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VIRTUOSITY of Performing the PORTRAIT

Versions of the Work and the Life Itself

An artwork named *a* requires thorough reconsideration. Does that *a* means something that's 'first', something that precedes everything and comes before everything else? Or, is that *a* a surprised scream of wonder, of amazement or bewilderment that is yet to come, and of fear, that obscures every expectation (erwartung)? Is that *a* the first letter of an inscription into the surface? Or, maybe *a* is an initial form of screen output for the eye which represents the body to the image? Is it a residue, a trace of a scream?! An artwork named *a* requires thorough reconsideration.

Marcel Duchamp once wrote that he was interested in a complete anesthesia.(1) From the 'sole' or 'pure' sensuality, the visual was thus transformed through the potentiality of the 'concept'. With its potentialities, the concept was opened to face the visual. An openness, thus promised, transferred the 'artwork' from the logic of sense labour into the semiology of conceptualized production of cultural artifacts which could also be art. Sensuality and conceptuality were dramatically confronted and offered to the artworks that had lost their finished or 'unambiguous' media identity. Thus the *poiesis* incorporated in itself many aspects of *praxis*.(2) But there was also an inversion – the cultural social praxes of articulating reality commenced to incorporate primary or secondary effects of *poiesis*. The contemporary æsthetization of culture is totalizing. As if there is no longer a clear distinction between 'socially useful work' which is not art but only articulation of life, and the 'virtuous media production' which is not life but the very performance of art. Some kind of social or human vortex is denoted here or, politically speaking, a hybridization of life by the effects of art creation and a hybridization of art by the effects of the articulation of life. This exchange is post-Fordist: it belongs to the social range in which the work is no longer directed only towards the adjustment of natural matter to human needs as it was in the industrial era.(3) Arbitrariness and artificiality are the characteristics of the new work which seems to always confront production and creation, or *poiesis* and *praxis*, or art and society through virtuosity that threads sensuality and conceptuality into a multitude of new media renderings of audiovisual or audiovisual/spatial temporal images. Therefore, the image is no longer simply a framed or isolated surface, but it is an animated plane that transcends the frame, intervenes within the space and occurs in time through its 'audio' or 'visual' intensities. Therefore, the post-Duchampian artist often appropriates tactics of, for example, high-tech design, to intervene within a field outside of and opposed to the expected utility, in order to face him/herself and the viewer (audiovisual consumer) with a virtuosity that does not have its defined territory: a virtuosity of painting (as in Vermeer) or a virtuosity of playing (as in Gould).

In the early Eighties, in his resistance to the drippy softness of then-new painterly expressionism (Transavangarde, Neo-Expressionism, Neue Wilde, Bad Painting) Germano Celant proposed the concept of unexpressionism (*inespressionismo*). (4) Celant turned his attention to that small and relative difference between the cultural artifact of everyday life and the cultural artifact of exquisite and critical productions within the art world. Today the artist, as well as the designer, utilizes the similar techniques of, primarily digital, design, that is, of productive work. But the two are fundamentally opposed in the fact that 'designer' takes part in performing the fields for the totalizing desire of the other: 'Human desire is a

desire of the Other.' He is a performer of the æsthetization of the world in an endless circulation of capital and information between the mapped artifacts of desire. He seems to produce the smooth space of erotic slide between the goods and the desire. An artist, on the other hand, takes part in performing the interpolations of anomalies, frictions and resistances in the construction of hybrid fields for the desire of the other: 'The subject's desire is the desire of the other.' (5) He is a performer of de-centered, sliding, evasive, negative, subversive, eccentric or egocentric anesthetizations through the world of endless circulation of capital and information between the actually or fictionally mapped artifacts. The artist is the one who seems to generate the frictious space of political resistance to the slip between the goods and desire. The designer's virtuosity and the artist's virtuosity are incomparable: the first one attracts you by creating the potentiality of your desire for you, while the other 'breaks your heart' by indicating the technique that seems to evade the sense, utility, organization, belonging, possession and, finally, enjoyment.

Dejan Grba's digital video ambient *a* was created in the open crossover space between the 'artwork' as a research within the given conceptual problem, and an experiment in digital production. That led to the video art reflection of 'screen' sensuality or primarily opto-corporeal effect, and to the articulation of space for the performing gaze (body that watches, and body that is being watched). *a* is set as a digital installation but it could be presented, perceived and interpreted as video installation. It is an animation or, rather, an animated fusion of the photographs that feature artist's face. It is important to 'know' that the audiovisual image of artist's portrait was generated through the complex procedure based on the set of predefined and strictly applied rules. Following the rules strictly or without 'æsthetic' variations and 'expressive' inscriptions is an important quality of this work.

a confronts the viewer with a dynamic space in which happens the moving or 'pulsating audiovisual image. This audiovisual event refers to different problems in art. Primarily, it is a new media problematization of the genre and of the phenomenalization of the genre of self-portrait. Also, the projected 'image' is, in its appearance a 'dynamic event', or the 'pulsating event of the visual intensity.' (6) It is about the relation between the variation of intensity and affectation of the viewer's eye/body. Nevertheless, it is also a performance of 'acts' that cancels the expression. Instead of traditional expression based upon triggering or linking the artist's and the viewer's emotions, here we have a provocation of the digital, video or screen affection.

Finally, fundamental here is the problematization of the status, functions and effects of the 'artwork' in the new conditions and circumstances. Dejan Grba questions the possibilities of artistic virtuosity within the conditions of digital design of audiovisual image and its screen ambient presentation. The focus is shifted from the 'virtuosity of the hand and the eye' to the conceptual and corporeal virtuosity through accelerations and fluxes of the 'machine' operation. The complex and alienated operation of the digital 'machine' transforms the appearances of the artist's face, turning it into an exceptional intensity of sensual pulsation.

Notes:

- (1) Marcel Duchamp, *Apropos of Readymades*, in Michel Sanouillet, Elmer Person (eds), *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 141-142, Thames & Hudson, London, 1975.
- (2) Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Semiotext(e), New York, 2004.

- (3) Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958.
- (4) Germano Celant, *Un-Expressionism: Art Beyond the Contemporary*, Rizzoli, New York, 1988.
- (5) Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book 11)*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1998.
- (6) Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation (Post-Contemporary Interventions)*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2002.

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