

<no more tv>

(audiences, online communities and radical democracy)

by José Luis Brea

"I herein point out that television produces two effects. On the one hand, it dismiss the right of entrance into a number of fields: philosophical, legal, etc. (...). On the other hand, it has access to the necessary means for reaching the greatest number of people. What seems to me difficult to justify is that the amplitude of the audience is used to lower the standards for entrance into the field. (...) A fight against audience ratings can and ought to be waged in the name of democracy."

Pierre Bourdieu, *On television*

<! – "THE PIONEERS OF NET ART TELL US IN ONE VOICE THAT IT HAS DIED."/// – >

Eldar Karkhalev, *Notepad*

No more TV. I am not suggesting the negation of the attributes of the device as an instrument of communication, of social interaction, of *democratization* of the cultural experience: instead, I propose a radical discussion about the mechanisms that regulate its *real* existence in a "**free* market" context (the existing one, to be precise), seeing that the possibility of its effective social existence ever being contemplated again is virtually nil, except perhaps occasionally (in isolated circles such as festivals, ok), in terms of *public service*, as a territory generically protected by some *welfare state* revised project, I mean. Hence, there has been enough caressing of fantasies that never materialize, have materialized or will materialize, and aiding and legitimizing, under their shelter, such ill-fated and denigrating realities like those we suffer day after day.

This is the end. To consider a TV that offers or can offer a service propitious to the objectives of the democratization of the social space is to put a sail on the apparatus of control, power and disarmament of citizens that currently most forcefully and terribly impoverishes the social fabric and evaporates all possibilities of working for a concrete project of democratization, the device which most bloodthirstily strangles any possibility of authentic communication in the public arena.

The question "What possible action is there in the public sphere?" has no answer within the scope of TV – unless it is anti-TV, microTV, TV that is not governed by the law of TV, the law of the audience. Under its government, the government of that law, TV does not and cannot grow other than as an instrument of control and degradation of experience, as a device of brutal acculturation, as an apparatus which produces masses of inert citizens, in denial of all sociality. The first chant,

for anyone with a critical viewpoint aimed at the projection upon any new media, must be, therefore, "no more tv."

Or what amounts to the same thing: let us wager for a counter-tv, for an anti-tv, for a (no)TV that practices the proliferating dissemination of the micro-devices of public interaction, of small units of communicative action. Segment, micronize, always cutting and dispersing, wherever the great machine of capital globalizes, produces empires, sleepy human masses. Any universalist illusion in the production of the public domain, of the Ideal Community of Communication, of the Public Reason, does nothing but sacrifice it to the demagogical populism of the *universality of access* to the intensive exercise of experience itself. And there is no policy – other than demagoguery – wherever intensity is sacrificed for quantity. No, no more TV.

Every media follows the law of its predecessor, modernity seems to have recognized the historified rule of *differed action*. Thus, it is necessary to be extremely alert if we wish to prevent the unexpected collapse of the new utopian illusions projected around the nascent *new-media*, with the advance of the famous angel of progress, if we want to avoid being delivered a present defeated among ruins that do nothing but carry out the law of the preceding media.

The era has ended in which we projected and saw projected suggestive utopias in the environs of net.art and internet in general; this is now a thing of the past. By all means, we must now intervene by obeying new laws and with another conscience – for, in any case, we are dealing with something that is absolutely impossible to stop. The illusion of a *temporarily autonomous zone*, of a domain beyond the territorialization of markets and institutions – is an illusion definitively impossible to sustain. If, for years, internet was a territory on which industry turned its back (and it seems obligatory to remember this: for a time, only educational institutions and marginal groups within civilian society were interested in internet), it is inevitable to be conscious of the fact that, at present, internet is the platform upon which the most important and decisive financial operations take place, the domain in which the entire reorganization of the new economies is established.

To expect that within this context of transformation, illusions of anti-commercialism or independence can survive, seems, at the very least, ingenuous, if not selfishly legitimating. It is not merely an *integrated zone*: internet is, *par excellence*, the main theater of operations in which short and medium term strategies (it is also clear that this will soon be a thing of the past) of the largest empires of communication (of mis-communication, we ought to say) and of the most powerful industries of mass culture (perhaps we should say *mass in-culture*) are being decided. Internet is the very place contemporary society uses as a base to define itself as a "society of knowledge," a society of cultural capitalism. That they – those macro-industries of nothingness – consequently impose their law – that law which sacrifices intensive quality in favour of the quantitative magnification of audiences – seems practically inevitable...

In other words: it certainly seems that the most immediate future for internet is that it will become *televisionish*, that it will yield to the logic of the *means of mass communication*. Thus, at present, speaking of <no more tv>, when referring precisely to internet, has a strongly critical connotation: it demands a widespread policy of immediate and urgent intervention in a territory in which the fight is still underway. Or in which, at least, it is necessary to intervene in order to keep it going operatively...

Considering that the territory of net.art is so young, it has been assaulted all too soon by dangers too profound, by chasms too magnetic. Neither the hasty institutionalization nor a commercialization that has not yet found its formulas would stand out as particularly dangerous if it were not for the fact that both processes are going to be subjected to the regulatory imposition of the audience – the law of TV.

That the net.artist finds himself obliged to sacrifice any critical intention to that objective – linked to expressive intentionality, to the productivity of meaning or to the intensification of experience – is something that irrevocably leads to the most evident illness suffered by net.art in our day: aestheticist neo-formalism.

Donning a jest complacent with the new youth culture (with the market of the new youth's consumption), techno aestheticism invests considerably in form – and here design is once again pestilence – and little or nothing in content. It follows that net.art is failing outrageously by becoming precisely what it was meant to criticize: an institutionalized production of objects – the latest vacuous objects – that supply the art institutions and, consequently, the market. Animated objects requiring new forms of expectation and commercialization, indeed, but offering nothing more, in the long run.

At a time when artistic practices are experiencing such an intense process of transformation, it is a disconcerting fact that a new practice, born in a territory initially hardly preconditioned, is expending so much energy in solving, above all, the terms of its overwhelming absorption – without even investing any energy in the development of new forms of inscription on the economic scheme of production (parting from the high degree of specialization in contemporary societies, or the transformation of work into immaterial work), or in the Art-system either.

In any case, there are certainly other paths of investigation that are headed in the opposite direction, distancing themselves as far as possible from that *neo-aestheticism*, rejecting its formalism, or any concession to the spectacularity or the gratuitous effects of appearances – and it is from them that we can still expect some critical effect. Definitively, we will benefit from those other forms of working, which involve investigating dry and non-designed interfaces, spaces wherein all is sacrificed for the sake of content, of the opening of spaces for intervention, dialogue and communication. We believe that the logic of TV is broken down in them, mostly due to their insistence on questioning and crossing two borders: first, that which opens onto the very space of social issues; and second, that which opens onto the scene of dialogue, of the exchange of what is public in *writing*. We believe

that among the producers of new artistic and post artistic practices on the web, works that effectively align themselves in those two directions can be found, although they are dispersed into an agglomerate of varied – and always unique – forms of action and operation.

Works which, for example, from the web, point to their exteriority, to their social space, and because of their relationship with this, they become meaningful (the well known works created by Zapata activists could be underlined here as good examples). Other works: those that (like the participatory e-mail lists) are oriented toward production in the public sphere, parting from the generation of participatory media that permit a flowing exchange and contrast of dissenting opinions – a multiplication of micro-TVs, of anti-TVs.

From our point of view, those two ensembles of investigations point to an orbit of expectation that is wide open and virtually undeniable – when working from a critical and activist standpoint in the public sphere – that of the bringing forth of dehierarchized structures of media capable of allowing an intensified communication in the public space, while still caressing the avant-garde idea of the *community of media producers*, a community whose speaking games are regulated by the heuristic aspiration to a horizon of equality of conditions of participation among all speakers, all potential broadcasters and not a part of them aligned with the role of passive receivers (precisely that horizontal, decentralized and dehierarchized structure that can be conceived of as the contemporary device capable of formalizing effective models of radical democratization of the communicative relations – finally, the very matrix of all social relations).

If it is no longer possible to work with the enthusiasm distilled by an ingenuous (or hypocritical) credulity in the definitive realization of the old universalist dream (of the Habermasian dream of the Ideal Communication Community, and its post libertarian image in the naive fantasy of the *direct electronic democracy*), at least these investigations devoted to the dispersion and multiplicative proliferation of micro things persevere in the active resistance in favour of the dissenting processes of the circulation of dialogue, of the public airing of differential thought, avoiding, on one hand, the intoxication of the perfume of falsified and self-complacent heroism wafting around the demagogic claim of that old ecumenical utopia and, on the other, surrendering themselves to that integrated destiny in which every critical effort ends up finding itself unarmed, overcome and gagged – in the hands of the law which, after the fact, dominates when the *critical project* is to be forgotten: that of the free market and its transposition onto the area of communication (which is nothing more than the *law of the audience*).

On the path, the chorus that may resound from this new war chant – a war chant that still demands the construction of a means of exchange of *public things* that allows for the conception of an online *community* as a community capable of contributing to furthering the radical democratization of the social space, *as a community yet to come* under the protection of the new media – that war chant may say, more today than ever: "no more tv." No, no more TV.