THE "CHAIR CANING", "L'OMBRE DU SOLEIL" & MR. R. MUTT'S URINAL: THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE AVANTGARDISTS' INTERART PRACTICES

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The hybrid art forms of the collage, visual poetry and the "found objects" are among the highest manifestation of what Peter Bürger saw as "revolutionizing of art" by the historical avant-garde and what Michael Webster termed the "hybridization and contamination of art forms". Walter Benjamin posed the question of the impact that technological development has on artistic practices, suggesting that new inventions like photography, the phonograph, or the cinema changed the very notion of art itself. Critics notwithstanding, the present paper intends to illuminate the *artists'* view on the issue. To do this, I discuss works by Picasso, Apollinaire and Duchamp, among others.

Key word: avant-garde, visual poetry, collage, interart, found objects, hybrid art

1. Painters and the work of art in the modern age

"I have discovered photography, now I can kill myself!"
(Pablo Picasso cited in Anne Baldassari's *Picasso und die Photographie*, 1997:17)

In 1936, Walter Benjamin in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" put forward the question whether "the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art". It is unlikely that he might have heard Picasso's remark, but he opens his essay by quoting another influential figure in the realm of the aesthetic - Paul Valéry.

> "…[P]rofound changes are impending in the ancient craft of the Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from

time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art." (Paul Valéry, Pièces sur L'Art, 1931,Le Conquete de l'ubiquite)

Benjamin took as a starting point the impact that technological development has on artistic activities. Though he concentrates on how the mechanical reproduction of art changes the social reception of the works of art, still he turns the attention on the influence that new inventions like photography, the phonograph or the movie have on the notion of art itself. In fact, Benjamin claimed that what he terms "the crisis of painting", was "by no means occasioned *exclusively* by photography" (italics mine). Yet, it would be the artist rather than the critic who is supposed to know better what, why and *how* influences his mode of expression.

Whether just posing or not, with his remark Picasso pointed at the greatest concern of the artists from the beginning of 1900s. If a deaf and mute object like a camera can produce the perfect image of reality, what would be left for a painter to do? The answer was easy. When you cannot compete with the machine in fateful representation of reality, then what is left for you to do is abandon *representational* approach in your work and do away with the mimetic function of art altogether. This was exactly the direction of art development for which Kandinsky's theories would pave the way. The constitutive elements of a painting – lines, plane, and colors would become a means of conveying the inner urges of the artist himself. "The most important point in the question of form is whether or not it springs from inner necessity" wrote Kandinsky (1968: 158). Expressing *that* on the canvas would be the aim of the artist, since modern technological development brought forth the "impossibility" and "uselessness of attempting to copy an object exactly" (qtd. in Scheunemann 2005: 26). Thus abandoning the "mimetic function" of art, Kandinsky shaped his idea of abstract painting. He was soon to be followed by Kazimir Malevich's suprematist experiments and Piet Modrian's geometrical color compositions (Scheunemann 2005: 26).

Expressionist painters would take a different path. Without total abandonment of the mimetic function of art, they will concentrate on the expression of "a sensuous experience" in an art work. But again this move would be necessitated by the emergence of technical means of representation, namely the camera. Explaining the origins of his artistic method, Ernst Kirchner would write that "[today] photography takes over

exact representation. Thus painting, relieved from this task, gains its former freedom of action" (qtd. in Scheunemann 2005: 26).

Similar statements come from futurist artists. In a manifesto on color Giacomo Balla would note that "given the existence of photography and cinema, the pictorial representation of truth does not and cannot any longer interest anyone" (Scharf 1983: 253; qtd. in Scheunemann 2005: 25) And he would comment in an exhibition catalogue that "with the perfection of photography, static traditional painting has completely fallen from repute" (Apollonio 1973: 206; qtd. in Scheunemann 2005: 25). The futurist break with tradition would be marked by an attempt at destroying the convention of this "static" nature of traditional painting. Since Lessing's *Laocoon*, a clear distinction has been made between verbal and visual arts within the temporal-spatial dichotomy. In Lessing's view the poetry can depict objects or phenomena extending in time. On the other hand, for him paintings can represent forms and figures extending in space. Inevitably, painters would be restricted to portraiture of a static object or to just a single "moment of an action" (Lessing 1874: 150). Landscapes, portraits or still-lifes, all seem to support this view. The futurists attacked this *stasis*-bound notion of the visual arts and opened the "medium of painting for the depiction of the "universal dynamism" of the modern world" and in appraisal of the "new beauty of speed" (Scheunemann 2005: 25). "Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the absolute, since we have already created eternal, omnipresent speed." proclaimed Marinetti in the *Manifesto of Futurism (1909)*. And "the gesture which we would reproduce on canvas shall no longer be a fixed moment" we read in the *Technical Manifesto* of 1910. (cf. Scheunemann 2005: 26). This "universal dynamism" was to be rendered "as a dynamic sensation" that communicates the energy, the force, the power of objects in motion (Scheunemann 2005: 26).

Yet, may be the most radical innovation in the visual arts would be brought in by the cubists Picasso and Braque - the abandonment of linear perspective in painting, the abolishing of the convention of the "spatial illusionism of the one-point perspective" (Fry 1996: 13). Linear perspective has ruled the day since the Renaissance when Brunelleschi and Alberti established its principles. In a painting that uses the principles of linear perspective all the constructing lines converge in vanishing points thus creating the optical illusion of depth on the flat canvas and creating a sense of realistic experience for the viewer. This one-point perspective in representation makes paintings look like photographic images, only that

they cannot compete with the camera in the precision of realistic depiction of detailed reality.

Cubists attacked precisely the one-point-of-view linear perspective.

What Picasso did in his *Demoselles d'Avignon* was to introduce multiple viewpoints into a single image. Further innovations contributing to the destruction of "spatial illusionism" in paintings followed rapidly. These include, among others, the defragmentation and geometricalisation of figures and objects. Portrayal of figures and objects as constituted of intersecting geometrical lines and planes simultaneously high-lightens and erases the function of geometrical linear perspective in realistic representation. Defragmentation of the subject depicted would remove the coherent sense of depth. And the lack of foreshortening blurs the distinction between foreground and background thus emphasizing the picture plain. Just a little bit later with the introduction of the "collage" technique, the flatness of the canvas itself would be stressed on by the gluing of pieces of paper, or oil-cloth on its surface and by the insertion of letters, since, as Braque stated, letters "are flat by their very nature"! (Scheunemann 2005: 25)

But are all those innovations instigated by the desire of painters to break away with the illusionism of "realistic" photographic representation? Photography may not be the "exclusive" reason for that as Benjamin would have it, but still it did play a central role. For Scheunemann, just like other avant-gardists, cubists also made no bones about their desire to "depart as decisively as possible from photographic imagery" (Scheunemann 2005: 23). Albert Gleizes for one, declared that "photography has completely distorted the idea of form" and that the new painting techniques "must perforce be antagonistic to the photographic image" (qtd. in Scharf 1983: 252; Scheunemann 2005: 23). Apollinaire in an early review of *The Cubist Painters* wrote that painters just like Gods create in their own image and it was only "photographers" who "manufacture duplicates of nature" (1962: 11; cf Scheunemann 2005: 23) And Louis Aragon was deliberate in his assertion that "cubism was a reaction of painters to the invention of photography." He wrote that "the photograph and the cinema made it seem childish to them to strive for verisimilitude" (Selz 1963: 326; Scheunemann 2005: 23).

But it would be again Picasso who would decisively bring to a sharp contrast the collision between the advance of technological means of reproduction and the cubists' stylistic novelties. In Scheunemann's reading of it, the first collage in the history of painting, Picasso's *Still Life with*

Chair Caning, "juxtaposed a cubist notation of common objects – a newspaper, a pipe, a sliced lemon, a glass and a scallop shell – with a piece of oil-cloth that bears an industrially produced photographic reproduction of chair caning"(2005:24). Mistaking the cloth for a real "piece of basket" Bürger had celebrated it as fragment of reality imbedded into the painting. That "reality", however, is a photographic reproduction, or the perfect "illusion" of an actual chair caning. So, for Scheunemann, by bringing together the cubist arsenal of object notation and the "piece of photographic reproduction, Picasso staged an encounter between the challenger photography" and the cubist painters' "response" to the challenge"(2005: 24). I think Scheunemann is closer to the truth in his interpretation of Picasso's idea. We have all the cubist innovations – the objects defragmented; viewed from multiple perspectives; erasure of the background/foreground distinction; the letters JOU to emphasize the flatness of the plane. And all that is superimposed on the photographic reproduction of the chair caning. There is even more to it. The frame is a piece of *real* rope. So we can interpret Picasso's intention as staging a direct collision between the avant-garde artistic techniques and the "illusionism" in reality representation of the photographic image both *framed within reality* itself.

To conclude, no matter how diversified the approach of the different avant-gardist movements may be, from a retreat to abstraction to the expression of "sensuous experience" to the depiction of motion in the stasis of painting to the introduction of multiple viewpoints into a single image, fundamentally all "seem to express the desire to move away from photographic imagery and develop functions for artistic production which lie beyond the traditional mimetic task of all arts" (Scheunemann 2005: 27). It might look exaggerated that a single device as the camera, a result of the technological development, may instigate all that chain reaction of artistic responses thus triggering nothing less than a revolution in artistic practices. Certainly, we cannot "blame" just photography for a fundamental change in art history. As Benjamin noted it was not "exclusively" photography that brought the change. Scheunemann himself is cautious not to assert such a generalization. He uses "seems to express" instead of "expresses" in the above quotation. Photography might be not *the only*, but still it was *one*, and an important one at that, of all the technological innovations that triggered the avant-gardist breakthrough.

2. Poets and the work of art in the modern age

"…Photographie tu es l'ombre
Du Soleil
Qu'est sa beauté"
(Guilaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, 1917)

That photography was dedicated a poem in Apollinaire's Calligrammes is indicative of the poet's acknowledgement of its significance. No one writes poetry on subjects that mean nothing to them. The shadow metaphor may invoke interpretations as to the unfavorable position this new form of representation of reality occupies next to genuine art. In the second stanza, not quoted here, photography is compared to the smoke of the flame, or the remnants of having gone true passion. Still, as with all valuable poetry, Apollinaire is neither lamenting some glorious past of the aesthetic nor is he praising some unknowable future. He is recording a transition in the practice of the contemplation of the beautiful.

For us it is interesting that not only painters but poets also have acknowledged the impact of the means of technological reproduction on their practices. André Breton, introducing and exhibition by Max Ernst claimed that

> the invention of photography has dealt a mortal blow to the old modes of expression, in painting as well as in poetry […]. Since a blind instrument now assured artists of achieving the aim they had set themselves up to that time, they now aspired, not without recklessness, to break with the imitation of appearances. (1948; qtd. in Scheunemann 2005: 27)

I find Breton's implied idea that artists' goal can be confined to "imitation of appearances" debatable. What is more important for us, however, is that he, as a poet, adds poetry to the visual arts as also affected by the technological progress. Poetry was only naturally drawn into the vortex of revolutionizing of artistic expression. Soon innovative "techniques" from one media would be transferred into the other. Two of the first notable examples of these experiments would be Apollinaire and Gertrude Stein, both closely linked to avant-gardist movements, especially to Cubism. Apollinaire, an ardent admirer of Picasso and Braque, experimented with transferring the "collage" technique into poetry. A poem like "Lundi Rue Christine" included random pieces of overheard conversation mixed with the lyrical voice. Apollinaire's enthusiasm brought him even farther in his experiments at integrating visual arts

techniques and between 1913 and 1916 he produced his *Calligrammes*, still a seminal work in the discussion of visual poetry. The typographical array of the words on the page, in these, was meant to represent a visual image of the subject of each poem. Thus these word-constructed "pictures" served as a visual enhancement for the reader's "experience" of the poem. Apollinaire's own understanding of these visual poems is very interesting. In a letter to a friend writer, André Billy, he described them in the following way:

> The Calligrammes are an idealisation of free verse poetry and typographical precision in an era when typography is reaching a brilliant end to its career, at the dawn of the new means of reproduction that [is] the cinema and the phonograph. (Guillaume Apollinaire, in a letter to André Billy; qtd. in Michel Burton's preface of the Calligrammes)

I find Apollinaire's comment extremely illuminating for the purpose of the present research, at least in three aspects, so I will dwell upon it at some length. Firstly, it seems to support what I consider as a counter-argument to Bürger's theory, namely that the common roots of the avant-garde rebellion should be traced in the technical advances of the new media, rather than in a shared desire to "sublate" art and social practice. The timing of the Calligrammes into the "dawn of the new means of reproduction" is indicative in itself. From my point of view it indicates an awareness of the impact that the technological means of production and reproduction of works of art exercised on the merging of different artistic media. Next is Apollinaire's reference to the cinema and the phonograph. He is not referring to the camera, but to the phonograph. There has always been a close relation between poetry and music, because of the common aural features they use to produce the desired effect on the audience. In poetry devices like alliteration and assonance, among others, exemplify the similar nature of poetic diction and music. As defined in Aristotle's *Poetics*, language, rhythm and harmony would be the means of creating the poetic *melos* as a direct equivalent of melody in music. The phonograph would change not only production, distribution and acceptance, in Bürger's sense, of musical pieces but also the production and "reception" of poetry and its performative characteristics. Hence, the phonograph, as technical innovation for reproducing sounds, is important for Apollinaire, the poet, in the same way, in which the camera as a technical innovation for producing pictures is important for Picasso, the painter. Each of these reproduction devices influences the respective métier of the artists.

Cinema would take equally important place in Apollinaire's view, because it was the best manifestation of the amalgamation of artistic media. The combination of visual images and verbal narratives, the dramatic scripting and performative staging, required for the production of a movie, made the cinema the focal point of intersection between visual arts, literature, theater and music alike. It's precisely for its *intermedia* character and the variety of aesthetic possibilities it offers for the artist that cinema was highly praised by the avant-garde. Not surprisingly, as Friedberg pointed out, the French avant-garde film of the 1920s would strive to make the "cinematic medium taken seriously as an art form" (1994: 164).

Finally, and of great importance for me, is Apolinaire's vision of the Calligrammes as "idealisation of free verse poetry and typographical precision". As I see it, here Apollinaire demonstrates awareness not only of the means of his literary production (free verse), but also awareness of the tools of this production (typography). This awareness of both means *and* tools of the creative process of the work of art would enable simultaneous experimentation with, and amalgamation of, both, to the effect of creating a new, hybrid art form. By "means of production" I mean the *materials* used. In other words, experimenting with the materials may result in new style, or technique, but still within the same realm of artistic practice, while experiments with the *tools* of your work will enable transgression of boundaries between different artistic spheres. To clarify that further, let us, for example, look at the process of "producing" a picture. For the sake of even greater simplicity, let us forget for the moment about the author (talent, creativity, motivation, intention and so on) and reduce the process to the simple formula – application of material on material with a tool. Paint and canvas are our materials here, and the brush is our tool. Technique or style will be a matter of *how* you apply your materials on the canvas or *what* you choose to represent in the painting. If a painter is innovative he may experiment with colors, shapes, volumes, lines. S/he may choose to "express his inner urges" on the canvass and go for abstraction, s/he may attempt depicting a "sensuous experience" (expressionism); s/he may instill dynamics in the static nature of the picture plain (futurism), or he may choose to break away with the one-point perspective (cubism). Still, s/he will remain within the realm of "painting". Our painter has been experimenting with the possibilities of her/his materials and the ways of their application. S/he has not gone beyond the ancient convention that the brush is just an extension of the artist's hand. However, if a painter is aware of the possibilities of his/her

tools *and* is willing to experiment with them also, s/he may paint a caption on the left-bottom corner of his work, like Duchamp did in *Nu descendant un escalier*. Using your brush as a pen, means you are aware of it as a "tool" and it is no longer just an "extension of your hand" as a painter. Exploring the possibilities *this* awareness gives you, you may choose to abandon the brush altogether and start applying your materials with a spatula or by directly squeezing the tube and that will change your idea of the materials also. Because instead for the tube of paint you may reach for the glue tube and then start gluing paper snippets or oil-cloth on the canvas to the effect of producing a collage. Or you may directly question your tools and materials, forget about them and just take a ready-made, found object from your real surroundings and present it in an exhibition as a product of art. I am referring to Duchamp's *Fountain*. Bürger interprets the *Fountain* not only as an attack on "art as institution", including the organizational forms of museums and exhibitions and the whole art market where "the signature counts more than the quality of the work", but also as a negation of "the category of individual creation" (1984: 51). For Scheunemann such an interpretation is debatable for Duchamp's own explanation of his intentions "shifts the focus elsewhere" (2005: 29). What Scheunemann is referring to is Duchamp's response to the unfavorable treatment of his work by the exhibition organization committee in an article for *The Blind Man*. There, Duchamp in defense of his "author" (he had signed the urinal "R.Mutt") wrote:

> Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object. (qtd. in Dachy 1990:83; Scheunemann 2005: 29)

For Scheunemann that comment "suggests nothing less than a fundamental change of the notion of art" (2005: 29). The question raised would be what actually makes an object a work of art. The answer to that question would be that the "selection and placement" of materials is the defining characteristic of art. And such a notion of "artistic creativity" is "well suited to the age of mechanical reproduction" (2005: 30) While this may well be true, what is also worth noting is that in the above quote Duchamp described the process and/or technique through which a found object from reality is turned into a work of *visual* art. And what is surprising is that this technique is used in *literary* theory. I doubt whether Duchamp has met Viktor Shklovsky or has ever been familiar with the works of the Russian formalists. The urinal was exhibited in 1917 and

Theory of Prose, Shklovsky's collection of theoretical essays on literature, was published as a single volume in 1925. Yet Duchamp's description of his technique is strikingly similar to Shklovsky's technique of *ostranenie*, translated in English as "defamiliarization" or "estrangement". As described in his essay "Art as technique" (sometimes translated as "Art as Device") defamiliarization is the technique employed by artists to make us see ordinary things in new light. Making the familiar unfamiliar would be the purpose of art. As Shklovsky himself put it:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important... (Art as Technique, 12).

So, Duchamp explained how he – the artist – took an "ordinary article of life" like a urinal ("the object is not important"), defamiliarized that object (signed it turned it upside down and placed it in an unusual context – art gallery) and made his audience appreciate it as art ("created a new thought for that object"). He made his audience "experience the artfulness of the object". In everyday life we see only the utility value of a pissoir, because of the automatism of our perceptions, but when Duchamp "places it" in an art gallery "so its useful significance disappears" we can now *perceive* it as art and *not* as the ordinary object that we *know*. Because, as Shklovsky would have it: "Art removes objects from the automatism of perception" (1925:12). So, even if in terms of form and content Duchamp's *Fountain* questions the "notion of work of art", in terms of technique it is art *par excellence*. And it is a new, hybrid art, because it not only crosses the boundaries between plastic arts and painting, but also relies on theatrical staging to achieve its effect on the audience.

Let's go back to our imaginary painter. The *awareness* of the possibilities that experimentation not only with the materials but also with the tools of artistic production gave her/him, had resulted in a new avant-gardist, inter-media art work. The more sophisticated the tools of artistic production, the wider the possibilities for experimentation. This is what is new in the works of art "in the age of mechanical reproduction". This process might be easy to see in the visual arts, but what about literature? Let's replace our painter with a poet and apply the same simplified formula of artistic production. What will be the materials used in the creative

process? Language is the answer. And what you do with this material is simply "put pen to paper". When language is you material and you experiment with it you have a lot of possibilities, since language as means of signification is a complex system in itself. You may challenge syntax as meaning construction structure, break down the complete language system into its basic lexical units, then reassemble them to the effect of discarding conceptions like narrative structure or plot and produce a dreamlike vision on the page similar to a surrealist painting, like Joyce. You may embrace the dadaist idea of "automatic writing" and produce a mechanical string of unrelated words on the page, ungoverned by any type of linguistic rules. Or you may chose to explore the merely aural aspect of words and reassemble them on the page subordinate only to the rhythm and sound of language, like Gertrude Stein will do in her exploration of the possibilities of everyday American English. Still, all these experiments will remain within the realm of language itself. However, when you are aware of the possibilities of your tools also, you will start experimenting with typeset and font, with punctuation and spacing. You will arrive at Mallarmé's proto-hyper-textual *Un coup de dés*, or at Marinetti's sound-visual poem *Zang Tumb Tumb,* or at Apollinaire's *Calligrammes.* These new avant-garde "products" of artistic creativity would belong to the category of Interart, because they utilize elements of different artistic media (primarily of visual arts and theater) to expand the form and effect of the traditional genre of poetry.

3. Conclusion: The Avant-Garde and the Interart work in the Modern age.

"The questioning of traditional borderlines between the arts and a lively interaction, including the transfer of new techniques and aesthetic principles from one art to another, became […] one of the outstanding features of avant-gardist art production." (Scheunemann, 2005: 28)

If we assume that this blurring of the "traditional borderlines between the arts" is a distinctive feature of the avant-garde, as Scheunemann claims, then any study of the hybrid art forms like visual poetry should necessarily be put within the context of avant-garde practices. Bürger asserted that the avant-gardist assault on the status of "work of art" changed its aesthetic perception as "living picture of the totality" (1984: 70). He dedicated a whole chapter on the subject, focusing on the collage and how it "calls attention to the fact that it is made of reality fragments [and] breaks through the appearance (*Shein*) of totality" (1984: 72). The constituent parts of the

collage "no longer have the relationship to reality characteristic of the organic work of art. They are no longer signs pointing to reality, they *are* reality" (1984: 78). Thus, for Bürger, the distinction between art and life are blurred. But as Webster has pointed out, there is also blurring of the distinction between material and the signifier, because a snippet of a newspaper in a collage painting, for example, is three different things simultaneously: "a piece of paper (material), a collection of symbols (words) taken from a larger life-context outside of the institution of art, and a part of a complete work of art" (1995: 8). While it is easy for the viewer to literary *see*, the "contrast between these reality-fragments and the semblance of art", for the reader it will be very difficult to distinguish between them, for literature relies on language as its signifying system. (1995: 8). Avant-gardist poets employed different strategies to interrupt the "seamless semblance of art" and to destroy the "impression of organic wholeness" (1995: 8). Some of them as enumerated by Webster would include: "breaking of the block-page format", "use of various typefaces", "forming shapes on the page", creating poems out of meaningless syllables, and "simplifying and disordering syntax" (1995: 8).

But how should we approach an analysis of such highly idiosyncratic forms of interart works? Are we to concentrate on their aesthetic effect, or on the authorial intention, or on their functional system of signification? Does visual poetry, from the example above, belong *only* to the poetic genre and fall under the categories studied by literary criticism exclusively? Though the literary devices such works employ are ideologically neutral, they still are applicable to a wide variety of political effect. Similar techniques are employed, for example, both by futurists, like Marinetti for the appraisal of the war or by Mayakovski for hailing the Revolution, to the effect of Fascist and Communist "collectivist" ideological propaganda, on the one hand. On the other hand, in E. E. Cummings we can find similar techniques serving the ideology of extreme Romantic Individualism. So, individual aesthetic or moral stance of particular authors cannot be neglected in studying their works. Proponents of New Criticism like Wimsatt and Beardsley in their classical essay on "The Intentional Fallacy" would dismiss any authorial intent or historical context and would insist that analyses have to focus exclusively on the text of the poem itself. We need not search for meaning outside the "verbal icon", since, as a rhetorical construct it is complete in its symbol system. This "completeness" of the work in itself is reminiscent of the notion of the "organic" nature of the art work. It was precisely the avant-garde that attacked the notion of the "organic" work of art. So this cannot be applicable to avant-gardist works

that "intentionally" would seek to destroy their own "organic" wholeness. Contrary to New Criticism's dismissal of authorial intent, we need to bear in mind what *effect* was sought by the author, if we are to understand *how* the elements of such inter-art works complement each other functionally. As Webster points out: "A work that refuses or problematizes its status as a complete aesthetic object must be interpreted at least partially by considering its author's intention", for in such interart works "a poet's intention and work mix in an inextricable amalgam" (1995: 9) Moreover, the notion of the poem as a separate verbal construct, complete in its own system of signification has been attacked not only by avant-gardist practices, but by theorists as well. Semiotic theory foregrounded the complex intertextual relations that each text is interwoven in. These intertextual relations inevitably would undermine the notion of the work as separate aesthetic construct, replacing it with the notion of a "text" made up of readily available cultural codes. In literary theory the "reader-response criticism" focused on the role that readers play to "unlock" the latent potentials of the text. Each individual reader has his/her different historical and cultural background, as well as a different literary competence. Different readers presuppose different readings of the same text. And this variety-of-readings potential intrinsic in the text would, of course, prevent us from seeing it as a closed "organic" construct.

When we deal with texts that intentionally transgress artistic boundaries we have to bear in mind that they create semiotic difficulties for the reader. Thus we have to turn to semiotic theory for the necessary tools for analysis of relations between object and sign, word and image, symbol and icon. On the other hand, such relations are variable when individual aesthetic decisions come into play. Hence, in the analysis of such works I think we should try to follow Michael Webster and the "flexible strategies" that he suggested. These would combine the aesthetic (which includes authorial intention and historical considerations) and the semiotic (including questions of style and relations of verbal to visual aspects) (1995: 10). By experimental avant-gardist practices I mean these works that, according to Michael Webster, lead to the "hybridization and contamination of art forms" (1995: 8). Such hybrid art forms can be seen as the highest manifestation of what Bürger saw as "revolutionizing of art" by the historical avant-garde (1984: 72). But these practices did not "die" with the avant-garde proper. Much of what is now termed "postmodernism" might be regarded as an extension of this same "hybridization process in new contexts" (Webster 1995: 8). The renewed interest in the legacy of the avant-garde, especially in the 1970s should not

be surprising then. The studies of these mixed artistic practices required a new critical approach. Especially with the next shift in technological advancement of the media and the dawning of the so called "digital age" the criticism focused back on the experimentalism of the avant-gardist practices and the hybrid art forms. The understanding that the new, technologically advanced media have broadened the possibilities for artistic expression and, consequently, have changed the nature of artistic production has led to the emergence of such interdisciplinary fields of research as inter-art(s) studies or inter-media studies.

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