the existence of a still, secure, and determined-sized cosmos; but the one revealing the space as a consequence of the transformable, the transitory, the provisional and even the marketable. From the impressionism it was clear that the effort to represent the passage of time was an exercise shared with the viewer. The reading of the modern city in Camille Pizarro's paintings — on Montmartre Boulevard for example — was conditioned by the fleeting moment. From that moment, perhaps a little earlier, the representation has been freeing itself from the accumulation of chronological successions, central concepts and of the identity of power. Principally the image of the reader as a subject turned on itself.

Beyond art, if we evaluate a bit the conditions of popular culture, in the effects of our reality marked by the spectacle and through the approaches of digital technology — although we are talking about a post-digital culture since a few years — it would be necessary to point out that the reading time is not a mark but a move. Reading and representing is an act of transformation, nothing can be fixed because everything is in process. Walter Benjamin had already sensed it by pointing out the loss of the aura of the aesthetic object. And it is because the aura, as understood by this German philosopher, is a seal, a sign, a trace, a lighthouse that today we cannot perceive in art or in communication, for current time is not the fixed system but the dispersion of all systems.

What defines the reader today is not even the ephemeral — something so valuable for the actions of performance and improvisation in Fluxus artists — but the permanence of the action. What does this mean? Precisely that time is not fleeted but remains, in all its possibilities, while it is the human being who travels through his alternatives across action. For example, in social networks people mobilize in the past, present and future without weighting their differences. On Facebook, Instagram — or any other social network — there are the people we once met but we

stopped seeing for years; we may not speak to them but they remain in our virtual temporality. There are the interactions of the present and we are four steps away from any of our possible futures: friendships, relationships, business, jobs or studies that circulate as we all do around the networks.

If we review the progress in what is known as augmented reality, we will also find this new condition of time. History, in this sense, ceased to be a retrospective reading, and the future a possibility. Digital devices merge the action of the past with the present: I can walk through London and merge the ravages of World War II with my present, I can go through a forest surrounded by dinosaurs or sit in a park and participate in a concert that happened five years ago. I can enter any past and future scenario with the power to move local objects from their place, accelerate people's rhythm of life and mix styles and narrative sequences. In this sense, reading is not only living the experience of the narrated, it is also that the narrated suffers the experience of my own interventions. The time of virtual reality is the becoming of transformation: the movement of semiosis in a process of infinite transformation without leaving the experience of the lived moment.

If we take into account that the contemporary way of reading is associated with participation, with collective action and with openness in the exchange of information, then we can say that a reader is a transformer and also someone who contaminates. To talk about Internet browsing is to point out a type of active reading that generates consequences. The human beings of the 21st century are agents of erosion and hybridization. What McLuhan called the technosphere is today a "cybercosm" of infinite relationships. The human-digital environment of our time is a field of metamorphosis. However, it is also a field of morphologies where we can recognize, in its different variations, the structure of reality without losing the sense of direction. It does not matter if today the speed and density of interaction is greater or the present scenario is more complex because it integrates media, content platforms and modes of interaction. Orientation does not depend on being in fixed coordinates but on dealing with the sense of multiplicity. In this regard, Pierre Levy has drawn attention to the collective responsibility in the formation of this environment of incessant transformation:

People have to accept their personal and collective responsibility. Because every time we create a link, every time we “like” something, every time we create a hashtag, every time we buy a book on Amazon, and so on, we transform the relational structure of the common memory. So we have a great deal of responsibility for what happens online. Whatever is happening is the result of what all the people are doing together; the Internet is an expression of human collective intelligence. (Álvaro, 2014)

Reading is a way of expanding subjectivity through a field of transformations. There is nothing linear about it, everything is augmented towards the various possibilities suggested by the texts and their crosses at a given moment. A semiotics of contemporary reading is not an analysis of the structure or the referent, it is, instead, a semiotics of dispersion. The contemporary reader is a hyper-reader connected to multiple textual universes. This figure was not possible while the reading was reduced to the eye and this subjected to linguistic syntax. Now it seems that hyperlinks, augmented reality scenarios, hybridization with AI and other navigation practices dominate the ways of addressing symbolic discourses.

The New Objectivity

This scenario is not yet a realized utopia. The fact that the topology of a flat space of representation has been changed to a three-dimensional form of interconnected and expanding tissues does not mean that the human being is more free than before. Perhaps there are more opportunity to be free, however, a greater participation does not necessarily implies a more critical and active awareness. As technology expands human capacities to unimaginable territories, it also multiplies the tools for the reader into more powerful seduction strategies. While each exchange that it makes modifies the complex space of contemporary culture, nothing guarantees you to be aware and alert to the movements of the great flux dominating the world.

Pierre Levy understands that the relationships in this global exchange are not symmetrical and therefore are not crystalline. People are transparent to corporations, however they are not transparent to citizens. Human actions are exposed to control systems in social networks, intimacy is a concept less and less valued by power and innocence is the dominant hu-

man condition on the Internet. We do not know the sources from which data flows come from, nor the origin of programming systems; the same occurs for the destination of contents freely provided by users. That keeps most of the readers at a disadvantage level.

The problem of objectivity has nothing to do with the way we describe the world but with the openness to a global consciousness, to readings where everyone has unrestricted access and to the disappearance of obfuscated codes: “Transparency is the new objectivity” says Levy (in Álvaro, 2014). The problem is not in the referent or in the way we approach it in the speech. Today we are clear that every look is an interpretation and we are doing it on something that is moving and changing without pause. The issue is that the strategies of data distribution, the production of messages flows and the opening of codes are opaque to the citizen. Subjectivity, then, in the collective exchange is subject to asymmetry in its relation to power. This means that there seems to be no way to escape trends and social uniformity strategies.

Considering that there is not a dominant utopia, then we are not locked into a stable social body. That is why there is not a definitive and impassable fence. Information flows and trends do not constitute closed organisms, nor they manage to differentiate or to impose absolute hierarchies. Although the collective is harassed by opacity strategies, it is not reduced to a set of mechanical functions. Large corporations and governments are also subjugated to variations. Both in the inside and in the outside, the fields of interaction produce distortions and subvert the efforts to build linear relationships.

The permanent mobility of data flows produced by interactivity and global migration — the last basically as a consequence of wars and social conflicts — makes the interior/exterior dichotomy a fiction. The tissue where the exchange is produced and, therefore, where the reading occurs belongs to a problematic morphology. It is a fractious space against the definitions and even more against the relations of absolute opposition. The operations of assertion and denial, constituting the logical basis of narrative principles, do not realize for the stories that are now more complex. Contemporary narratives are spaces where no relationship is stationed in a central conflict. Much of what Deleuze and Guattari defined when they referred to those other models that cannot be reduced to the State: “We are facing something that does not reduce either the monopoly

of an organic power or a local representation, but refers to the power of a turbulent body in a nomadic space” (2010: 372).

The Reading, the City

Studies in communication have made it clear that the city is also a symbolic space, therefore, an area of reading and writing, of sensory exchanges and semiotic relationships. The studies of cultural consumption, for example, offer us a symbolic perspective of the human beings, of their looks and appropriations, of the narratives that seduce them in both arts and popular manifestations and, finally, of the media mixture that compose their urban identities. The passers-by of the 21st century are beings synchronized with the permanent mutation of media and technology. But also with the constant updates of walls submerged by graffiti and the different manifestations of street art, with its culinary sensibilities, smells, colors, emotions and temperatures; with the transformations of the body from the tattoo to aesthetic prostheses and with the differences of speech in the different sectors of a certain city. Marcelino Bisbal (2001), referring to the city and the cultural consumption, states that:

The history of the present is built — or as someone would say, reconstructed — on the cinema and television screens, in the pages of newspapers and magazines, also in books as the media ‘artifacts’ that they are, on the personal computer console and finally, throughout the complex communication system formed today by cultural industries. (Bisbal, 2001: 88)

We usually rush to point out, in a first reaction to the connection of the human being with the symbolic character of the city, that the spaces are full of signs coming from advertising, laws, architecture, art and architecture. Fashion among others. And this, indeed, is true. However, it may not be the fundamental thing. It is essential to admit that the determining force of this urban symbolic space is manifested thanks to the fact that all this is circulating alongside words, gestures, distances and, as a whole, to the modes of human interaction. In turn, also that extraordinary system of semiotic functions is interconnected to the digital. So, it is a problem of mobility, of active forces, of multiple operations and not a problem of

forms, formats, techniques and materials. Reading is to subsume in that combination of tensions.

If we want to better visualize this idea, we can compare the complexity of that space, imbricated by multiple overlapping relationships, with the penetrable ones by Jesús Rafael Soto. In the moment of entering into this work, the body, space and time acquire a new meaning. They do so by activating the effect of movement, mutation and instant experience. In their structures the problem is not the object: the metal rods and the geometry where they are grouped. The work appears when the environment as a whole is disturbed, when the vibration of all the levels of material and immaterial existence is activated. Anyway, when that altered state offers us a heterogeneous reading of existence.

The Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (2012) has a proposal called *Shadow Object*, which we can also take as an example for this disquisition. In specific, I will make reference to the work *Bifurcation*. It is an interactive installation in which a branch suspended in space, like a mobile, casts the full shadow of the tree where it comes from. When touched, both the object and the shadow rotate in an operation that combines branch, tree, human, machine, light and software. However, beyond those components, its meaning is precisely in the linking of what we can find not in the system but in its depth: the idea that the present and the absent are not opposed. Thoughts that the artist can track in Octavio Paz and Adolfo Bioy Casares.

In these works, experience is not associated to the structure of a model but to variable phenomena. The conditions of its space are generated within the processes that make them possible. A contemplation from a distance, an outside look would always be, according to what they are, an incomplete experience. Perhaps, a useless relationship, because there is no aesthetic space without the contact experience. The same happens in transit through the city. The reading, there, is a performance full of small actions not coordinated with a center.

In contemporary cities, the double exercise of reading and production occurs on the basis of variable vital pulses, of visibilities and invisibilities, which permanently alter the shared space. The reader modifies, increases and makes new connections. The citizen as a hyper-reader is a body that moves and an immateriality processed by the software. This semi-phantasmal character of the contemporary human is possible because their

“reality” is neither real nor virtual: it is made of multiple experiences and scraps of digitally enhanced symbolic imaginary. In its transit through space, the density of the place goes “in crescendo” because all actions raise new content. That density is a form. However, it does not keep a unifying code behind it. There is no legislator of spaces and yet there are fluxes of power. Therefore, the city is increasingly rebellious to Euclidean geometry and affects the tetra-dimensionality of the interaction.

Holographic City, not Geometric

The city had, in many cases, a geometric origin. There was a center providing order and identity, and from which the urban grid was employed. From that “omphalos” the civil and religious foundational monuments used to propose orderly readings of life. The narratives were sustained by the discourse of power. Today, that seems to be just the drill. At least that is how Félix de Azúa (Hernández, 2007) understands it, stating that “the centers, converted into the image of their own image, are the logo of the city. A city without a scenography center will have a very bad time in the coming years” (2007: 15).

In the perspective of Ascensión Hernández (2007), the contemporary city is the space of simulation, cloning and versions thanks to the fact that in architecture, as in almost everything, copying has become a valid mode of cultural representation, accurate and indispensable. The copy not only multiplies what has been said but also gives it a good density thanks to noise or sharpness. It doesn't matter if a copy gains or loses information, it will always be a thick space, with a lot of mass, full of content that can be confusing or can saturate us with data. The low resolution makes blurry spaces an important ingredient in reading: it complicates, decelerate and presents it to us as forced. High definition, a paradigm of audiovisual consumption of the 21st century, increases the amount of information in bytes. More and more it constitutes an ecosystem of relationships.

In Michael Najjar's Metropolis project, the digital fusion of the multiple perspectives of the megacities of the planet — Berlin, Beijing, Dubai, Hong Kong, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City, New York, Paris, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo — transform the landscape in a complicated grid of visual relationships. The heterogeneous texture of these cities is

re-thought from the imbrication of many overlapping layers. In this work the density of information is very high. The problem is not geometric but telematic. However, it makes all dimensions possible and probable at the same time. None is absolute and yet each of them in that overlap is possible.

Another example of the substitution of urban geometry with telematics can be extracted no longer from art but from popular culture, specifically from that sub-genre of science fiction that is the comic. In the film *The Dark Knight* by Christopher Nolan, billionaire Bruce Wayne creates a machine that turns every Gotham City phone into a microphone attached to a complex computer network that he will use to get his alter ego Batman to catch the Joker. In this way, the city threatened and collapsed by the terrorism of Batman's archenemy will no longer be the urban space of geometric layout becoming, instead, a gigantic digital network. But both of them are true. The first is formed by atoms, the second by bytes. The digital gadget is a kind of GPS made from the exchange of data and voice of all users.

Then, beyond its urban planning and its architectural forms, the city of communication, of semiotic hyper-relations, of symbolic vibration, of the circulating data — which we should not confuse with the materiality of technological interfaces — can be assumed like a kind of multidimensional hologram. A structure similar to the model that David Bohm drew up in his quantum description of the Universe. “Everything implicates everything” (Bohm, 2008: 197), the American physicist stated and that, as well, can be sustained according to the contemporary condition of the reading-writing processes of the city. At least we can assume it as a metaphor for the urban fabric we inhabit in the 21st century.

Isn't every human being constituted as a node similar to the system of the entire network? Do the modifications we make to the density of data in the space of a city modify us too? Let's think about the GPS applications for mobile phones like Waze. Every citizen circulating in the streets is a node in the complicated scaffold of the traffic. Through the application the user is reading the contribution that all users make and at the same time, writing their experience around the city. Both what he reads and what he writes — with texts and images — influence the form of the system and its circulation. They are imbricated in the same texture of the city. However, that writing — and that is one of the most relevant

elements of the communication/city relationship in our era — is not only about words or images, but also about the circulation. The mobility of network's users through avenues is shaping the traffic we see reflected in the interface. That is, what we read is also the effect of 'transit'.

Something similar happens with urban art interventions. I am going to allow myself to approach one work made by the designer and artist Teresa Mulet on the Boulevard de Catia in Caracas. On a wall stained by political graffiti, plus old remains of different posters and a decadent blue paint, she began, gradually, to paint the word 'to walk' in stencil. She did it repeatedly, and in white color, again and again, until she "got a full-white space, which shows the emptiness". This space is the effect of the relationship between the transit of the citizen and the accumulation of the word 'to walk' in the space.

The metropolis of relationships is built by circulations and we read the effects of that circulation. Mulet, in another proposal entitled "Cada-vez-es". "Cada-vez-más", she printed over and over again on black plastic the silhouette of a corpse as it is drawn by the police on the asphalt. Layer upon layer, by the accumulation of the same, the silhouette ends up transfigured in a white abstraction. It is a metaphor for the effects of crimes committed in Caracas, one of the most violent cities in the world. Due to the accumulation of bodies, individual death is lost in the unmanageable data which is produced every week: statistics, official words, political complaints, citizens fear, publicity of security companies, laws, graffiti, messages, calls and everything that circulates symbolically around the problem of insecurity. The result is an almost holographic image where corpses and accumulation 'interpenetrate' to show the only reality: disproportion.

Multiple Narratives

In her work on communication and contemporary aesthetics, the researcher Margarita D'Amico affirmed that the culture of the 21st century has been invaded by a new generation of creators. Heterogeneous groups and independent people coming from different humanistic, scientific and technological disciplines. They do not have a common method, they are not defined by a technique and we cannot group them into a name, a style or an unitary manifest. They are scattered throughout the planet and

in general there is no direct relationship between them. However, they agree, immersed in its dispersion, in the extensive plot of calls in which they are mobilized as a kind of digital bohemia.

These “neo-bohemians” no longer problematize the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of history or the postmodern *potlatch*. For them, the hybrid, the paradox, the trans, the appropriation, saturation and globalization have lost their halo of novelty. Such categories, among others, are now part of their natural creative ecosystem, their social relationships and the way they practice the rituals of global techno-civilization.

Taiye Selasi, writer and photographer, defines herself as “afropolitan”. With this term, she seeks to express the difficulty in trying to define her as an artist, as a citizen and as a debtor of a culture: “Nobody claims me as his own: I am never British enough, African American enough or African enough to satisfy those who find fun on the issue of identity” (Jurado, 2013). For Teju Cole, a writer as well, identity seems a problem that is resolved by accepting and emphasizing ambiguity:

About my origin, I move between two worlds: I was born Nigerian and I was born American. I think this invalidates all claims about purity and absolute loyalty. I have always understood that we are, first and foremost, human and that one’s country is a matter of historical accident. (Jurado, 2013)

Nevertheless, that problem it is not an issue of certain auto reflexives looks, most of the creators share that point of view. No doubts that all the narratives and aesthetics developed by bohemians are displaced from each center. This is about discourses in transit, similar to those which can be found in ambiguous and creative exercises at ‘El Blog de los Hermanos Chang’ (<http://hermanoschang.blogspot.com/>) where literature has sense only when published marginally. Also in “Neural Glitch”, from Mario Klingemann, where the artist changes the processes of the Generative adversarial networks (GANs) in the search of an aesthetic of inductive error in the field of AI network learning.

The hypermediatic bohemian, as D’Amico used to refer when speaking about that generation, inhabit a cyber-cosmos where the common dynamics are the interpretative media dispersion, the unstable meanings, the plurality of interfaces, the changeable variables, and the wills of putting into crisis any standardized syntax. More than for a variable

they search for a test, the quest; their attitude it is not about who is innovating but experimenting. They are, thinking from McLuhan postulates, anti-environmental “testers”. Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky, deals with his proposals’ outputs processes from the concept of a ‘total work’ an idea which destabilizes, deprograms and, therefore breaks with the imposed environment by the hyper-specialization of the technocratic thought.

I’m in the process of editing my first two nonfiction anthologies, *Sound Unbound* and *Rhythm Science*. I’m going to have multimedia, I’m going to have web, I’m going to do a limited edition CD, I might want to do some performances around them. That’s what Wagner was trying to do with the whole idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* [“total artwork”]. But that approach is actually more of an African kind of thing in general. In Europe, because of the specialization trip, you had to specialize and just do one thing. But why? I guess I’m just deprogramming out of the specialization thing. Why not have a book that can be HTML code, or a building that’s a symphony, or whatever? (Davis, 2013)

The artist Rafaël Rozendaal showed some of his websites collection in the world bigger led screen, at Seoul. Those works can circulate in any space because they are determined by mobility. The city was another node in the web, just like a tablet, an iPod or a cellphone. The definition is an inexistent station inside that instability. In one of his blog’s published post, after the question ‘how could you define an #internet #artist?’ made by Filippo Lorenzin in the twitter account @idaumentata, he proposes the following question:

Complex.com recently posted an article called “25 Internet artists you need to know”.

@idaumentata asked on Twitter:

How could you define an “#internet #artist”?

Here is how I feel about it:

Cultural categories can be helpful to discover things, but we shouldn’t take them too seriously.

Art can’t be defined. Try it. It can’t be done. We all kind of know what it is but no one really knows. No one really knows what happiness is either. The moment

you know it, you're not really happy. When you're really happy, you're not thinking about happiness.

The internet can't be defined either. It's part of our subconscious and dreams and daily lives and relationships and business and family and identity... it's everything. (Rozendaal, 2013)

The authorship crisis, the temporary nature of concepts, the oscillation of identities, and the aesthetics in transit are already common into contemporary cities. All of them are in the same context of our ways of urban reading and writing. Transmedia narratives defined by Carlos A. Scolari (2013) are going in this direction. A narrative can start in a book, a comic or at the cinema and arrive to a thematic park, videogame or a product of industrial design. For him it is clear that "it can be known where transmedia narratives start but not where they finish" (Scolari, 2013). Proposals of citizen activism create as well landscapes about the already existent, helping to increase the complexity, the distortion of the evident and the proliferation of readings.

In Caracas there has been a contribution in this context made by all the cyclist, runners and travelling explorers of architecture and gastronomy. All of them have been opening a path across the urban spaces, already full of meanings, in order to offer different readings, provocative stories and even new relations of identity and communication. Their actions are not only the route or the conceptual content of their searches, but also the city they are narrating with the appearance of those circuits, as well as the city they are reading to later, multiply it in words, images or changing proposals of transformation of the streets and the architecture. The same happened with activism in citizen protests where shields, helmets and bibs have reconfigured the political imaginary, thanks to an aesthetic blending of national identity with the iconography of superhero sagas.

Reading, City, Data, Inflation

One of the great contemporary complexities has been caused by the explosive and sustained growth of data. Although it looks like an overflow of information and, perhaps, a problem, it has not ceased to be, likewise, the engine of new disciplines of research, business and investment. It has

also produced an emerging aesthetic in applications which are made of the administration of that “big data” in art and design.

The shape of that “stretch” that inevitably involves, relates and affects both atoms and bytes — unlike those studied in traditional structures such as syntax, unlimited semiosis and rhizomes — is similar to continuous inflation. It is not, therefore, a geometric or organic system. It is not an evolution, a linear system, a mutation or a revolution. It is about the expansion of the space in which all the information has been expanded. The metaphor that can help us to understand this situation is derived from the inflationary theory of the Universe exposed by Alan Guth.

Let’s Imagine that the expansion of the data is the product of a primary “seed”, dense and hot, containing everything that contemplated the culture before the digital era. That is to say, what was kept by the books, the works of art and the incipient format of the radioelectric media. Now, we can consider that this primary density, of a very small size with respect to the information we handle today, was capable of containing all the mass and energy of our cultural universe. Suddenly, it was dismissed outward, in an unusual expansion, thanks to the explosion produced by the development of contemporary technology and communication. We would be, then, facing an inflationary force that in a few years has multiplied, in quite an extraordinary way, the constitutional data of our reality.

Such an inflation has altered our appreciation of events around the world and, therefore, the reading we made about them. Hence, the expanded, the hyper, the big, the mega and many other superlative scales dominate our relationship with reality. It doesn’t mean that things have grown. The problem is, in fact, how our image of reality has been expanding into extraordinary levels and, with it, the density of information where we mobilize. For example, the issue is not about the overpopulation on the planet, but a superior number of people connected to social networks and making the data structure, which communicates that reality, more dense and wide. According to Lev Manovich (2011), the vehicle of this extension is the software:

I don’t need to convince anybody today about the transformative effects internet, participatory media, mobile computing already had on human culture and society, including creation, sharing, and access to media artifacts. What I do want to point out is the centrality of another element of IT which until recently received less theoretical attention in defining what “media” is. This element is software.

Aggressive changes in matter of perception carry crises with them. If there is something characterizing the reader's relationship with urban stimuli, in their immediate and global reality, that is an unstable reading. Of course, this complicates the possibility of increasing the critical reflection, discernment and security. We are insecure readers because these hybrid and changing spaces — called Caracas, Lima, Buenos Aires, Brasilia or Tegucigalpa — are, in turn, accidental and transitory texts, subject to the variations that in our perceptual scale, have been introduced by that inflation. Cities are no longer encyclopedias, complete works or collections providing us the eternal validity of an identity. Maybe at some point they intended to be, but it is no longer possible.

Today it is not just about the transformation or renovation of urban spaces. Imagine that cities are texts and that for a few seconds we look up from the sheet where we are. When we turn our eyes on the page, the text has grown disproportionately and we can no longer find the line where we were. That is what happens frequently today. Clearly, history as a whole has made clear to us the dynamic character of cities in every way. However, the aspect I want to explore goes far beyond the architectural and urban planning. That is why my intention moves away from the given criteria of stages and styles, and show to its draft's format from approximately the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Today's metropolis are incomplete and interconnected texts. Reality is heterogeneous and imbricates the visible and the invisible. They are constantly sieged by amendments, cross-outs and projects to be made. As we read, we are writing and accumulating. We cannot even define them as 'versions' because they are actually 'sketches'. As citizens, we are living immersed in narratives crossing each other, affecting us and from which we cannot be separated. The world, seen in this way, is a space for editing and collaboration. Current job offers, as well as other activities, point in that direction.

In 2013, for example, an event entitled *Libre Graphics e Interactivos? '13: Herramientas para un mundo legible y editable* was held in Madrid. The organizers of the event, among which is Medialab-Prado, proposed that in contemporary reading-writing the user is both a consumer and a transformer. The task of designing content implies the idea of sharing and leave an open source for transformation. In a similar conceptual line, the Italian artist Salvatore Iaconesi made an open source work called La Cura.

After “cracking” the clinical data of his own disease — a brain tumor — and extracting it from medical systems, he made it available to the entire planet on a webpage. From there he launched the question: “What can you offer me to cure my illness?”. Iaconesi made the treatment of his cancer an open source and shared with everyone the data that was arriving: clinical reports, specialized 3D models, scientific studies, recipes, poems, images, and videos among many others. His illness became a collective reading–writing of which he states: “We can transform the meaning of the word ‘cure’. We can transform the role of knowledge. We can be human” (Iaconesi, 2012).

City Sketch: the Hyper–Reader in the Cyber–Cosmos

In the ancient world, the issue was about transformation by replacement or renewal. Pre–Columbian cities were overlapping versions of each other, products of the same centralizing thought and the cyclical conception of time. Then, as in countless cases, the conquest of America erased them and replaced them with another central systems from Europe. In the West, generally, cities were designed to be the eternal monologue of power. However, this has ceased to be that way, especially in Latin America where the relationship with identity, memory and the concept of permanence memory is closer to the conflict than to the truth. As I write this article, many Latin American cities burn due to citizen protests and blur themselves due to political variations, whose destinies are uncertain.

The idea of thinking the city as a sketch can be rescued from design and art, aspects that are not so far from each other. The sketches have not only the proper charms of modifications; the conflicts of the provisional are also appreciable in them. Ideas come and go looking for a way: the promise of an end where utopia seals the agreement between client, designer and user. The difference here is that we are over the collective’s sketch; the one multiplying itself because it is an open source, either because the city itself has decided to open or because the activists have decided to “crack it”.

Eugenia Fratzeskou (2013), in an essay entitled *Mapping Emergence: Nomads, Nodes, Strings & Paths — Urban Transcripts 2012*, talks about space as an informative substance that we can also understand as a disturbing

multiplicity of real and virtual layers. For the author, the visible/invisible dichotomy has been replaced by dynamic interactions occurring between many orders and spaces. This leads to propose some disquisitions about the space which wasn't present in traditional systems. When we talk about layers, we are talking about overlays, however we cannot appeal to a geological look to exemplify it. Here 'layer' is not what covers but what is added to the complexity of a figure composition. They are the layers of software of image edition: superimposed on each other, they are all invisible and visible at the same time. Each of them represents a part and the whole.

Reading a sketch does not necessarily mean to repeat the memory of the utopia planned by a city. One can stay in it, be satisfied with the limits returning it to its complex and fragmented structure before becoming a product. Shortly, it is to decide that the value is in the superposition of ideas that continue to expand it unstoppably. Thus, everything that is displayed in its space is proof of the triumph of the moment.

Virtual reality is just one dimension of the city sketch as a real life experience. The cyber-cosmos of the 21st century is multi-media, multi-spatial, multi-perspective, multi-speech, multi-polar, multi-touch, multi-channel, multi-functional. Multiple monitors, the display of windows in the space, holograms, fragmented looks by the speed of updates, voices moving forward or backward across the different levels of perception, fallible theoretical perspectives, complex truths and electronic signals from heterogeneous sources support the practice of most modes of production and consumption of messages.

The existence of the hyper-reader is determined by transgender, transcode, transmedia, transdisciplinary and transdimensional aesthetics. Likewise, in the fashion revival of previous decades there is also a multiple-time aesthetic. In this sense, every text is sketch and every city is a text-sketch. Reading, without a doubt, is to interfere, interact and affect. Participating stimulates an invasive action spreading in everyday life a display of never original, exclusive or isolated stories. They are always alternatives. What does this mean? First of all, no image of reality is a truth but a network of possible arguments. Secondly, this cyber-cosmos of the 21st century is, at the same time, the sum of all the destinies and of all the origins that can have any argument about reality.

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