

STATEMENTS ON APPROPRIATION

MICHALIS PICHLER

1. if a book paraphrases one explicit historical or contemporary predecessor in title, style and/or content, this technique is what I would call a "greatest hit".
2. Maybe the belief that an appropriation is always a conscious strategic decision made by an author is just as naive as believing in an "original" author in the first place.
3. It appears to me, that the signature of the author, be it an artist, cineast or poet, seems to be the beginning of the system of lies, that all poets, all artists try to establish, to defend themselves, I do not know exactly against what.
4. Custom having once given the name of "the ancients" to our pre-Christian ancestors, we will not throw it up against them that, in comparison with us experienced people, they ought properly to be called children, but will rather continue to honor them as our good old fathers.
5. It is nothing but literature!
6. there is as much unpredictable originality in quoting, imitating, transposing, and echoing, as there is in inventing.
7. For the messieurs art-critics i will add, that of course it requires a far bigger mastery to cut out an artwork out of the artistically unshaped nature, than to construct one out of arbitrary material after ones own artistic law.
8. The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.
9. Intellectual Property is the oil of the 21st century.
10. Certain images, objects, sounds, texts or thoughts would lie within the area of what is appropriation, if they are somewhat more explicit, sometimes strategic, sometimes indulging in borrowing, stealing, appropriating, inheriting, assimilating ... being influenced, inspired, dependent, indebted, haunted, possessed, quoting, rewriting, reworking, refashioning ... a revision, re-evaluation, variation, version, interpretation, imitation, proximation, supplement, increment, improvisation, prequel ... pastiche, paraphrase, parody, forgery, homage, mimicry, travesty, shan-zhai, echo, allusion, intertextuality and karaoke.
11. Plagiarism is necessary, progress implies it.
12. Ultimately, any sign or word is susceptible to being converted into something else, even into its opposite.
13. Like Bouvard and Pecuchet, those eternal copyists, both sublime and comical and whose profound absurdity precisely designates the truth of writing, the writer can only imitate a gesture forever anterior, never original.
14. The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more.
- 15.
16. The question is: what is seen now, but will never be seen again?
17. Détournement radicalizes previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths and thus transformed into lies.
18. No poet, no artist, of any art has his complete meaning alone.

On December 11, 2009 six one sentence statements originated by the "artist/author" for the purpose of this piece were mixed, in a container, with eighteen one sentence quotes taken from various other sources; each sentence was printed onto a separate piece of paper. Eighteen statements were drawn by "blind" selection and, in the exact order of their selection, join altogether to form the Statements on appropriation, for the presentation at Stichting Perdu, Amsterdam. In the following bibliography the sources (...) may be found although no specific statement is keyed to its actual author.

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SENTENCES ON CONCEPTUAL READING

MICHALIS PICHLER

1. Conceptual readers are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2. Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.
3. Irrational judgements lead to new experience.
4. Formal reading is essentially rational.
5. Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.
6. If the reader changes his/her mind midway through the execution of the piece he/she compromises the result and repeats past results.
7. The reader's will is secondary to the process he/she initiates from idea to completion. His/Her wilfulness may only be ego.
8. When words such as decoding and comprehension are used, they connote a whole tradition and imply a consequent acceptance of this tradition, thus placing limitations on the reader who would be reluctant to make reading that goes beyond the limitations.
9. The concept and idea are different. The former implies a general direction while the latter is the component. Ideas implement the concept.
10. Ideas can be works of reading; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical.
11. Ideas do not necessarily proceed in logical order. They may set one off in unexpected directions, but an idea must necessarily be completed in the mind before the next one is formed.
12. For each work of reading that becomes physical there are many variations that do not.
13. A work of reading may be understood as a conductor from the reader's mind to the writer's. But it may never reach the writer, or it may never leave the reader's mind.
14. The words of one reader to another may induce an idea chain, if they share the same concept.
15. Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the reader may use any form, from an expression of words (read or heard) to physical reality, equally.
16. If images are used, and they proceed from ideas about literature, then they are literature and (not) art; numbers are (not) mathematics.
17. All ideas are reading if they are concerned with reading and fall within the conventions of reading.
18. One usually understands the reading of the past by applying the convention of the present, thus misunderstanding the reading of the past.
19. The conventions of reading are altered by works of reading.
20. Successful reading changes our understanding of the conventions by altering our perceptions.
21. Perception of ideas leads to new ideas.
22. The reader cannot imagine his/her reading, and cannot perceive it until it is complete.
23. The reader may misperceive (understand it differently from the reader) a work of reading but still be set off in his/her own chain of thought by that misconstrual.
24. Perception is subjective.
25. The reader may not necessarily understand his/her own reading. His/Her perception is neither better nor worse than that of others.
26. A reader may perceive the reading of others better than his/her own.
27. The concept of a work of reading may involve the matter of the piece or the process in which it is made.
28. Once the idea of the piece is established in the reader's mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly. There are many side effects that the reader cannot imagine. These may be used as ideas for new works.
29. The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with. It should run its course.
30. There are many elements involved in a work of reading. The most important are the most obvious.
31. If a reader uses the same form in a group of works, and changes the material, one would assume the reader's concept involved the material.
32. Banal ideas cannot be rescued by beautiful execution.
33. It is difficult to bungle a good idea.
34. When a reader learns his/her craft too well he/she makes slick reading.
35. These sentences comment on reading, but are (not) reading.

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THE WORK OF ART IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

MICHALIS PICHLER

"It would therefore be wrong to underestimate the value of such theses as a weapon. They brush aside a number of outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery."
Walter Benjamin

I
In principle a work of art has always been reproducible; man-made artifacts can always be imitated by men. Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain. Digital reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new. Historically, it advanced intermittently and in leaps at long intervals, but with accelerated intensity. The nineteenth century knew only two procedures of electronically transmitting works of art: Telegraphing and telephoning. Morse code, telegraphic photography (wired faxes) and phone calls were the only works of art that they could transmit in quantity. All others were physical and could not be electronically transmitted. With radiofax graphic art became transmittable wireless for the first time. The enormous changes which Xerox, the mechanical reproduction of writing, has brought about in literature are a familiar story. However, within the phenomenon that we are here examining from the perspective of world history, Xerox is merely a special, though particularly important, case. During the twentieth century algorithm and computing were added to the pantelegraph; at the end of the nineteenth century photography made its appearance.

With photography the technique of reproduction reached an essentially new stage. This much more direct process was distinguished by the tracing of an image on a film rather than its incision on a block of wood or its etching on a copperplate and permitted information for the first time to put its products on the market, not only in large numbers as hitherto, but also in daily changing forms. Photography enabled information to permeate everyday life, and it began to keep pace with printing.

But only a few decades after its invention, photography was surpassed by data file. For the first time in the process of data reproduction, data files freed the hand of the most important artistic functions that henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a screen. Since the eye perceives more swiftly than the hand can draw, the process of data reproduction was accelerated so enormously that it could keep pace with speech.

An Internet user copies a text with a lengthy cut & paste swipe at a thousand times speed of a user's speech. Just as photography virtually implied film, so did data file foreshadow the World Wide Web. The digital reproduction of sound was tackled at the beginning of the last century. These convergent endeavors made predictable a situation which Paul Valéry pointed up in this sentence: "Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign."

Around 2000 digital reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes. For the study of this standard nothing is more revealing than the nature of the repercussions that these two different manifestations—the reproduction of works of art and the art of the Web—have had on art in its proprietary form.

II
Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its physical existence at the place where it happens to be. This physical existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence. This includes the changes that it may have suffered in physical condition over the years as well as the various changes in its ownership. The traces of the first can be revealed only by chemical or physical analyses that it is impossible to perform on a reproduction; changes of ownership are subject to property that must be traced from the situation of the physical copy. The presence of the physical copy is the prerequisite to the concept of limitation. Certificate of purchase can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century. The whole sphere of limitation is outside digital—and, of course, not only digital—reproducibility. Confronted with its mechanical reproduction, which was usually branded as a forgery, the Physical copy preserved all its authority; not so *vis à vis* digital reproduction.

The reason is twofold. First, digital reproduction is more independent of the physical copy than mechanical reproduction. For example, in data file, digital reproduction can bring out those aspects of the physical copy that are unattainable to the naked eye yet accessible to the screen, which is adjustable and chooses its angle at will. And data file reproduction, with the aid of certain processes, such as content management or file sharing, can capture files that escape natural vision. Secondly, digital reproduction can put the data file of the physical copy into situations that would be out of reach for the physical copy itself. Above all, it enables the physical copy to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a data file or a MP3. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the Personal Computer of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the Handheld Device.

The situations into which the product of digital reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not

only for the work of art, but also for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie. In the case of the art concept, a most sensitive nucleus—namely, its limitation—is interfered with whereas no natural concept is vulnerable on that score. The limitation of an idea is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on limitation, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authorship of the concept.

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "commodity" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of digital reproduction is the commodity status of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced concept from the domain of property. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of data files for a physical existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the concept reproduced. These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of property that is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the Web. Its social significance, particularly in its most positive form, is inconceivable without its destructive, cathartic aspect, that is, the liquidation of the proprietary value of the cultural heritage.

III
During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. And if changes in the medium of contemporary perception can be comprehended as decay of the commodity, it is possible to show its social causes.

The concept of commodity that was proposed above with reference to historical concepts may usefully be illustrated with reference to the commodity status of natural ones. We define the commodity status of the latter as the physical phenomenon of a distance however close it may be. If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow over you, you experience the commodity status of those mountains, of that branch. This image makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the commodity status. It rests on two circumstances, both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring ideas "closer" spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the physicality of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of a concept at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by blogs and tweets differ from the information seen by the unarmed eye. Physicality and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. To pry a concept from its shell, to destroy its commodity status, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of ideas" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a physical concept by means of reproduction. Thus is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the increasing importance of statistics. The adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.

IV
The physicality of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of property. This property itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable. An ancient statue of Venus, for example, stood in a different proprietary context with the Greeks, who made it a concept of veneration, than with the clerics of the Medieval Age, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both of them, however, were equally confronted with its physicality, that is, its commodity status. Originally the contextual integration of art in property found its expression in commerce.

We know that the earliest works of art originated in the service of ownership—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its commodity status is never entirely separated from its ownership function. In other words, the physical value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ownership, the location of its physical use value. The secular commerce of beauty developed during the Renaissance that prevailed for three centuries, clearly showed that ownership basis in its decline and the first deep crisis that befell it. With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, data files, simultaneously with the rise of gift economies, open source cultures and public commons, art sensed the approaching crisis that has become evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of "pure" art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing by subject matter. (In poetry, Mallarmé was the first to take this position.)

An analysis of art in the age of digital reproduction must do justice to these relationships, for they lead us to an all-important insight: for the first time in world history, digital reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ownership. To an increasing degree the work of art reproduced, becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a data file, for example, one can make any number of copies; to ask for the "authentic" copy makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of limitation ceases to be applicable to artistic production the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ownership, it begins to be based on another practice—everyday life.

V
Works of art are received and valued on different planes. Two polar types stand out; with one, the accent is on the commercial value; with the other, on the use value of the work. Artistic production begins with ceremonial concepts destined to serve in commerce. One may assume that what mattered was their existence, not their being used. The elk portrayed by the man of the Stone Age on the walls of his cave was an instrument of magic. He did expose it to his fellow men, but in the main it was meant for the spirits. Today the commercial value would seem to demand that the work of art remain private. Certain statues of gods are accessible only to the owner at home; certain Madonnas remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are invisible to the spectator on ground level. With the emancipation of the various art practices from ownership go increasing opportunities for the use of their products. It is easier to exhibit a portrait bust that can be sent here and there than to exhibit the statue of a divinity that has its fixed place in the interior of a temple. The same holds for the painting as against the mosaic or fresco that preceded it. And even though the public presentability of a mass originally may have been just as great as that of a symphony, the latter originated at the moment when its public presentability promised to surpass that of the mass.

With the different methods of digital reproduction of a work of art, its fitness for use increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature. This is comparable to the situation of the work of art in prehistoric times when, by the absolute emphasis on its commercial value, it was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its use value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental. This much is certain: today data files and the Web are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function.

VI

In data files, use value begins to displace commercial value all along the line. But commercial value does not give way without resistance.

VII

The twentieth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus data file today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact the symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realized by either of the rivals. When the age of digital reproduction separated art from its basis in commerce, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever. The resulting change in the function of art transcended the perspective of the century; for a long time it even escaped that of the twenty-first century, which experienced the development of the Web.

Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question of whether data file is an art. The primary question—whether the very invention of data file had not transformed the entire nature of art—was not raised. Soon the Web theoreticians asked the same ill-considered question with regard to the Web. But the difficulties which data files caused proprietary aesthetics were mere child's play as compared to those raised by the Web; whence the insensitive and forced character of early theories of the Web.

It is instructive to note how their desire to class the Web among the "arts" forces these theoreticians to read ownership elements into it—with a striking lack of discretion. Characteristically, even today ultra reactionary authors give the Web a similar contextual significance—if not an outright consumerist one, then at least a supernatural one.

VIII

The artistic performance of an offline user is definitely presented to the public by the user in person; whereas that of the online user is re-presented by a screen with a two-fold consequence. The screen that presents the performance of the Web user to the public need not respect the performance as an integral whole. The sequence of positional views which the user composes from the material supplied him constitutes the completed Web. It comprises certain connections that are in reality those of the screen, not to mention special screen angles, content management, etc.

Hence, the performance of the user is subjected to a series of optical tests. This is the first consequence of the fact that the user's performance is presented by means of a camera. Also, the online user lacks the opportunity of the offline user to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the user. The audience's identification with the user is really an identification with the screen. Consequently the audience takes the position of the screen; its approach is that of testing.

IX

For the Web, what matters primarily is that the user represents himself to the public before the screen, rather than representing someone else. One of the first to sense the actor's metamorphosis by this form of testing was Pirandello. Though his remarks on the subject in his novel *Si Gira* were limited to the negative aspects of the question and to the silent film only, this hardly impairs their validity. For in this respect, the Internet did not change anything essential. What really matters is that the part is acted not for an audience but for a virtual community: "The film actor," wrote Pirandello, "feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself.

With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses its corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice, and the noises caused by his moving about, in order to be changed into a mute image, flickering an instant on the screen, then vanishing into silence... The projector will play with his shadow before the public, and he himself must be content to play before the camera" (Luigi Pirandello, *Si Gira*, quoted by Leon Pierre-Quint, "Signification du cinema," *L'Art cinématographique*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1927), 14–15).

This situation might also be characterized as follows: for the first time—and this is the effect of the Web—man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its commodity status. For commodity status aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it. The commodity status which, offline, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the user. However, the singularity of the shot in the studio is that the screen is substituted for the public. Consequently, the commodity status that envelops the user vanishes, and with it the commodity status of the figure he portrays.

X

The feeling of strangeness that overcomes the user before the screen, as Pirandello describes it, is basically of the same kind as the estrangement felt before one's own image in the mirror. But now the reflected image has become separable, transportable. And where is it transported? Online. Never for a moment does the online user cease to be conscious of this fact. While facing the camera he knows that ultimately he will face the public, the consumers who constitute the market. This market where he offers not only his labor but also his whole self, his heart and soul, is beyond his reach. During the shooting he has as little contact with it as any article made in a factory.

This may contribute to that oppression, that new anxiety which, according to Pirandello, grips the user before the screen. The Web responds to the shriveling of the commodity status with an artificial build-up of the "personality" offline. The commerce of the online star, fostered by the money of the Web industry, preserves not the physical commodity status of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity.

So long as the online marketing's capital sets the fashion, as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's Web than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of proprietary concepts of art. We do not deny that in some cases today's Webs can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property.

It is inherent in the technique of the Web as well as that of sports that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert. Any man today can lay claim to being online. This claim can best be elucidated by a comparative look at the historical situation of contemporary literature.

For centuries a small number of writers were confronted by many thousands of readers. This changed toward the beginning of the last century. With the increasing extension of the press, which kept placing new political, religious, scientific,

professional, and local organs before the readers, an increasing number of readers became writers—at first, occasional ones. It began with the daily press opening to its readers' space for "letters to the editor." And today there is hardly a gainfully employed European who could not, in principle, find an opportunity to publish somewhere or other comments on his work, grievances, documentary reports, or that sort of idea. Thus, the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character.

The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer. As expert, which he had to become willy-nilly in an extremely specialized work process, even if only in some minor respect, the reader gains access to authorship. In blogs, tweets and wikipedia work itself is given a voice. To present it verbally is part of a man's ability to perform the work. Literary license is now founded on polytechnic rather than specialized training and thus becomes common property.

All this can easily be applied to the Web, where transitions that in literature took centuries have come about in a decade. In net practice, particularly in blogs, tweets and wikipedia, this changeover has partially become established reality.

XI

Offline one is well aware of the place from which the play cannot immediately be detected as illusionary. There is no such place for the Internet scene that is being mediated. Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree, the result of cutting. That is to say, online the digital equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure, namely, the mediation by the specially adjusted screen and the mounting of the file together with other similar ones. The equipment-free aspect of reality here has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.

Even more revealing is the comparison of these circumstances, which differ so much from those of the theater, with the situation in writing. Here the question is: How does the New Author compare with the Old Author? To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with a surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient's body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authorship. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient's body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician—who is still hidden in the medical practitioner—the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him.

Magician and surgeon compare to Old Author and New Author. The Old Author maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the New Author penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the texts they obtain. That of the Old Author is a total one, that of the New Author consists of multiple fragments that are assembled under a new law. Thus, for contemporary man the representation of reality by the Web is incomparably more significant than that of the Old Author, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with digital equipment, an aspect of reality that is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art.

XII

Digital reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance. The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion. Online, the critical and the receptive attitudes of the public coincide. The decisive reason for this is that individual reactions are predetermined by the mass audience response they are about to produce, and this is nowhere more pronounced than on the Web. The moment these responses become manifest they control each other.

XIII

The characteristics of the Web lie not only in the manner in which man presents himself to digital equipment but also in the manner in which, by means of this apparatus, man can represent his environment. A glance at occupational psychology illustrates the testing capacity of the equipment. Psychoanalysis illustrates it in a different perspective. The Web has enriched our field of perception with methods that can be illustrated by those of Freudian theory. A good century ago, a slip of the tongue passed more or less unnoticed. Only exceptionally may such a slip have revealed dimensions of depth in a conversation that had seemed to be taking its course on the surface. Since the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* ideas have changed. This book isolated and made analyzable ideas that had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception.

For the entire spectrum of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the Web has brought about a similar deepening of apperception. It is only an obverse of this fact that behavior items shown online can be analyzed much more precisely and from more points of view than those presented on paintings or offline. As compared with painting, online behavior lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. In comparison with the offline scene, online behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily.

This circumstance derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science. Actually, of an online behavior item which is neatly brought out in a certain situation, like a muscle of a body, it is difficult to say which is more fascinating, its artistic value or its value for science. To demonstrate the identity of the artistic and scientific uses of data files that heretofore usually were separated, will be one of the revolutionary functions of the Web.

By content managing the ideas around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar concepts, by exploring common-place milieus under the ingenious guidance of the screen, the Web, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the Web and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With content management, space expands; with file sharing, movement is extended.

The managing of content does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, file sharing (bit torrent, P2P etc.) not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones "which, far from

looking like retarded rapid movements, give the effect of singularly gliding, floating, supernatural motions." Evidently a different nature opens itself to the screen than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. Here the screen intervenes with the resources of its lowering(s) and lifting(s), its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its content management and reductions. The screen introduces us to an unconscious optic as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

XIV

One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand that could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects that could be fully obtained only with a changed digital standard, that is to say, in a new art form. The extravagances and crudities of art that thus appear, particularly in the so-called decadent epochs, actually arise from the nucleus of its richest historical energies. In recent years, such barbarisms were abundant in Conceptualism. It is only now that its impulse becomes discernible: Conceptualism attempted to create by informational—and literary—means the effects that the public today seeks on the Web.

Every fundamentally new, pioneering creation of demands will carry beyond its goal. Conceptualism did so to the extent that it sacrificed the market values which are so characteristic of the Web in favor of higher ambitions—though of course it was not conscious of such intentions as here described. The Conceptualists attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion. The studied degradation of their material was not the least of their means to achieve this uselessness.

XV

The mass is a matrix from which all proprietary behavior toward works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation. The fact that the new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form must not confuse the user. Yet some people have launched spirited attacks against precisely this superficial aspect. Clearly, this is at bottom the same ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the user. That is a commonplace.

The question remains whether it provides a platform for the analysis of the Web. A closer look is needed here. Distraction and concentration form polar opposites that may be stated as follows: A man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art in the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting. In contrast, the distracted mass absorbs the work of art. This is most obvious with regard to buildings. Architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art the reception of which is consummated by a collectivity in a state of distraction. The laws of its reception are most instructive.

Buildings have been man's companions since primeval times. Many art forms have developed and perished. Tragedy begins with the Greeks, is extinguished with them, and after centuries its "rules" only are revived. The epic poem, which had its origin in the youth of nations, expires in Europe at the end of the Renaissance. Panel painting is a creation of the late Medieval Age, and nothing guarantees its uninterrupted existence. But the human need for shelter is lasting. Architecture has never been idle.

Its history is more ancient than that of any other art, and its claim to being a living force has significance in every attempt to comprehend the relationship of the masses to art. Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sight. Such appropriation cannot

be understood in terms of the attentive concentration of a tourist before a famous building. On the tactile side there is no counterpart to contemplation on the optical side. Tactile appropriation is accomplished not so much by attention as by habit.

The distracted person, too, can form habits. More, the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction proves that their solution has become a matter of habit. Distraction as provided by art presents a covert control of the extent to which new tasks have become soluble by apperception. Since, moreover, individuals are tempted to avoid such tasks, art will tackle the most difficult and most important ones where it is able to mobilize the masses. Today it does so on the Web. Reception in a state of distraction that is increasing noticeably in all fields of art, and symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds on the Web its true means of exercise. The Web with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The Web makes the commercial value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that online this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one.

bibliography:

Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Paris: 1935)

APPENDIX