HERMENEUTICAL ASPECTS CONCERNING THE AESTHETICS OF THE WEB DESIGN

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Abstract

The present study proposes an interdisciplinary analysis of the features of aesthetic communication in the field of web-design. Assuming an aesthetic theories approach, we insist in particular on the importance of the application of artistic styles and trends at the level of web design by discussing the main aesthetic trend of web design in the past two years. We conclude by releasing several hermeneutical consequences of the application of aesthetic communication in web design.

Keywords: hermeneutics, aesthetics, web design, multimedia, public sphere

1. Introduction

This study is based on the systematization of theories specific to areas such as aesthetic, symbolic communication and the hermeneutics of art, using qualitative research methods, such as comprehensive and contextual analysis applied at the level of aesthetic aspects specific to multimedia creations. The theme reported is all the more important as the research in this area is very current and, we might point out, in a stage of development and applicability.

Whereas the subject involves a very broad and flexible approach, we plan to research the aesthetic aspects of preliminary principles in the design of multimedia that we can find, in particular at the level of web design. In the first part of this work we will discuss the relevance of the application of artistic trends in web design over the last two years; in the second part we will discuss some consequences of the application of aesthetic hermeneutical communication in multimedia creations.

The aesthetic theories of the last years have diverged their attention towards studying the concept of world of art, understood as the aesthetic actions and objects that are received by audience. Numerous modern aesthetics presuppositions are being questioned, especially the ones regarding the non-historical context of the work, the non-specialist audience or an audience understood as a rightful collectivity which reacts heterogeneous when is faced with the aesthetic production. As a transituary observation, the presupposition

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pertaining to the immutable character of art critics as single communication source of the aesthetic speech is evoked. As such, the starting principle in today's research of the aesthetic phenomena is that the artistic practice must be perceived as being bound to a specific audience, what's more, to different audiences. In addition, claim of the fact that symbolic communication remains the fundamental model of the aesthetic experience, in order to open the possibility for a constructive interpretation of the new artistic languages and reconfiguring the relationship between the aesthetic object, the audience and the artist is stated.

Regarding the aesthetic speech, two aesthetic philosophy and art criticism specific attitudes can be identified in the present, both of which construct the method bearing of our research. The first attitude, specific to the relating and analytic aesthetics [1], expresses itself appreciative towards the present artistic practice, insisting upon its role in reconfiguring the relation between the aesthetic object and the receiving audience.

The second attitude, using traditional interpretation standards, especially some idealistic and theological versions of the modern aesthetics, brings forth critical judgments upon the justification of aesthetic experiences and of artistic practices, arguing that they do not lean on strong theoretical postulates (J.F. Lyotard, J. Baudrillard [2]). According to the critic vision, art does not fulfil one of its original functions anymore – i.e. being a reality of the spirit, and the receiving audience faces the impossibility to form founded taste judgments. Owing to the audience's lack of aesthetic education, but also to some of the communication and dissemination models of the aesthetic discourse – lean, art becomes cliché, a show art, shaped by the consumer audience-aesthetic merchandise relationship, forced to give up any aesthetic reconstruction authentic projects.

2. Aesthetic trends applied in web-design

To be noted that the aesthetic theories of the past few years involved in the field of multimedia insist on the concepts of multimedia art and of new digital media [3], addressable to the general public, and to the receiver of the aesthetic phenomena. The hermeneutic principle that starts in the aesthetic categories at the level of multimedia creations, in particular the web design is that this kind of symbolic communication should be regarded as referring to a specific audience, extremely pretentious concerning aesthetics. Web design, multimedia design creations in general, are very developed, the correct application of the principles of aesthetics being required to give a successful creation.

Current research underlines that, now more than ever, aesthetics remains a fundamental model of communication, for semiotic and hermeneutical patterns, particularly with regard to the ability of new artistic languages to communicate symbolically a plurality of meanings and to reconfigure the relationship between

multimedia creation, as an aesthetic object - the public- and, possibly, the artist, in the case of the web designer.

In this discussion context, we mention that our study embarks from the observation that the present utilization of the aesthetic concept in web design has two sources. The first is given by the direct consequence of the institutional-economic factor and the interference of the artistic patronage in the artistic world. The latter is represented by the scientific factor, more specific by the present aesthetic theories, which approach art as a historically conditioned intercultural relationship product.

In terms of aesthetic trends of the web design in the past two years, we notice that they focus on resuming, adaptation, and re-signification of some reasons, specific shapes, and attitudes of important artistic currents of modern and post modern art. The latest software programs allow one to create complex, fine art, heavily stylized [4]. These aspects, in addition to the functional purpose, have an obvious aesthetic value. Beyond their obvious functional and efficient value, web design and the graphical user interface of multimedia creations must have an attractive appearance, must express a special image of beauty and a form of aesthetical pleasure.

Punctually, we can indicate the following aesthetic trends applied in web design, in the most recent works [5, 6]:

- using aesthetic minimalism, to the detriment of the abundance of detail, while avoiding cluttering the page with unimportant details;
- in terms of chromatic palette, we notice the use of either a minimalist chromatic (reduced to black and white combination and, at most, one colour), or of a dynamic chromatic (red, orange, yellow, pink), especially in the case of sites that allow various applications or are interactive; using a palette restricted to a basic chromatic (usually within 3-4 colours); the use of light; pastel shades with relaxing effect;
- the frequent use of the colour green, whose symbolism is associated with the current day environmentalism and ambient design;
- elements of abstractionism (use of geometric figures in the organization information page: the most frequent squares, rectangles, circles);
- syncretic layout of the stylization of the page background (for example, using textures and various resolutions, pictorial representations);
- highly stylized textures, vintage, retro, accents of neo-Gothic or grunge art;
- the use of photographic effects (blur, dynamic swap);
- the use of photos, mostly black and white on the background page.

Along with the above, to the reported aesthetic trends the following can also be added:

- the application of forms of decorative art and ambient design, with a view not only to highlight the text and diagrams, and to personalize one's web page, but also to create the impression of motion, fluidity, dynamism (e.g., rounding the edges of the page, decorative symbols-spirals, forms, stylized organic natural elements, etc.);
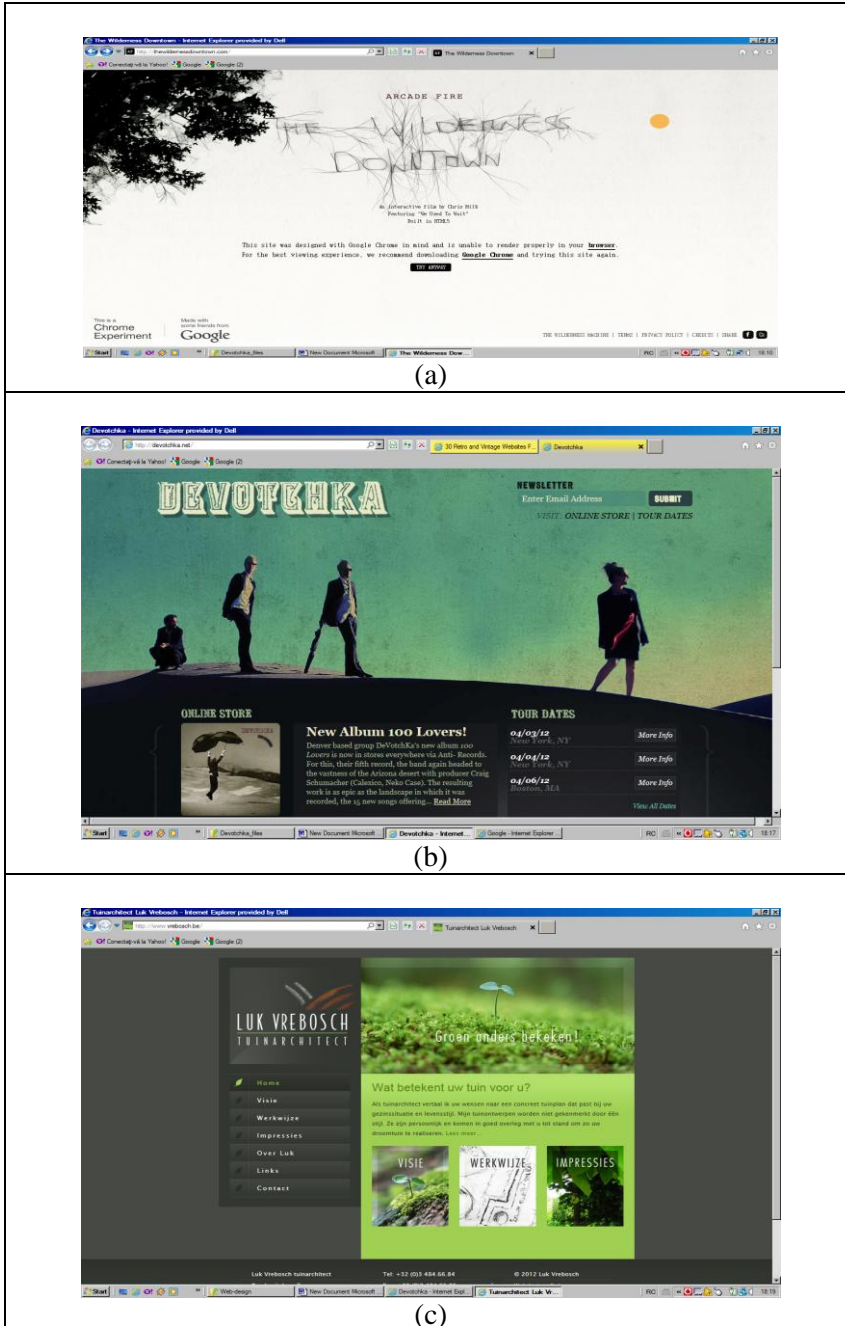
(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 1. (a) Minimalist chromatic, syncretic layout of the stylization of the page background: neo-Gothic and forms of decorative art, http://thewildernessdowntown.com/; (b) Retro and Vintage elements; http://devotchka.net/; (c) The colour green, http://www.vrebosch.be/.

(a)

(b)

(c)

Figure 2. (a) Aesthetic minimalism, elements of abstractionism, the use of photos, http://www.allanyu.net/; (b) Elements of street-art and urban-art, the colour green, http://www.thegreenhouse.co.uk/; (c) Functionalist aesthetics elements, elements of abstractionism, aesthetic minimalism, http://www.greenhouseperth.com/.

- the application of functionalist aesthetics elements (the use for functional art craft);
- elements of Surrealism aesthetics (deconstructive, dissented, addressing the unconventional of traditional artistic motives);
- the use of artistic techniques specific to post-impressionism (representation of the background image thinning, diffuse);
- elements of pop-art, street-art and urban-art: strong chromatic contrasts, collages, advertising posters, banners, graffiti effects, combined paintings (for example, Figures 1 and 2).

3. Discussion: hermeneutical meanings of web design and multimedia aesthetics

How do we interpret the diversity of expressions specific to the aesthetics of web design or of multimedia creations in general?

Starting from the current aesthetical principles that deal with web design as a form of digital art, we can give two meanings of hermeneutical application of aesthetics in multimedia, depending on the predominance of either the functional or of the aesthetic factor.

The first meaning, based on the aesthetic theory belonging to authors such as Arthur Kroker, David Cook, J. Baudrillard is mostly negative and it is based on the critic of the hedonist model of subjectivist-sensualist aesthetics, in which emphasis is placed on the outbreak of emotion and affective irrationalism, on the idea of new, show, entertainment [7]. The aesthetic object becomes an item that can be sold, an object of consumer culture, aesthetic technological shapes become patterns, lacking originality. These aspects applied to web design determine a deflected aesthetic conduct in the audience, common to the consumer culture.

The second meaning, predominantly positive (N. Bourriaud, R. Wise, Anne Cranny Francis) is specific to the tendency for rehabilitation of the artistic language and its aesthetic canons [8], in general, focuses on the stylistic pluralism falling on artistic language as dialog, opening the possibility of symbolical cross-correlation. In this case, web design expresses a pure aesthetic reasoning, specific to the rehabilitation project of the artistic language and aesthetic dogma, including the aesthetic category of beauty, as passage from the beauty-merchandise idea to the beauty-overly symbolic one.

From this perspective, the artistic aspects of multimedia creations do not just mean surface production, simulacrum or artefact, but, in addition to the aesthetic grounds themselves, they can express non-aesthetic – social, communicational, educational or even ethical reasons. Thus, we can admit that, at the level of multimedia creation, communication aesthetics might express a model of participation to a symbolic meaning, with deep hermeneutical foundations, in the sense that it implies recognition, inter-subjectivity, interaction of identity and cultural diversity.

Despite the theoretical attitude which suspects web design of major deficiencies, being an aesthetic object devoid of depth, cliché, we set out to regain a positive acceptance of it, beginning from re-evaluating the conceptual apparatus and the relating aesthetics [9] and philosophical hermeneutic. In the context of proliferating theories regarding the art and beauty crisis, these theoretic models could provide viable solutions pertaining to the essential aspects of the aesthetic phenomenon in general, and in particular to web design. According to the relating aesthetics presuppositions, the principle of rehabilitation, of post-industrialization, of artistic merchandise do not represent absolute appreciation and interpretation criteria of web design. Beyond its noted negative feature, we can identify here the level of present application and artistic practices based on the reasonable discourse regarding the relationship between art, artist and audience.

The advantage of web design is that it is extended to an extremely large field of possibilities, but your computer can discover them all systematically, by means of filtering out possible alternatives and adjusting the results of psychological principles to reach aesthetics. In addition, web design seems to be in accordance with some information on the psychology of theoretical presuppositions of the perception threshold, after which the volume of information of an artistic work must not be greater than the capacity of the sensory pathways, experimentally determined, of the receiver, because the creation will not be considered trivial. Thus, we can easily make the distinction between semantic information of multimedia creations, featured as intelligible, directly enunciable, translatable, pragmatic and aesthetic originality, understood in this context as the degree of novelty in the limits of an artistic style, the main characteristic of the message. The aesthetic information counts on subliminal phenomena that occur at the level of multimedia creations, those elements, forms, relations which are not perceived consciously, but still influence public perception in various ways.

Despite finding limits in the applicability of the aesthetics of multimedia, of which we can recall, for example, no direct link between the aesthetic criteria and the new developments in technology based on the performance and the original copy and of the opposition, so important in the sphere of traditional art, we may identify a number of positive effects:

1. Aesthetics becomes an experimental science based on the psychology of communication and on the sociology of communication and creation. Web design, multimedia creations in general, are not only a form of art. They open the possibility of a sequence of experiments involving knowledge of the main aesthetic styles, artistic creation, but also of the symbolic communication.

2. An obvious aesthetic turn is produced in the field of multimedia, consisting of a link between art and technology, which is probably one of the major accomplishments of postmodern culture.

3. Accessibility of art receives a positive significance in the sense that it allows web design to reach any famous work of art; the commercial dissemination doesn't represent any kind of difficulty.
4. We also note the active role of web designers, designers of multimedia applications in general; they must not be only very good connoisseurs of the different artistic styles, but also to be receptive to the aesthetic response of the public. So far, we notice a close relationship between the artist, in his depiction of web design and the audience, because the feedback given acts on his creative process at a later date, depending on the taste and the reaction of the public.

Philosophical hermeneutics offers viable solutions regarding the relation between artist and audience, setting out from the open interpretation of the present artistic language, characterized by ambiguity, polysemy and semantic openness [10]. Admitting that the public reacts when confronted with art by interpreting it, an aesthetic creation is defined by subjective-interpretative or objective perceptions. Not forgetting that the audience perceptions can often be different than those pertaining to web design; the work can carry significance that the audience might not have conceived. Interpretation is in dependence, as much of the criteria utilized by the audience, but also by specialized communication, interpretative-evaluating communication specific for the art critic. The art critic can sometimes appear as too restrictive, conservative and other times too specialized in connection to the audience expectation and education. As a result, the possible existing misunderstanding regarding artistic practice interpretation of the last years can express not only the poor aesthetic education of the audience, but also a lack in the specialized scientific discourse.

4. Conclusions

Besides its common meaning, from the communication science vantage point, the public sphere, from web design aesthetic perspective, appears much wider and more divers. The public sphere is no longer only the instrument in which social life and urban opinion take its course, no longer a community without proximity, but proximity in community. Meaning that, in connection with web design aesthetic phenomenon, the public sphere functions not only as grounds to the relationship between art, consumption and technology, but also as a tool of configuring a specific sociality for the aesthetic community, communicating meanings and inter-relation audience-artist-critic. Public sphere does not necessarily determine levelling-out the behaviour of the receiving audience or the softening of the relation between audience and artist.

Conditioned by the artist's involvement, art criticism and the aesthetic value communication efforts, expresses the definite possibility of symbolic communication, reuniting the artist with the audience, and the audience with the meaning of the aesthetic object. Like so, the public sphere concept signifies also aesthetic trend environment where artistic work and practice manifest themselves as work-receiver-artist interaction. The public sphere is presented as web design

and informed audience, as artist and specialist critic. In this situation we can fall back on the role of philosophical hermeneutics in reconfiguring web design aesthetics to prevent possible deviations in the audience's aesthetic experience, as well as proliferating the subjective relativism in interpreting the artistic language specific to web design.

On the basis of the considerations noted above, we may conclude that, in the context of the current aesthetic, though in recent decades the proliferation of various types of speech on the crisis of art and the aesthetics of communication, the concept of public sphere has aesthetic connotations and receives, in his virtual depiction, an audience called up and formed by web designer. From our point of view, meaningful trends are identifiable both at the level of multimedia design creations and this new meaning of the aesthetic public expresses a critique function of postmodern trend of hyper-aesthetics, indicating its influence through the construction of aesthetic spaces of socialization, web-design reflects the symbolic patterns and proximity of meeting different cultures and styles.

Acknowledgement

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