

Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic

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Asunción López-Varela, "Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic"

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Edited by Asunción López-Varela

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Abstract: In her article, "Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic," Asunción López-Varela explores the relationship between technological development, the materiality of objects, the concept of ontological presence, and the emergence of abstract and fantastic models. López-Varela argues that since the early twentieth century there has been a return to the fantastic in literature and that this is related to neo-baroque attitudes whose foundations are a systemic way of knowing that unveils a world understandable from an epistemology of complexity and ambiguity. In postmodern neo-baroque aesthetics, with its focus on technological re-mediating, that is, transferring information across different media, originality is no more than the capacity to deconstruct pre-established formulas. This represents a phenomenon where the cultural and the technological meet, since repetition arises from excess of information thus showing the material and local character of the cultural. López-Varela shows how the emergence of hybrid and fantastic perspectives embedded in negative values implies a changing of values, that is, referential parameters about ourselves, the others, nature, etc. The conflict between a vision of the world as a closed system and the vision of the world as group of local open systems with permeable borders is a conflict which anticipates ideological, political, economical, and axiological systems and thus it signifies a cultural conflict.

Asunción LÓPEZ-VARELA

Cultural Scenarios of the Fantastic

We can trace the fantastic in Western literature to Greek and Roman myths with classics such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The majority of epic narratives in all cultures have strong fantastic components, from the Sumerian *Gilgamesh* to the Hindu *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* through the Saxon *Beowulf*, the German *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, Icelandic sagas and Arthurian legends. The turn of the epic towards more realist forms gave rise to picaresque and chivalresque novels, journey narratives, social novels, etc. Fantastic elements are present in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver Travels* only to return in the romantic period in the "gothic novel." The fantastic became the popular genre *par excellence* and including among many sub-genres children's literature and science fiction, stretching to contemporary cyberfiction. This is so because such narratives situate perfect societies in islands away from human reach and similar devices; it is not by chance that the etymology of the word is from Greek *outopia* (*ou* = no; *topos/topia* = place, location) + *eutopia* (*eu* = good; *topos/topia* = place, location). The fantastic seeks to spread beyond the threshold of the real, beyond our borders of perception, beyond the socially authorized including religion and sexuality, and also beyond our temporal and spatial context. One wonders, then, if there is a relationship between the fantastic and the artistic avant-garde, since the term means metaphorically the first line of creation and artistic innovation, that is, the space beyond what is established.

It is striking that in literary history and the history of genres the fantastic remains elusive to its categorization. As Julio Cortázar has explained, "the fantastic and the mysterious are not only the greatest imaginations of cinema, literature, stories and novels. They are present within us, in our psychic mind, and science or philosophy can explain them only in a primary and rudimentary manner" (291; unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine). Thus we need to question the reasons why this "feeling" emerges with particular force in certain historical moments that appear to coincide with social changes, mainly technological. One of the first to formulate the concept of the fantastic was Vladimir Soloviev for whom the signification of the fantastic is founded upon the certainty that everything that occurs in human life depends not only rooted in causality but that there is a deeper universal and less obvious causality. Soloviev speaks of an exterior and formal possibility for the explanation of phenomena and about an internal type of explanation which lacks all internal probability (see Tomachevski 61-95). Boris Tomachevski brands Soloviev as an idealist because of his use of these terms; however, words like "causes," "exterior possibility," and "internal probability" remind us of existential approaches and dynamic systems theory, as we shall see later on. Roger Caillois also indicated that "the fantastic is a rupture of the recognized order, an irruption of the unacceptable within everyday immutable legality" (161). Tzvetan Todorov describes it as being a liminal state of the supernatural and he compares "the fantastic" to "the uncanny," wherein the phenomenon turns out to have a rational explanation, and to "the marvellous," where the explanation is truly supernatural as in fairy tales. Todorov explains that "the fantastic" is the state of mind which leaves the reader with a sense of confusion about the work whether or not the phenomenon was real; Todorov argues that both "the grotesque" and the "supernatural" contain fantastic elements but "the fantastic" is based on an ambiguity of those elements.

The analysis of the mechanisms of representation and their problematic relationship with a supposedly objective "reality" that they would try to reflect in a precise and transparent way has occupied a fundamental space in philosophical and artistic debates in the Western tradition, although only at certain times have they come forth disputing its prominence versus other more transcendental realities, metaphysical or sublime, with the subsequent reconsideration of epistemological paradigms. In recent decades, thought on the baroque in particular has reached some surprising findings. For example, according to Martin Jay human imagination has moved towards the

baroque, that is, towards a rupture with classical and renaissance perspectives in an attempt to investigate and complicate rational, visual, and narrative spaces and thus the baroque and modernity would be times when the imaginary has thought to discover a world which runs against order and against the rationalism of the classic ideal. In other words, a world that has sought to approach representations which are both ambiguous and fantastic. Tracing a quick path through the antecedents of such reflection on the baroque we could begin with work by Friedrich Nietzsche who in his *Human, All-Too-Human* anticipated many of the claims of the movement towards ambiguity in the twentieth century. Nietzsche defines the baroque in terms of opposition, as lack, absence, or failure to comply with the rules of the classical canon. The baroque expressed new values: in literature the use of metaphor and allegory and in painting multiple light sources and the abundance of diverse elements. The theoretical thread that would explore aspects of ambiguity related to philosophy, art in general and literature in particular, can be found in the work of diverse thinkers including William Empson, whose work *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) was fundamental for the development of New Criticism. Or, Maurice Blanchot, whose work illuminates symbolists such as Stéphane Mallarmé and his formulation of literary language as anti-realist and different from everyday experience. Blanchot's work is also linked to that of Georges Bataille and Emmanuel Levinas, while Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, François Lyotard, or Jean Baudrillard have revised patterns of representation and the conception of reality and the world as exercises of construction underlying performative aspects, that is, the idea of culture as process. Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's work, Julia Kristeva examines certain artistic strategies guided by the need of excess and transgression that the Russian theorist terms "grotesque realism." Works recovering Walter Benjamin's thesis on the influence of technology upon modernity, such as by Christine Buci-Glucksmann or Omar Calabrese (see also Buci-Glucksmann and Jarauta), Samuel Arriarán and Mauricio Beuchot, Fernando R. de la Flor, Francisco Jarauta, Ana Lucas, José Antonio Maravall, Severo Sarduy, Cornago Bernal, or Octavio Paz, all of whom consolidate new perspectives on the baroque, modernity and postmodernity, and the importance of ambiguity (for new work ambiguity in culture and literature, see the forthcoming volume *Culture and Ambiguity* edited by Anthony Stephens and Paolo Bartoloni).

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno theorized aesthetic theory as a correction of abstract and instrumental thought. Furthermore, the verification of the limits of empirical knowledge and of the objectivity of scientific discourse in the so-called "exact sciences" made them loose the condition of neutrality from which scientific paradigms had benefited until the apparition of the first relativist models, thus bringing these fields closer to the humanities in such a way that analogy, metaphor, myths, and semiotic approximations begin to permeate scientific discourse as viable forms of knowledge that can help guide the capacity of what we perceive as known, the intuition of that which cannot be understood. The subtitle to William Irvin Thompson's *Gaia: A Way of Knowing* (1987) and his notion of the implications of "New Biology" announced an explicit political and ideological emphasis. The most important general principle of a Gaian polity is to begin to think in terms of an ecology of consciousness rather than one-sided ideologies. In an ideological political culture it is generally assumed that Truth can be known completely and absolutely and contained in a single system of ideas. In contradiction, in Gaian political culture characterized by ecological thinking it is assumed that "truth" can only be expressed in the context of relationships of interacting opposites and therefore "truth" embeds those conflicts and is not necessarily wholly reducible to one pole of a conflict or the other. Thompson claimed that for a variety of reasons, each cultural pursuit has become increasingly dissociated from the others during the course of the twentieth century to the detriment of each and all. The end result was a set of separate and highly specialized subcultures, each with their own discipline and specific jargon that did not and could not serve as a vehicle of wider communication, let alone leading to a communal understanding. Thompson explains that Western high culture and its concern with pragmatic careerism lost sight of its project to

preserve, protect, and promote a "shared" culture and the only common culture left was popular and pop culture which, on its own, could not maintain its value as shock absorber and moved downward cumulatively toward the lowest common denominator of base impulses.

Similarly, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela use the term *autopoiesis* to designate a dynamic process of cognition by which a system maintains its organization on account of its own operation, depending on its current, present, and past states. System behaviour is determined by its interaction with the environment (the material substratum) and by the fact that systems are man-made. Thus, rules governing systems can be a) perceptual, that is, responding to peculiarities of sensing, b) cognitive, that is, dealing with cultural knowledge and beliefs, c) evaluative, because they introduce the individual factor and tend to explain personal preferences, values, and goals, d) behavioural, because they delineate future patterns of action, and e) denotative, because they specify the choice of signs for signifying. Semiosis organizes signs using hierarchy that moves from objects (manifestations of physical objects as signs, perceived or realized through their distinctions; under a materialistic perspective we could include emotions and behaviours as objects) to a second induced level of processes and structures, reflecting interpretative laws of experiential and environmental (physiologically, socially, technically, economically, etc.) which in turn determines meanings. This new epistemology of networked complexity begins to emerge in different disciplines (radical constructivism, complex systems paradigms, quantum physics, neurobiology, cybernetics, critical theory, deconstruction, reader-response criticism, etc.), a convergence also theorized by Katherine Hayles or George P. Landow, among others. For instance, it is at least striking that theoretical trends such as radical constructivism (e.g., Schmidt; Glasserfeld; Tötsch de Zepetnek), complex systems paradigms (e.g., Prigogine; Morin; Deleuze), breakthroughs in the field of quantum physics (Heisenberg; Bohr), neurobiology (Maturana and Varela; Calvin), thermodynamics (Bertalanffy), systems theory (Schmidt; Luhmann), or cybernetics (Wiener; Jay; Gleick; Capra; for a study of the crisis of representational time in science and literature see also López-Varela, *Embers*), all show a change of orientation towards models that emphasize processes instead of states, and even a certain empirical anti-objectivist with the sight on uncertainty, non-linear dynamic systems theory (also called "chaos theories"), complexity, fractal geometry, etc., where the relationship between the principles of order and disorder, imbalance and instability, construction and deconstruction, and the discovery of an unpredictable world beyond statistic trends. This new vision of the world as a group of local open systems with permeable interdisciplinary borders includes ideological, political, economical, and axiological structures and thus it signals changes in our ontology of symbolization which in turn affects cultural forms and their material formats in a feed-back loop. Such changes are-prefigured in the acts of acts of production, distribution and reception of cultural objects, which form the very symbolic structure of cultural phenomena. This new systemic way of knowing unveils a world understandable as binary construct and ambiguous process and hence the relevance of the fantastic. Within this epistemology, the distinction between open and closed systems becomes fundamental. Closed systems are characterized by two conditions: centre and a perimeter. In the latter, their symmetrical organization around their centre confers order and stability but also stiffness and stagnation while in the former expansive forces create a crisis within the system in its movement towards openness. The same persistence is manifested in the development of critical theory where deconstructive mechanisms, such as those by Jacques Derrida or orientations towards an aesthetic of reading in reception and audience studies and the "open work" (see Eco). These readings elude canonical order and essentialist stability, requiring instead acts of invention in a world in continuous movement. While the humanities and the arts congratulate themselves for this new alliance with the sciences which seems to aim at all-embracing knowledge (even if ambiguous) and of reality, and where diverse approaches enhance one another under comparative study, one wonders if these shared paradigms of ambiguity are the result of interdisciplinary dialogue, intertextuality, and re-mediation (i.e., transferring previous discourses into multiple [new]

media formats) or if, on the other hand, we are really talking about a cultural and epistemological revolution.

The rapprochement between reason and intuition, between empiricism and spiritualism, between perception and abstraction has one of its most radical expressions both in Ludwig Wittgenstein's thought and the crisis of phenomenology. The difficulty of capturing reality through perception can be tracked to Baudelaire's *Peintre de la vie moderne* and it is the fundamental objective of many modernist artists who try to overcome the crisis of representation by turning, in many cases, towards the sacred or sublime, frequently related to the essence of nature. This is, for instance, the case of Virginia Woolf whose work *The Waves* seeks to reunite the fragmentation of subjective human experience within the universal temporal cycles of the natural world, shared by everyone. This return to the sacred or sublime attached to Lockian British empiricism, Kantian analytic thought, and to the processes of *anamnesis* (recollection, reminiscence, etc.) is characteristic of Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, or Thomas Mann, and it appears in dynamic tension with its opposite, namely the material world and the need of the profanation of the sublime through the grotesque, characteristic of James Joyce's works for example. These works point towards a postmodern way of looking whose basic approach is the denunciation of formal limits, that is, the crisis of the object tied to the crisis of the perceiving subject, both represented in twentieth-century avant-garde artistic movements that recover the ineffable, the invisible, and the hidden under a new non-sublime vision, a prostituted vision, baroque and ambiguous that feeds in its own contradictions (on this, see López-Varela, "El burdel"). It is therefore not the sense of time or period, of being yet another temporal category, but the character of dynamic process(es) integrative of opposites and open to change what allows us to contemplate postmodernism as a new way of looking towards the cultural past and that implies a radical revision of dominant epistemological paradigms now oriented towards ambiguity and the epistemology of the baroque. Postmodernism's struggle to constitute itself simultaneously as opening and closing, as the end of representation and history in order to inaugurate a new moment within a never ending allegorical process is thus a symptom or expression of the underlying epistemological crisis that brings us back directly to the baroque and to semiotic approaches and unveiling a pragmatic and performative, contingent and processual comprehension of reality, a comprehension that moves towards sceneries beyond what can be named, that is, towards the mystery of the infinite, the unstable, the empty, and the fantastic in art. In systemic theory there is no separation between phenomena and their consequences: both are part of the process. There is no distance between order, rule, cause, cosmos, finitude, etc., used (in the present) to explain origin (the past) and anticipate phenomena (future order; teleology) and disorder, irregularity, chance, chaos, undefined, unlimited, or monstrous. Disorder, frequently discarded because of its apparent lack of functionality, is now understood as an integral part of a dynamic system. It is this legitimating of the casual and monstrous, the instability between order and disorder that provides dynamism within the system. However, it is not that mathematical theories and the study of natural phenomena influence cultural change. Instead, it is postulated that scientific paradigms are cultural acts in themselves and, what is more, the production and reception of cultural objects or what we call art is not only a consequence but the very symbolic structure of cultural phenomena.

The above suggested view, namely an epistemological crisis, ought to result in an interdisciplinary rapprochement (not merely multidisciplinary or pluridisciplinary: the prefix "inter" points to the interrelations), that in the case of literature and the other arts becomes manifest in a generic rupture, bridging the fantastic and the avant garde. I argue that this crisis has its origin in new forms of the materiality of objects, forms mediated increasingly by digital technologies and mass communication and not only by the multiplication of representational spaces but the growing remediation of these spaces. It is precisely the 1960s with the complete activation of Western capitalist systems and the impact of the "iconic turn" and the point of no-return in the movement towards

an understanding of the world as a constructed cultural product. It is at this time when the return of the baroque in the so-called "neo-baroque" becomes particularly noticeable. However, there are differences between the neo-baroque and the aesthetics of the first avant-gardes in that neo-baroque is not an aesthetic of totality or singularity (and exceptionality). Modernism, for instance, attempted to claim the value of art as original and unrepeatable, while contemporary aesthetics overcome idealization and singularity to insist on the rupture of the inscription of the whole and proceed by repetitions and variations and re-writings. Hence, new poetics centre on 1) the study of detail (photography, slow motion cinema, close-ups, minimalism, etc.), 2) the production of fragments (collage, description without unity, exquisite corpse or cadaver, and other surrealist techniques), and 3) in the reception of details and fragments (see also Wollen). There is also a desire to exceed limits, a desire of eccentricity and excess, imagination, fantasy, etc., all implying destabilization. As Calabrese indicates, the value avant garde art derives from its disorder in the face of normality, that is, a diversion of the norm resulting in ambiguity but also novelty and originality. Nowadays, however, artists are used to the fact that works can continue to generate themselves by re-readings, re-writings, *recyclage*, and re-creation, becoming dynamic systems that try to overcome exhaustion by opening themselves, instead of centralizing, categorizing, or closing as classical systems did. This aesthetics of re-creation and repetition brings into play several modalities such as standardization, that is, serial production (for example TV series) and structural variation (for example film sequels). Calabrese describes these modes of repetition as iconic which respects images (maintaining for instance the same protagonist) and thematic and narrative (structural variations, scripts, recurrent motifs, etc.). Contemporary technology, the different types of information support materials, text, image, audio, video, etc., produce all these variations. In fact, what we term "hypermedia" produces all type of reconfiguration re-mediating classical formats and converting them in digital and intermedial (mixture of text, audio, image, etc; see Bolter and Grusin). Thus, we are talking about a phenomenon where the cultural and the technological meet, since repetition arises from excess of information, that is, excess of history, what once more shows the material and local character of the cultural (the fact there exist different cultures and that these change over time). At an epistemological level this shows once more fragmentation, questioning again the concept of totality. These aspects appear as repetitions in the new baroque aesthetics, namely that making originality evident is no more than the capacity to change, decentre, and deform pre-established formulas. But the fragmentation of totality also appears as a deconstruction of categories (for instance the case of literary genres; new technologies enable even more inter-generic crossing than the avant garde), that is, the part understood as detail or fragment. In this tendency to detail one can see the desire for autonomy of the part. On the other hand, the tendency to fragment prefers rupture or proliferation of parts, seeking to elude the centre; thus fragmented writing uses aphorisms and loose thoughts. Both expressions, the tendency to detail and the tendency to the fragment, move away from totality. Poetic sense is found by means of a removal from regularity and the search for that which is different and does not belong within global categories: the local (in the case of the tendency to detail) and the hybrid or monster (in the case of the tendency to the fragment).

From a sociological and cultural perspective, attention to detail and fragment has allowed a new vision of the other, different from me, localized. Values are not only an epistemological problem, since morals and ethics are not simply a way of reasoning but based in experience; it is not enough to explain rationally the arguments for the convenience of a value in order to be able to put it into practice later. The root of values lies in the way experiences have a profound emotional impact on us, as if they were aesthetic experiences. Negativity, the sinister, the monstrous, the repulsive, the disgusting are aesthetic categories just like the positive, beauty, the sublime, etc. Classical forms always respond to judgements of value according to which what is culturally accepted is physically positive, desirable, beautiful, etc., while what is not is considered deformed, undesirable and ugly.

However, negative experiences are not always interiorized as rejections: this also depends on social and media influence and on individual psychological and personal reasons. A distorted sensibility, such as the neo-baroque, can be the starting point for the interiorization of what later we assume as values, that is, referential parameters about ourselves, the others, nature, life's sense, etc. Hence, in order to explain the evolution of cultural values it is also necessary to explore the symbolic forms that represent those values. The repetition of symbolic forms affects psychic and non-explicit levels giving way to the interiorization of values. The conflict between a vision of the world as a closed system (with the exigency of totality as ideological and aesthetic condition) and the vision of the world as group of local open systems with permeable borders is a conflict which anticipates ideological, political, economic, and axiological systems and thus it represents a cultural conflict (on this, see further López-Varela, "Literature as Node").

Tolerance has been an absent value until recent times and it is still today a reason for conflict. The relationship with the other has often been established as a relation of power, control, subjection, and even annihilation, carried out by the hero. The other has always been the stranger, the uncanny, the monstrous, the enemy who demanded domination. Sometimes this other is within ourselves, as in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll y Mr. Hyde*; at other times it is forming part for instance of cultures alien to ours, as in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Women have frequently been contemplated as monsters (see, e.g., Caputi). It is significant that in our contemporary world artists no longer seek heroes but anti-heroes, hybrids, monsters, characters with a dark and hidden side. The return of the negative principle or the un-human as a component of reality (see, e.g., Cottom), means a qualitative change that opens up new horizons of knowledge and insight. The idea of the un- or in-human, the excessive, the formless, points to the paradoxical essence of the human, of order and form, a distancing movement with respect to positions of abstract and idealizing humanism. At the level of literary characters' presentation the changes in aesthetic orientation show the incorporation of negative principles and at a structural level labyrinthic visions proliferate (e.g., Joyce, Borges, Pynchon, Auster, etc.). The labyrinth is also one of the images of chaotic systems: it has order but it is hidden and complex. The complexity of the labyrinth can be defined as ambiguous: on the one hand it denies the value of the global and on the other it constitutes a challenge to find a new order. That is, the labyrinth is a game which begins with pleasure, that of getting lost, and ends with another pleasure, that of finding oneself. It is the pleasure of the resolution of the enigma, a process that it is only possible through a vision of constant change, through transformation more than stability and open, interdisciplinary, and dynamic according to a non-lineal path of the plot, even at the risk of loosing orientation. Following Gilles Deleuze, Calabrese proposes that this characteristic is part of a generalized rejection of systematization, caused by a new nomad way of living-thinking. It is easy to relate this to changes in our ways of living during the twentieth century as means of transport have allowed greater mobility including large diasporas and (im)migration (see López-Varela, "Webness"). Besides, the revolution in our means of communication produced by digital technologies including hypertext reconfigures our models of reading and writing, and therefore, thinking. What is different, unknown, misunderstood, etc., emerges paradoxically as a final guaranty for a dynamic sense and truth, distinct from the essential truth, and incomprehensible from the perspective of logical rationalism. Thus, it is possible to understand the irrationalism present in Nietzschean thought as something positive.

While light and electricity fascinates gothic writers during the Romantic period (i.e., Shelley's *Frankenstein*), a mixture of human and machine, the cyborg, forms part of our contemporary imagination. Studies by Walter Benjamin or John Berger show how technologies such as photography or cinematography are producing cultural change in our ways of looking at the world. We observe the reality that surrounds us while we acquire a conscience of our own observation. The camera makes evident that what we are watching is framed within a spatial and temporal context, even if it breaks the uniqueness of the image allowing its infinite reproduction and depraving it from its

original context. Although photography might seem as an act of no intervention, it is much more than passive observation. It would be equivalent to sexual voyeurism in that observation contributes, at least tacitly, to stimulate so that what is happening continues to happen. If the camera can, thus, invade, transgress, and distort, cinema allows even more. Christian Metz established an analogy between the cinema screen and the mirror, explaining that by means of identification with the gaze in the camera, the spectator can re-establish what Jacques Lacan called "mirror stage," a scenery where looking into the mirror allows the child to see him or herself for the first time as other -- a significant stage in ego formation. In this sense, we can establish a link with Lacan's calls dialectic of identification with the other (*Écrits* 4) pointing out that the function of the mirror stage is reveal to us as a particular case in the function of the imago, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality (for Lacan's thoughts on the baroque see his "Du Baroque").

We could situate the main characteristic of the baroque in the twentieth century as an invasion of space to the detriment of temporal models which become integrated in the system's own dynamics (see López-Varela, *Embers*). The neo-baroque spaces of the avant garde incite positions of looking that are not satisfied with voyeurism and seek the implication of the observer, reader, etc., turning him/her into a performer. Deleuze explains that the baroque offers an architecture of vision that places the audience in a spatial relationship with what is being represented, and that this disposition of perspective is not ordered statically but is the result of an articulation of complex spatial conditions where the borders are continually re-written in relation to the spectator, depending on his/her focal point. In this way, that being observed, the spectacle engulfs the audience forcing its participation in such a way that illusion and reality intermingle (see López-Varela, "El gusto del público"). According to Calabrese, neo-baroque aesthetics has realized that our fragmented world forms part of an open and dynamic system and that it knows that objectivity is impossible and thus it becomes involved, takes part developing intentionality so as to aesthetically strengthen the distortion. It is intentionality that goes beyond the borders of creation and reaches the receptor, to incite and implicate him/her. It is in this sense a form of perversion. In addition, interactivity, desire, and search now turn into dimensions of the audience, which in turn becomes a productive consumer (however, let us remember Fredric Jameson's warnings). The aesthetic of attention to detail, according to Calabrese, is characterized by an aesthetic of fidelity and pleasure for a complete perception of representation, whereas the aesthetic of the reception of fragments is characterized by a taste for the continuity of rupture arising in general from the pleasure of tearing apart complete products. Neo-baroque culture enjoys breaking perimeter rules. This pleasure or need is reflected in two possible attitudes: a tendency towards the border, limit, or threshold (without completely breaking the rules) and the need to overcome it. Calabrese offers several examples to illustrate the operation of overcoming the threshold. One is the manipulation of "slow motion" to create certain effects in cinema, television, or video and the other is the so-called "zapping" which allows the viewer the possibility of fragmenting discourses. These possibilities of the surmounting of the time/space threshold are not only promoting a new vision of the world but also behaviours that conform more and more to "multitasking." Today a growing number of people prefer computer and web interactivity to passive television reception. Unlike television's zapping audiences, internet users have at their reach a vast amount of all kinds of information, fit to all pleasures. On the screen, one can read, search for information in libraries all over the world, buy products, watch a movie, speak through the telephone line with anyone anywhere in the world using programmes such as Skype, seek sexual pleasures, etc., etc. The user constructs his/her own palimpsest or individual collage, providing significances *à la carte*. It is a type of intermittent communication that requires new speeds and forms of perception and that, in the case of hypertextual readings, for instance, requires new forms of reading competence (see López-Varela, "Literature as Node"). Internet users seek greater freedom in their paths, more interactivity, and structures sufficiently

open and flexible to allow manipulation of information in a radical way. Open code, open access, peer-sharing, and Wiki movements are just a few examples of our intermedial world.

In conclusion, our intermedial age suggests that we have developed a systemic way of knowing that, in turn, unveils a world from a new epistemology of complexity, non-linear dynamic systems theory, and ambiguity. The characteristics of this intermedial world began to manifest itself in early twentieth-century avant garde thought and techniques, such as montage that mobilized space-time frameworks and enabled the projection of simultaneity within linear structures thus unveiling temporal folds within the structures (artistical, narratological). This proliferation of complex systemic visions favours dynamic and open structures that express themselves in contemporary representational forms, both artistic and scientific. The re-readings and re-writings, and re-mediations of the world emerge as different types of deformities such as interdisciplinary metamorphoses, generic crossings, structural fragmentation, plot mutation, new ways of seeing. Thus the inclusion of the negative, the chaotic, the monstrous, the ugly, in the intermedial world of the neo-Baroque resulting in a general situation of ambiguity and ambiguities.

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