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Zita2010's melancholy and the "low resolution" artists

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My study is in the line with Aesthetic. Its objects is the study of the impact of media in the process of aesthetic creativity and development of sensitivity. In France, social sciences are state-of-the-art in that field. Aesthetic, a human science, experiences more difficulties. Although, it is legally the best placed to mention taste and setting up of narrative and experimentation issues.

That's what I tried to do, in between 1998 and 2002 with my first big research about studying closed circuit devices. I precisely focused about webcam practices by amateur practitioners.

I didn't want to put into perspective artistic practices in order to justify amateur practice. I did observe different means of acting. I focused on one figure who has created a particular language: Corrie from website Camathome. I also studied aesthetic conditions of reception. I spoke about « boredom aesthetic » to describe that 'internet web privacy'. I was referring to Marcel Duchamp who used to say: « happening introduced in art something which nobody had put: boredom. Doing one thing while people get bored watching it, I had never thought that. It's a shame because this is a very nice idea. »

Since 2004, I am interested in mobile images. Those which are on the Internet but those cinematographic, on TV or amateur which go from movie theatre to homes and on screens of mobile objects. In France, there is either controversy nor debate on that change of works' status, on the issue of images and sounds' quality. What is happening to still photography or the work on the screen when one movie is digitized in low resolution? I can remember in the 70' and 80', the important aesthetic controversy on the issue of having movies on television. At the end of the 80', the famous movie critic Serge Daney annoyed by some critics and movie maker's contempt. Serge Daney decided to give a daily chronicle in the French newspaper Liberation. Named « some movies on tv », that chronicle dealt with explaining the change in the status of perception of movies broadcasted on tv. He liked to « venture into describing it »: « In short, one has to experience it, that's is to say, generations to come will discover cinema through its loss ». One period was over, and one has to think about the changing to another, the cohesion of two periods of time.

Thus next question is: in a context of digitalised data, a streaming intense and excessive of images and sounds, which sensitivity is at work? What about this still new sensitivity appearing in young generations entering in a world where data are shared, apparently free, downloadable, copiable... Without any conscious that this world is only in fact accessible by paying an entrance and exit right.

One uses generally this expression Low resolution (in French basse définition) to describe the quality of images coming from the technique of data compression. That is to say it suppresses some data in order to lighten the size of a file in order to ease its circulation on the network or its saving on cd, dvd, or ipod.

JPEG, MPEG et MP3 are then algorithmic acronyms now far from being barbarian words for digital devices' users. If one requalifies in aesthetic words this particular sensitivity (soft sensitivity) belonging to the web network. One can't strictly give a technical definition to low resolution. Because this expression means data circulation (texts, images, sounds), its

production, its distribution, and its reception. Low resolution defines a single way of perceiving the world. It asks the question of the perception, and the making of data enabled by using more or less sophisticated materials, more or less home made, mainly belonging to audiovisual and data processing goods.

Zita 2010

Zita two thousand and ten is 18 years old. She lives in the south of France, in Montpellier. She has finished high school. Between 2005 and 2007, she had a Skyblog (from French radio Skyrock). Since one year, she has precisely moved to My Space.

Zita's blog is significant of these young generations which are becoming liberated on the network and which handled MP3 files, jpeg pictures, animated Gif, and DIVX format's movies. Zita has developed her sensitivity in dealing low definition cultural object. Her actions and her practices show an utopia at stake in her room : nodal point in between ordinary life, actions, the practices in writing personal text, making pictures, is the room.

Sociologists talk about flat culture to point out the company of cultural objects (music, book or film) in home places, at home. Zita handles cultural goods, yet also medias, appliances which gets her involved in autobiographic or narcissitic behaviours. Of course her cultural space is colonized by the ideology of media industries, yet as an answer she transforms it : she infiltrates in formats, text format, musical format, videographic format (Lipsync), and makes them explode through her inner emotions producing her own language.

What kind of secret utopias is plotted in these forms ? Zita believes, she loves and she hopes. One is very far from usual amateur practices : some words unveil sensitivities just above the water, building themselves, feeling the world as it is, or as it represents itself in relationships, in media. Sensory talks, very reactive to the world. Some forms are produced by emotions, neither by the temptation of copying, imitating.

In Zita's blog, the overloaded pages, the highlighted words, colored writings, more or less blurred pictures, personal videos, are just like emergences. They are the hyper sensitive area, « media sensitive » of her personality. Zita is a colorist, a « stabiloworking girl » . She insists on words, on sensations.

Yet what sounds important to me, and what I can hold, is that these generations are emancipated themselves from highly standardized expression formats such as blogs, the website Myspace. Indeed, in a blog, everything is normed, ruled, pre-established. Skyblog forces you to conciseness, to obey an implicit logic. That's young Zita2010's case.

Question : which value should we give these thousands of data put on the network ? Can we archive them ? Should they survive their authors ? I'm thinking about Brewster Kahle's firm : Archive.org. This big amazing company has recorded yet around 55 billions pages. Yet when one consults the websites, these pages are lacking words, images, data...

In a last letter Zita posted on her blog 20th July 2007, before moving to Myspace : « and it reminds me a lot of things skyblog 120 articles yet I think I'll never erase it...Skyblog will take it over from me...yet I would like to print all my stories to get souvenirs » she does seem somehow sensitive to any loss of data, yet shows some detachment.

This is a significant character trait in the generations born since the mid 80s. Characterized by some detachment from physical support on digital ones.

Then let's ask the question : what will survive in several years from all these exchanges on the network, from these data copiously sent to servers consulted or not, sometimes duplicated to infinity but fast forgotten, abandoned ? During a short period of time, it made Zita sad. Yet since that time she's started a other digital life on the net, on Myspace. She

produces less information. She contents herself with changing music, introduction texts, interests. Just as if she gets used that her texts are not memorable. As if they are not taking part anymore in her identity construction. She sadly sums up her interests in nice and pathetic lists :

« Who am I : im working 35 hours to get some mojitos at the diner, i m very nice unless my bad reputation, i hope i ll have a succesfull and happy life »
My interests : drink some Martini, have fun, drink some rosé, eat some dakatine and feel guilty, my pay check, get laid, get ready, be unaware, have fun »

Low resolution artists

In this low definition context, what's the place of art ? What's the artist's function ? What kind of forms should they produce ?

Digital prints on kleenex or Post-it, drawing with an oily chalk on a Velleda slate, Patafix sculptures enriched with sequins, graffitis with a Karcher, felt-pen drawing on a punched A4 paper : pieces of art realised by Clôde Couplier, Fanette Muxart, Fabrice Croux, Camille Laurelli et David Lefebvre contrasted with the usual corpus of works one sees in the digital arts. Nevertheless they belong to them, just like thiose, some years ago, of Serge Comte, Raphaël Boccanfuso, Pierre Giner, Ludovic Burel, Delphine Coindet, Rainer Lericolais.

Yet, unlike their elders whose artistic practices « take their origins » in the use of computers, these young artists were born with the Internet which rapidly became their playground : Clode Couplier practices blind surfing from blog to blog, ending up most of the time on pornographic websites ; F M thinks of her drifts on the net as means to desire things, without possessing or living it ; D L collects images depending on his excitement, pictures that he will later on reproduce on paintings. FC through Altavista and Google gets fed of clichés and stereotypes juggling with key-words ; CL thinks her productions as necessarily declining, and doesn't want to set any particular size to her images.

All their productions, very heterogeneous, are the symbol of a low resolution culture. Is the LDef culture a falsely durable culture, that of the programmed obsolescence, in which algorithms (jpeg, mpeg, mp3, page rank) have literally structured the sensory environment and the creative power of young artists. The time for them to control, to reveal, to master the flux of images and information has gone. On the contrary, they are trying their best to propose esthetic experiences as undetermined as inventive. They produce shifty forms, volatile and temporary they name « weak forms ».

Then they multiply their identity, kind of masked, and hiding behind groups such as Grüu, Renegade, The Kung-Fu Cow-boys, Super Polar, Antro, and Dj Casquette : so many identities which supply the catalog of their real-false musical label *Dick Head Man Records*, on the site of which you can get the whole bunch of their videos. By investing standardized formats, social networks (My space, Hi5, YouTube) as well as art centers and musical scenes, these young artists proclaim the power to create on their own their conditions of their appearances. They don't care much about their institutional visibility and their position in the art world ecosystem, just like it was not their business. They participate to undefined projects which they won't be able to capitalize. So it seems that they implicitly express the criticism of a normative system whose vacuity they aimed at.

« Internet is a medium which enables us to make effective what is fictional ». Explains CC. By putting in place a creative peculiar system they themselves name « imaginary residencies », this artists little company has quickly built a network friendly and relational spreading on the internet network, and also on different mainlands. Naming it « fictional », one has to understand artists' residencies with no real legal frame, nor associative status and foreign to any artistic institutions. To date, six exist. *Résidence Minimum Exemplaire* in Clamecy (France); *The Ghost residence* in Tapei; *La résidence interdite* in Shanghai; *Résidence silence* in Islande (Sauðarkrókur); *Le Popo institute* in Strasbourg; and *Biosphère* in Grenoble. These residencies, investing home places, with no necessary result, and artists are free to debrief or not their creation on the internet or in an exhibition place. CC says « we realized that we can produce an energy in the work, without having to answer for it. That watching Tv is still working. We realized that our production is abounding, an unexpected energy, entirely detached from any context or evaluation process. We self recognized ourselves. » At the end of a first working session in Clamecy residency, they send their production to friends, to relatives, yet also to the Tate. All their works mentioned that they had been realized within the framework of Minimum Exemplaire Residency. « What happens in that kind of places, is actually the setting up of some conception of work; one doesn't do a lot, yet one does it fine. »

As a conclusion

Low resolution is not only a simple variation in formats one could simply imagine. It also represents a sensitivity in progress, a flexible perception of culture. In this new information economy, all cultural practices may be reduced and made attractive as valuable sources for digitalized contents. Artists temporarily fix their appearances and their ideas on various supports and formats, according to circumstances or their urge to act or to stop acting...