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WEB 2.0 AS THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE OF NET ART
Continuity and fault lines in the discourse of Internet Art

Theses of the Doctoral Dissertation

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I. THE AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION

The doctoral dissertation focuses on Internet art (or shortly: *net art*) within the territory of new media art, from the perspective of the services known as Web 2.0. Net art is not just an art movement, but it can also be identified as a new kind of art form used the Internet as a creative tool. However, the Internet art is eliminated from the contemporary art discourse which is mainly due to the fact that its death was declared in the 2000s after the flourishing period of a new kind of communication structure of the World Wide Web in the nineties, which is embedded into multi-faceted art theoretical discussions contexts about the "death of art".

So, the question of the dissertation can be formulated such a way why literature on the subject states the death of Internet art and what was the reason of the change that meanwhile the Internet art was hailed as a kind of new avant-garde in the end of the nineties, its artistic practices was decomposed a decade later and its theories on the end seems to be prevailed. Answering the question raised can be implemented by on the basis the services known as Web 2.0, and this answer operates the logics of dialectics of continuity and fault lines or novelty and obsolescence. Looking more particularly, the question about death of net art can be investigated among the medium-specificity, the avant-garde, and interactivity as key factors. The final conclusion of the study wants to prove and articulate by the close examination of these nodes that the aesthetic and cultural impact of Web 2.0 caused the so-called death of Internet art. However, it tries to offer suggestions for the question that if it is really the death of net art, or rather, the transformation of this art form.

From the starting question, the structure and logic of the study is organised by not the history of Internet art, but an issue relating to a particular problem of Internet art. Therefore, the study has historical interest, but it is not about the history of Internet Art history as a whole. The doctoral dissertation asks how technological, cultural and aesthetic transformations brought about the evaporation of novelty in the discourse of Internet art, which can be examined by the crossing of aspects of theoretical and historical aspects. Beyond itself, the research of Internet art gives general models for the operation of artistic and cultural systems, and the changes of media, thus it is embedded within wider media and art contexts.

II. THE METODOLOGY OF THE DISSERTATION

As the research of Internet art just a part of investigation on the Internet, as opposed to the media studies related to the socio-cultural affects of media techniques, the study seeks to answer not primarily the question how the Internet itself had and has changed the political, cultural, economic, and cultural paradigms and frames. But it asks how an art uses a medium for aesthetic purposes, and how the medium affects to the arts as a system. This kind of aesthetic interest has methodologically differentiation from both the technology-centric aspects of the history of information technology and information history focusing on social systems through the prism of information phenomena, but it is a limited area compared to the dispersed field of internet studies dealing with the sociological dimensions of the Internet through interdisciplinary toolbox.

Second, since the Internet can be seen a complex system, the research has to deal with heterogeneous technological, political, economic linkages, therefore the investigation of the death of internet art is implicated not "pure" art historical method, rather, it indicates just an aesthetic dominance of the questions raised. So while the investigation is restricted to the art thematically, the answer requires a methodological plurality. The issues is crystallized around the nodes of medium-specificity, avant-garde, and interactivity, these rely on media theory, art theory and art history, discourse analysis, ideology critique and software studies as methodological pillars.

According to the doctoral study, Internet art is a paradigmatic shift from the image dominance identified as the watermark of modernity and postmodernity towards interactivity, participation, and many-to-many communication, and generally speaking, to social artistic network practices. This change based on the 20th-century artistic practices is grasp by the dissertation as the concept of interactive turn based on the analogies of turns in cultural history (linguistic turn, cultural turn, turn corporeal, spatial turn). It concludes that the internet art cannot be understood solely from the methodology of the visual culture science constructed by the visual revolution of (post)modernism. A new methodology concentrated to the media archeology and taxonomy of interactivity is needed, different from the tools of the visual culture science, which is able to grasp discursive statements related to the death of net art in the light of web 2.0 practices.

III. THE LOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Given the peculiarities of Internet art that its subject is far from self-evidence, the creation of a corpus itself is the part of research tasks. Therefore, firstly, I place my subject among the field of related concepts, and I attempt to take distinctions between the various denominations, then I can analyze the self-definition of Internet art. In general, the thesis tries to grasp examination of the role of Internet art in interactive turn by the studying of medium-specificity, then by opposing the general theories of the avant-garde and using the internal contradictions of these theories to Internet art, and finally by applying interactive theories to net art. From this perspective, it positions the spread of the trope of "death" in the Internet art discourse.

Detailing this logical structure, it seems to be essential to pose this new branch of art among the system of media and arts as starting point, including the terminological uncertainties, in order to specify my subject. Because of incompatibility problems coming from category inequalities, rival denominations, uncodified meaning and assumptions, I look at my subject in the framework and context of electronic art, computer art, digital art, new media art, interactive art, multimedia art, intermedia art, network of art, web art, web design, and net.art.

In the second step, I explicate the definition uncertainty of Internet art by opposing the two extreme poles of medium-specificity and post-media/meta-medium in order to argue that net art has no end at the point where it is said. I identify the early net art criticism as an interpretive tradition which I call the medium-specific approach of the Internet art, and I show that the tradition comprehended medium-specificity as meta-linguistic self-reflection actually. In my view, the doctrine of medium-specificity flowed into the net art discourse from the avant-garde idea of Greenbergian formalism. I attempt to grasp medium-specificity in a new way in order to move the question from medium ontology to political economy of media system, and I ask why Internet art needed this idea. I argues the essentialist, prescriptive and reductive idea of medium-specificity emerges in favour of media distinction in the case of each new medium. Therefore, the reason of the doctrine of medium-specificity is a father complex and the aims of that is emancipation. Instead of restriction to its physical and materialistic basis, a medium is defined by the dissertation as a complex system of production, reception, distribution, and interpretation, and this approach have to take into consideration the media interaction, and the mechanism and logic of political economy of historical changes, as well as political, economic, cultural and aesthetic contexts.

Logically, these arguments make it possible the periodisation of internet art understood as static phenomenon previously, and I examine four separated phases in the midst of the technical, economic, political and cultural conditions. I call the first phase as "anarchic net art". The metaphor "anarchic" can be explained by the fact that this phase was dominated by technical, juristic, economic and cultural chaos from approximately 1994 to the millennium. This period was understood as a medium-specific one, but, indeed, was characterized by the self-referentiality style due to the low bandwidth dominated by the slow data transfer speed technically. The Internet artworks applied mainly low-tech style, craft techniques, especially texts and still images. This period was changed by the advent of Flash software, so I describe the second phase of Internet art as "Flash-based net art". This technical innovation from animated film to web design to YouTube video sharing site played a key role that textual superiority was replaced by visual and dynamic domination. Besides that it directed online media culture into standardization and commercial media, Flash had a shift towards Web 2.0 described by Tim O'Reilly later, which was oriented towards the increase of the role of user generated content and empowerment defined by Lev Manovich. This phase led the elitist Internet art to the era which can be called "vernacular net art" by the dissertation. Vernacular net art can be understood as "internet folk art" and digital folklore enabled by Web 2.0 of which sharing culture directed the vectors of Internet art / culture towards distribution. However, the "democratization" of Web 2.0 and the massification of participation went hand in hand with the acceleration of the logic of institutionalization and standardization which catalyzed the trend can already be observed in Flash. I call the fourth phase of Internet art as "post-internet aesthetics" coined by Marisa Olson which refers to the extension of the online logic to offline contexts.

Given the fact that there is no consensus on the nature of the subject in the discourse of post-internet aesthetics, the doctoral thesis analyses only the first three historical phases in greater detail as case studies. All three case studies have three different focal lengths and methodology in order to outline continuity and ruptures between them. First, I focus on a group of artists called as Jodi which is explained the light of the medium-specific school of net art. Second, the Flash-based net art is commented in the frameworks of the softmodernist Internet art, Flash animation known as "flashimation", and browser games in order to highlight the epoch-making impact of Flash software. Thirdly, I analyse a Web 2.0 work called as *Crossing the glass* which is *not* considered as an artwork, and the aim is to highlight its embeddedness into the history of art and image theory, as well as to point out the massification of participation and the emancipation of the logic of distribution.

The periodization enables the next logical chapter dealing with the relationship between avant-garde and Internet art. Firstly, it is necessary to prove the avant-garde-ness of Internet art that is performed by using multiple aspects: the genealogy of authors' carriers, art trend in history of art, practices and attitudes of the avant-garde and finally the general theories of the avant-garde. It is concluded that the avant-garde is a permanent reference point for net art. Then I try to outline an ahistorical interpretation of the concept of the avant-garde which always refers to the criticism of the established social and aesthetic systems beyond specific temporal determinations. To rethink the concept of the avant-garde in such a way, identified as an *attitude*, allows for us to use Peter Bürger's avant-garde theory in which the author stigmatizes the neo-avant-garde, and Hal Foster's the opposite opinion as a model for the death of Internet art. While according to Bürgerian institution theory, the neo-avant-garde institutionalized the historical avant-garde, according to Hal Foster its purpose, the merging of art and life, that is, the elimination of the autonomy of art was implemented by the neo-avant-garde.

Using the theoretical debate Bürger and Foster as an analogy for net art reveals that the conventionality of Web 2.0 was made possible by net art, like the relationship of the avant-garde of the neo-avant-garde. However, the anarchic net art necessarily liquidated itself which was not explained by the critics and theoreticians as the realization of its purpose, but as the death of internet art.

As a last logical step, a deeper investigation of the interactivity identified as medium-specific property of Internet art is needed for the articulation of obsolescence of early net art which was avant-garde in interactivity, in light of the death of Art. The dissertation reconsiders art history and aesthetic ideologies of the 20th century as a continuing effort to the extension of the user's participation.

As a result, the interactive turn popularized through web.2.0 was anticipated by the avant-garde art and the progressive cultural ideologies, and the anarchic net art played an accelerating role in this framework. As a result, the thesis states that the institutionalization of the online interactivity made the art forms of net art based on interactivity to obsolete. This insight led to the dissertation to the final conclusions and the shaping of the theses through the "death of art".

IV. THE SUMMARY OF THE THESES OF THE DISSERTATION

Theses are summarized as follows:

The first and most important conclusion relates to the death of net art. According to this, the institutionalization of interactivity made impossible the continuity of the Internet art based on interactivity which led to the conceptions of the death of net art. Web 2.0 institutionalized the anarchic net art eliminating its *raison d'être*. It concludes that the everyday-ness of interactivity is the so-called death, in this sense, the murderer of net art is Web 2.0.

My second conclusion recommends the use of a general theory of the avant-garde as a model: The net art reiterated the logical trip what was made by the neo-avant-garde from the phase of the historical avant-garde, according to Hal Foster. In this sense, the title of the doctoral thesis – web 2.0 as the neo-avant-garde of net art – can be understood.

My third thesis refers to the paradigm shift in art history. Internet art is a paradigmatic shift from the visual dominance identified as the watermark of modernity and postmodernity towards interactive turn. Consequently, changes in the relationship between authors, works and users create a new kind of work, the "privatized work". The basic experiences of "death of art" declared many times are that art needs its autonomy, its distinction, in its own right.

Finally, my fourth thesis related to the logic of media changes. The Internet art reproduces a number of phases and direction of a new medium (underground / mainstream, elite culture / mass culture, novelty / obsolescence) and provides general lessons for the general operation of medium changes and cyclical repetition.

V. PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

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