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An Ecology of **Brands**,

Art and Control

The New Age of Homo Cypiens

PARA UNA ECOLOGÍA DE LAS MARCAS, ARTE Y CONTROL
LA NUEVA ERA DE HOMO CYPIENS

ABSTRACT

Thanks to digital technology we have a more surveilled society than ever. Control is in a network form, but also in narrative, graphic and conceptual form. In this article our concern is to debate how ecology and nature have become a new ground for control. And in this context, brands, corporate images, man-made environments need to face a critique better shaped by art and theory. In this way we hope to best reflect on the features of the new emerging character: the *homo cypiens*. As the networked world seems to link up everything and everybody there is a new human condition changed by technology. And more than ever, connections between ideas may be the answer.

Keywords
Cypiens, Control, Art, Ecology, Digital, Surveillance, Brands.

RESUMEN

A causa de la tecnología digital nos encontramos en una sociedad más vigilada que nunca. El control no sólo se manifiesta en forma de red, también en forma de ecología y naturaleza. En este contexto, marcas, imágenes corporativas, ambientes desarrollados por el hombre, necesitan ser contrastadas con una crítica desarrollada por el arte y la teoría. Pretendemos reflexionar mejor sobre las características de un nuevo y emergente personaje: el homo cypiens. Si la tenemos en cuenta, surge una nueva condición humana alterada por la tecnología. Que en el mundo en red todas las cosas y las personas parecen relacionadas entre sí. Y más que nunca,la solución puede ser la conexión entre las ideas.

Palabras clave
Cypiens, control, arte, digital, vigiláncia, marcas.

1 INTRODUCTION

The ecological concept bears the same meaning today as for a controlled, protected space. The ecosystem we find ourselves into is no longer a wild system, but rather a complex system. The question is that this ecology of art, brands and control have turned us into new characters; we are not just *sapiens*, but *cypiens* as well. Cyberspace, the digital world, has interlinked everybody and everything. It is like living inside a GPS grid, only better. We stand for sure now on a post-science fiction world. Most of the media gear available in the market no longer seems disneyesque, Bond-like or futuristic. We are already in the future. The problem is that in this future, as in most of the science fiction dystopias presented on motion pictures and paperback novels, control beats democracy.

Homo cypiens also happens to be the first post-control species, for the new generations after the Millennials are too much engaged in the system to notice its upcoming complexities. In the meantime, we still have the need for communities and continuity. We long for social narratives, and social media come in; we need to be updated, and media news show up, under the shape of community. Our dilemma is that we need things to keep up with us, we need continuity, and thus advertising and blogging posts appear.

First, in a radical antithesis of mass media, social media such as Facebook emerge as being totally new, when in fact they are betting on the flow concept, just as MTV, radio and TV did in previous media generations. Our concern here is to understand the changes in the media world and how art and critique may offer new reflections based on their specificities of expression. Like in the motto of *Lost*, the TV series, "people are still the answer", much as sometimes they seem to be the problem. Due to this, multitasking is the response. There is just no spare time for ourselves to know, cross, update and upgrade everything. It is too much change. As a matter of fact, "change" is not changing anything at all. Present time is the age of new trends and innuendos all the time.

Another new thing is that even relationships became a commodity, like a stroll in the theme park, window-shopping in the mall, or surfing the web. As Anderson & Wolff pointed out in one of the Wired Magazine covers: "the web is dead"[1]. People are so focused on staying inside social media brands, that they don't get out of the social media grid. They don't search, and when they do it, it is still inside a branded search engine. This means whatever the user do online he remains inside media channels, whose brands are getting more and more attention. Unlike before, surfing the unknown and practicing search is not the main trend. Now the crowds are captive on brands, social media brands. As the previous mass media public used to stand before the TV set, switching channels in non-interactive fashion. It is like staying inside a condo without wandering around the city block, and finding the ad delivery truck more appealing than the warnings of the street cop.

Without noticing the transition, we are becoming complements, augmentations, extensions of the brands. Our pictures, browsing history, texting, places and calendar details, agendas and emails, among other things we use, are sending private data to third parties we don't know. Welcome to the cyberworld, a world where the "technium" mentioned by Kevin Kelly in *What Technology Wants* (2010) is beyond it all, a technological domain of all techniques and knowledge, thus rendering, in our perspective, contemporary man into *homo cypiens*. Cyberspace became common ground, the *métier* for everyone.

However, the strange prediction and / or planning of the reality as a machine-fantasy turned the feedback loops of Norbert Wiener's cybernetics into something "naturalized". The perverse idea of a balance in the system sets humans in a no-revolution-is-allowed mode. As in science fiction discourse, in this case Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) idea of the "metaverse"[2], we are being modified by the new social media. We don't recall having signed any paper to meet further "activation". But the fact is we are activated. And there is just no coming back. If there is any chance though, I don't think we could just push the button and go back to previous time.

1   CONTROL

Today, in the age of cyber-warfare, massive surveillance and drone combats, digital media has become a tool for control. It seems that a "post-science fiction agenda" is set up (Hoepker, 2011, p. 34). And not only do we witness changes in technology, but these also take place in art, media, politics and warfare. One has to ask the question: "is it all of it sustainable?" Perhaps not. Especially not on a soon to be overpopulated world. If there is a form of controlling the world, that is by following the method of "futurocracy" (Howe, 2010, 155). Everyone is accepting data about things that didn't take place yet, crimes not committed, elections not won and storms that we'll come across. In this day and age predictions themselves are becoming unsustainable. The starting point of it all is capitalism, mass consumerism society, digital media and post-Cold War equipment.

Let's notice that sociologist Manuel Castells affirms that "the network does not imply the end of capitalism. Network society (...) is, so far, a capitalist society" (1999, p. 608). Having said this, and considering the fact that today we are all citizens of a multi-strata, wide and new medium, we hereby understand the *homo cypiens* as citizen of the digital and capital world, searching a heroic pursuit of the "new deal". Also, we should notice that in *Posdata Sobre Las Sociedades de Control* we are told by Gilles Deleuze that what is set on is "(...) a technological evolution, that is even more profoundly a mutation of capitalism" (1991, 1, translation is ours). For the philosopher, "marketing" stands as the current tool to make social control effective and immediate (Idem). This did not came out of nowhere, there was "a progressive and disperse installation of new domination regime" (Idem). Let's say that a new hegemony is focused on viral capitalism. In our time, we are looking at a profusion of social control, marketing, domination and capitalism. This is where *homo cypiens* is summoned to intervene. There is the need to answer to the new demands. The future is no longer dreamed of, it is built, instead. We are living in a sort of "scientific present time". Everything comes up, and nothing is simple, and as if this is not enough for itself, the whole main discourse being a progressive construct, an artificial technical reality, being futuristic becomes, somehow, a regime in itself.

The *homo cypiens* also triggers a new image of control. He tries to practice what he determines is his "image of the future". Thinker Fred Polak (1973) pioneeringly mentions the "image of the future", an image upon which reality is designed from beyond to present time. Well, if control and capitalism share their part of accountabilities in the world we live in, then the "futurocratic regime of images" is crucial; in case the present is a way of accomplishing, turn the future into something present. In Polak the image of the future consists in a construction, a "future present". Such an image performs as a guidance image. To control society is to control foremost its guiding images. The *homo cypiens* is the first post-control species; its orientation image is a polymorphic one. Nobody is able to control it, despite the general attempts.

In the decade of 1970, one author accusing the crisis preceding control is Alvin Toffler. At the time he speaks of a "future shock", "technophobia", "over-choice" and demographic excess. None of these things kept the digital from being the optimal control environment. Once the stage of imagination is overcome, let's say hello to a new world species, for *homo cypiens* is the new system's native.

Curiously, if the new system controls it all, why does it need control for? In other words, if there is a control system, that many believe to be secret, how are we aware of its very existence? Perhaps the new system is merely an idea.

Another author, Zygmunt Bauman, mentions the existence of an "orwellian event" (2000, p. 27), a coordinated event, disturbingly controlling us. In the movie *Eagle Eye* (D.J. Caruso, 2008), a cyber-system, more specifically an Artificial Intelligence, picks real people and wovens them on a simulation. Each of those persons are told that "you have been activated". Pervasiveness has been the subject of many fictions. Take for instance the *Person of Interest* (Jonathan Nolan, 2010-11) TV series, where right in the introduction titles someone says:

> You are being watched.
> The government has a secret system, a machine. It spies on you every hour of every day. I know because I built it. I designed the machine to detect acts of terror; but it sees everything, violent crimes involving ordinary people. People like you. Crimes that the government consider irrelevant. They would not act so I decided I would. But I needed a partner. Someone with the skills to intervene. Hunted by the authorities we work in secret. You'll never find us. But victim, or perpetrator, if your numbers up we'll find you.

This continues to be the message being issued about "control". This is to say that what is being cast is the idea of control. The starting point is that we are being monitored and that there is an always present and all-seeing machine. This is not about reflecting on a digital world whose artificial form would attract every person. Instead, it is about something different, something apart from "cyberspace" (Gibson, 1984) and the "metaverse" (Stephenson, 1993). In the *Snow Crash* novel, Stephenson affirms that the Metaverse twists the way people speak to each other (Ibidem, p. 60). This prevails in spaces where control is keeping spontaneity away. Bauman entitles this mechanism of "Cyworld" (2011, p. 2), a cybernetic world spreading around and scaring us. Maybe Toffler should update his "future shock" into "present shock". And why? Because we live in an age of new hegemony and control, of two systems. Jean Baudrillard makes clear that the *hegemon* ("leader"), much as the *cyber* ("pilot"), are both addressing "leadership". However, what is new here is the fact that the "age of hegemony is the age of the cyber-system" (2010, p. 121). The same is to say that our contemporaneity is marked by cyber-control domain.

On the documentary film *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace - Episode 2. The Use And Abuse of Vegetational Concepts*, directed by Adam Curtis (2011), we face a new programme:

> We dream of systems, nature and networks with no authoritarian powers intervening. Ecosystems, networks, economical systems. But in reality it is just a machine's dream. It has nothing to do with nature. It is the reflection of how things are organized. This is the story of the ascension of a dream of a self-organized system, a strange machine-fantasy of nature that undermines it.

This is where the idea of economy, technopolitcs, ecosystems' theory, the digital world and the financial crisis are mutually explained. By understanding nature as system, sometimes containing chaos, or self-balancing itself, a scaring perspective is highlighted here: that of a world being controlled, even the natural world, like a cybernetic ecosystem. For starters, the idea of a horizontal network, the absence of any political power whatsoever, an economy ruled by the State and guided by private entrepreneurs, is something that has no straight attachment with the concept of "natural balance". However, there is one theory that, according to Curtis, connects it all. It is the so-called Jay Forrester's *Systems Theory and System Dynamics*, that claims that all systems are intertwined. Based upon this, one knows that the cyber-system is bigger than expected. It is no longer merely about computers. What is at stake is all things to be regarded as being machine-like.

Computers are capable of seeing the effects of the system parts. Interdependent systems consolidate feedback loops. Once everything is plugged to the network, in loops, it seems clear that the cybernetic field is set up. Society, computers and machines have patterns. Human beings are seen as systems, individuals as computers, web nodes. Because it is a core idea in Cybernetics, Norbert Wiener defends that both natural and social systems have an information-based kind of mechanics (1965, 1988). For all purposes, every system is self-regulated with repetitive cycles, whether they are natural or artificial.

In *The Fundamentals of Ecology*, Eugene Odum & Gareth Barrett (2004) speak of ecosystems as if these were machines. The concept of a machine-fantasy of stability aims for the end of random reality. Despite this, these shall not be the most important ideas. As soon as the self-regulated model of nature crosses into society, everything starts looking too much computer-like.

If "*homo consumers* are things" (Bauman, 2011, p.99), then the *homo cypiens* are data. Besides, it is not by chance that "networking" is a term rapidly replacing that of "society" (Idem, Ibidem, 3). The cyber-system is the society's controlling mechanism. Society changes with this control. We are told by Gilles Deleuze that what is at play is a technological evolution, consisting in "a capitalism mutation" (1991, 6). For the author, we find in marketing the perfect tool to accomplish social control. Even the city prevails as a space for elites and control, a place working out as a "statistic control space where citizen-consumers are monitored as 'bit structures', and other electronic signs, according to their economic performance" (Hoepker, ult.op.cit., 2011).

North-American Kevin Kelly has a new designation for the increasing technology. The author admits that the technological structure surrounding us is to be called "technium" (2010, p. 11), being in practical terms the major global system, the most massively interlinked pulsing technology system. Kelly concludes that the "technium extends beyond shining hardware" (ult.op.cit.). This is to say that it has no limit in its visible parts. What Baudrillard calls "cyber-system", Kelly labels as the "technium", being the latter a more inclusive technological sphere rising through the ages. "The alienated, the oppressed and the colonized are now 'attached'. They are the prisoners of the nexus" (Baudrillard, 2010, p. 37). What Baudrillard means is that the network, or being networked is not an option. So, standing out of the network is something rare, namely when we do not have one medium in the classic sense of the term, since on the contrary what we have is a single environment. Everybody is plugged into it. Lev Manovich is a

believer that post-Web culture and post-digital culture have changed everything (2001b, p. 4). In this way, one understands why there is no longer any periphery (Deleuze, 2004, p. 260). The network is global. There is no way of fleeing from it. The control practiced on the *homo cypiens* species is a different form of control. Bauman believes that "companies need a sort of 'negative surveillance'" (2011, p. 4), which basically means to keep the good consumer surveilled and the undesirable individuals away. In this context, a whole new ecology is formed, and art criticism and theory are summoned to provide answers.

2   ECOLOGY AND ART

In 2000, Virilio publishes a book on the so-called "Cyberworld". It is a world of further control on everyone since 9-11, but mostly a world where Ecology plays a certain role. Since then, beyond controlling people, we are witnessing the control of the environment. Should we recall that Marshall McLuhan labeled the media world as an "electric environment" and we'll easily understand how suddenly "Ecology" becomes a synonym for "control" on a more geographic dimension of the "cyberworld" (Virilio, 2000).

On the documentary films of Art21 published by PBS about *Art in The 21st century* we may be introduced to the many discourses on arts and sustainability signed by artists such as Robert Adams and Ursula Von Rydingsvard. From photography to installations, video and sculpture, the artists featured and interviewed on the documentary film speak of their relationship with the environment, their views and major concerns.

The documentary film (Adams, R.; Rydingsvard, U. V.; Manglano-Ovalle, I.; Dion, M. (2013) called precisely *Ecology* stands as one of a series dedicated to forward thinking. In it we find Ursula Von Rydingsvard mentioning her relation to the environment. We are told by her that it is easy to possess an image, that the tension cannot go anywhere else. She says she feeds on visual media to get words. A post-world war framework is depicted in her testimony filled with silence. She affirms that working hard was the answer to life, by the time when there was a basic austerity.

In her work, Rydingsvard designs organic shapes with many cuttings in cedar wood. Her sculptures are psychological and emotional landscapes, organic cuttings. Rydingsvard believes that a form of combat shall exist in the works, and that rage, wrath is a driving force. The sculptures she builds are chaotic, as in struck by life; they work out as three-dimensional drawings. There is something "wayward" about them. They seem like man-made objects that somehow merge up with nature. Being both erratic and celebratory in their looks, her sculptures are a part of her work, of her writing and dream documenting that in some way make her as an artist lighter. On a closer inspection the sculpture-landscapes seem both exterior and interior, as in belonging to the human body. Such structures are anchors for shapes, gravity, voluptuousness, and yet they carry violence.

Another participant in this episode of Art 21 is Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, for whom art is not standing on the object, but rather on what one says about the object. The artist mentions the underlying politics of the environmental and physical issues. Manglano-Ovalle describes the Farmsworth house made by Mies Van Der Rohe. We see a video clip of a scene in which

someone is cleaning windows. There is music playing on the background of the house interior, a sort of sound that is nothing but a guitar solo played by the rock band Kiss being stretched out in stereo. Manglano-Ovalle says he enjoys architecture and that the viewer is the worker, and also the artist and the architect. We are playing the role of someone visiting a sanctuary of modernity. As in touching it. And as for the person cleaning the window, this one is also cleaning the image, the glass and our hands look as if they were being cleansed in a cathartic way. We are on the image.

So here in this situation the transparency covers a gap, that of total separation, despite not looking like that at all. Inside that video, a woman seems to say: "I can see you". Manglano-Ovalle reffers later to another work in which someone is sweeping the floor to clean the shattered glasses of the broken window of the Rohe's Farmsworth house. He believes that it seems as if the work of the son was replacing the work of father.

Manglano-Ovalle speaks of the work "Random Sky", an analysis on space and architecture that helps us to comprehend and fit in the environment as a species. Another work is entitled "Living Ecology", because there is a balance in both outdoor and indoor space; images, space and also sound are to be considered. The "Random Sky" installation adresses the fortune idea, the randomness. It is focused on the unlikeliness, our will for stability and control. When it comes to "The Storm", another installation work, Manglano-Ovalle gets the name from a storm system. In this particular work, time seems to stand still; it is a storm image on the computer turned into a sculpture. This is why the artist believes that the space in-between things is more important than the space things really occupy. No ephemera exists, merely sculpture. For this work he had to learn that the world had borders, because when he was a child his parents used to travel all around the country. Besides this, the very concept of turbulence seems to work out as a metaphor for migration, destruction and events production.

The famous photographer Robert Adams, who happens to work with landscape photos, assures that the best pictures suggest more than what they just show. The photographer actually works a lot with his wife in the management of his career and works. He his passionate about the New West. Even so he likes to document what is still glorious about the West, his idea is to look for the really balanced image. In this sense, he is not looking for life, but for a "better view", instead. For him, photography is a seduction, but worked out by light.

Adams strongly believes that for oneself to capture again the image of the landscape is almost impossible. He is fond of surrendering to something on the image. For him, to place the juxtaposed images on an exhibition changes the very experience of those images. In photography there are surprises, there are gifts. Adams speaks of his book *Turning Back*, which addresses concerns such as deforestation, spirit voidness, spirit depletion, tree-less worlds and nihilism. He is profoundly sorry that he never touched a tree. He also speaks of a black & white place as colour photos are no match for grayscale photography. Someway the latter are portraying a beauty that confirms the meaning of life.

In its turn, artists like Mark Dion are expressing their concerns about museums. Dion says that museums are like windows to the past. He speaks of an idea of an artist that won't care for nature, but rather for ideas of nature. One thing he highlights is that he recognizes that the "natural system" possesses an "unthinkable complexity".

3 BRANDS, SOCIAL MEDIA AND NARRATIVE

We may say that the current evolution that is both technologically inspired and technologically driven is also a media technology blossom. Much as the natural system is regarded as a system of complex systematics, the new technological milieu is also complex. In it new characters stand out, people who find on the Web their new "default address", according to Bauman (2011, p. 2). Social media users, especially Facebook ones, are connected all the time. Without noticing, the always online mode and the flow of ads and posts keep brands closer to users. These days each and every thing is branded. More than before the people of today are helping to establish a "multichannel society", despite the fact that Toffler had seen the phenomenon taking place back in 1991 (p.372).

Psychologist Sherry Turkle believes that the Facebook generation goes online with different expectations (2011, p. 256). We face the problem of the increasing "sociability capitalization"; goods and consumer items aren't the only items being capitalized. Relationships have become the new target for the brands that are in their turn surveilling the network. Rifkin points out the "relationship commoditization" (2001, p. 23). It is exactly on this scope that we underline that the "product is already sold". The purchase option turns out to be irrelevant if people are transforming themselves into "brand extensions" (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2010), by following the network selling lexicon. There are two factors that, in our understanding, enforce our figures as "productions". First, we come across with the surface of the "we media" (Gillmor, 2006, p. xiv), meaning the collective-designed media; and secondly, but no less important, there's the fact of ourselves being "multitasking" individuals. This is Turkle's idea, where she points out mostly the productivity and the ambition of these very individuals.

One comprehends that consumer characters and society change because there is more investment on relationships and individuals. People and relations are thus the "new capital". "Nobody lives without other people" was in fact the motto for the *Lost* (J.J. Abrams, ABC, 2004-10) TV series, on the last episode foremost. By taking the social media network Facebook as an example, we may assume a different angle of discussion here. Media are about people now. Facebook organizes the user data according to a "timeline", a chronological line allowing authorized visitors, much as brands, to know what a certain public segment enjoyed during a certain age. The brand best knowing the past of its public may set for this public impossible to refuse "emotional bonds". This raises some issues, such as the instrumentalization of information, the purpose of social media, and especially, the prominence of this network on user's lives. More than ever what users are confessing and sharing online may be dangerous, and it may at least end up on their future, and upcoming products and services.

Let's ask ourselves the question "what is [ultimately] the secret of social media?" Lipovetsky & Serroy (2010) find this network suspicious. Both authors are questioning whether or not the network has really "free" things. Free or not what is true is that the network users are more and more relying on a phony idea of "community".

On the other hand, with social media becoming a sort of anthropological places, where bonds and connections are established, now is the time when we come across with the so-called virtual communities reported by Howard Rheingold back in 1996; not the original virtual ones, but the virtual communities *per se*. Sherry Turkle is a true enforcer of the need for "communities"

and Bauman, in its turn, identifies with the specificity that what counts is the momentaneous experience of the community (2011, p. 112).

Bearing the purpose of knowing what is going on with the networks, one has to resort to other kind of sources. On the *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace - Episode 2. The Use And Abuse of Vegetational Concepts* (Adam Curtis, 2011), there is the thought of "thinking as a system" and not as an individual. Forrester's view is that people would work out in the end as "individual nodes" in the sense that reality would be a sort of machine, a network system. What happens in Web 2.0 is different, users integrate each others' narrative; they are nodes, nodal points of a personal stories' constellation. In sum, everything becomes a great narrative. Our concern should be which brand owns it.

The suspicion raised in the post-9-11 world is cast by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* (2008)[3]. We are told by Klein that "what keeps us oriented is our story[/history]; our narrative. By stepping into a crisis we lose our sense of 'continuity'. We get lost, in shock". This is the point to which social media provide the answer: they add narrative where there is none; they augment where there is something; increasing both the sense of "continuity" and "community", by integrating the individual in something bigger. If we think on the bond between product brands/ social media, then we'll understand that the future of the new characters, these "networkers" may be as awkward as in a science fiction dystopia.

From the science fiction writing comes a type of discourse in which an advertising agency official believes that all things come around "narrative". Gibson says "Consumers don't buy as much products as they buy narratives" (2010, p. 21). The practical reason behind the narrative phenomenon is that to surround the consumer is determinant. An "engaged consumer", a compromised one, is to have a "brand ambassador", and he'll communicate the best aspects of the very brand through the Social Network (Maúl, 2011, p.21).

Let's accept ourselves what Lucrécia Martel refers to in the documentary film *O Tempo e o Modo [The Time And The Manner] - Episode 3*, that there is a "radical narrative transformation that always changes the scientific paradigm" (Graça Castanheira, 2012, Pop Filmes, translation is ours). As for this, there are no doubts left. Now the narrative is another one. All things are relying on a long-term integration of the individual in the system. The life network thus elects a bigger story/history out of micro-stories. *Touch*, the TV series created by Tim Kring (2012), where actor Kiefer Sutherland stars, is precisely focused on how the bio-narratives cross each other into something huge, collectively, and through numbers. We get to know that the narrative, that is, whoever we meet, what we do, are and publish, becomes an emotional product of our own. Personally I would say we are everything we do and everything we refuse.

It is also odd that we are living in a "confessionary society", a society known for having deleted the border that once kept away the public from the private (Bauman, 2011, 3). When the evolution of a "consumer society" onto a "desire society" sets the proposals that are prospective (future) because they relied on information from the past (retrospective), then things get to be disturbing. On George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* [1948] a world of control is displayed, shock and war are prevailing. Winston, the main character, repeats endlessly that whoever controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past (2007, cap. II, p.1). In the Facebook social network we do find something similar, since in the user's organized life as in a log, the digital personal archive thrives on. To know from "who" came "what"

becomes inseparable from "when" it happened. If there was a time when we were able to cut our connection with the past, that time is for sure now over. In a disturbing way, technology now just won't cut the link with us. What we do online, stays online. It's a new uncanny, surveilled and trendy world, in which we are living.

CONCLUSION

The shocking news of our time is that nothing is deleted. In the age of the *homo cypiens*, control is already a given data, nothing new. In fact, there is nothing new at all. There is always meso point, not micro, nor macro. The expansion of media as an environment has led us to a point in which we are all participating into something big. All narratives are interwoven into something bigger. The key-change in every sector is participation; the more we share, click, post and type, the more we are into it. It is as if there is no possible outside left anymore. The problem with brands, ecology and media is that, like in natural systems, our "cyworld" or media world is but a controlled space. Every individual's data is being collected, from ID cards, driver's licence, purchase options, credit cards, biometrics, which leads us to a similar world to that of tagging wild animals that later are set free to help collect more data.

One thing is new here: we did not step into cyberspace. As in the forecast of the *digerati* in the 90s. It happened otherwise, meaning that all things digital came across to this side of the screen, since we work on a network grid, and we drive on charted maps, digitally enhanced by GPS devices. Our consumer options are organized and whatever we are doing online these days is shown everywhere. What is uploaded to the cloud stays in the cloud. And that cloud is called control. Much as the animals being digitized in terms of nature, we are being translated into systemic information. Brands use this data against ourselves, so our "true" and "free" options of buying things are restricted to the very data we have delivered ourselves in a free will mode. Corporate products are designed for us. We are buying and selecting things that people knew we would like to have.

At the same time by thinking as a system instead of thinking as an individual we are meeting a new ground; we confess personal things online, we hardly unplug from the Web and there is network access almost everywhere. This makes it harder for us to be with ourselves. There is always noise. What theory and art critique offer us is that for a better understanding of the organic, ecological weirdness and technological mayhem, we need ideas and arts to help us decode what lies within this controlled world. There is no more an "outside". As time goes by, we are more and more engaged in media narratives, buying more things we don't need, and having our social life filtered by gear we didn't know who built it. We can't help ourselves if we find this world suspicious, odd and dangerous, it is just too much engaging. We need a break.

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1. Anderson, Chris & Wolff, Michael (August 17, 2010). "The web is dead. longlive the internet". Available in http://www.wired.com/2010/08/ff_webrip/all/

2. "Metaverse" is a concept similar do "Cyberspace", in which science fiction writer Neal Stephenson tries to depict in its own way the digital realm in a visual and psychedelic fashion. It was supposed to be a "universe" "beyond" our own, hence the "meta", and the "verse". It is also a synonym for "digital" and "Internet".

3. This "Shock Doctrine" is also available in the documentary film format (Whitecross & Winterbottom, 2009).