Marcel·lí Antúnez Roca - Texts

HYPERTEXT, NEW ORDER. APHASIA.

Aphasia

Some general considerations.

1. Hypertext. The appearance of the technology of hypertext in the early nineties introduced major question marks over some of the hitherto inalterable precepts of the linear nature of time on which we base a great deal of our memory: the memory which is handed down to us through writing. Hypertext allows us to proceed to other units of meaning without having to move any distance. The different links allow us to navigate to regions which take on unpredictable forms and develop unimagined paths. The contents of files are no longer a question of strict order, they now form part of a horizontal network which depends on our will; time and distance have become relative.

2. Hypermedia. The logical consequence of the spread of hypertext technology is hypermedia, a way of linking up different aesthetic elements: image, sound, text, data and video. Whatever final from things take, they can be linked not just by their original appearance, but also by their remotest aspects.

3. Multimedia. But we do not just perceive the different elements as isolated entities, we can also see them as a single thing, as an overall interaction, as a multimedia reality. When we say multimedia, we automatically think of the jumble of products ranging form interactive games to web pages. The form of these works carries on the legacy of their most immediate predecessors, the cinema and the television. Even today, when we speak of multimedia we refer to an audiovisual environment: a 2-D or 3-D image which is reflected on a flat surface and stereo audio line. It seems logical for the periphery of these technologies to spread in the future towards other aspects of perception —the palpable, the three dimensional...— and occupy reality as a whole. Perhaps in the guise of robots, peripherals or other forms.

4. Computing. The possibility of processing a great diversity of data using a single pattern —digitisation— allows the interaction of hypertext, or hypermedia. But these technologies are just some of the resources that information technology offers us. Another of its possibilities is the creation of more complex, dynamic environments, for instance. Today computers do tasks which in the past required the synchronised work of groups of specialists. Now complex collective processes have been replaced by a single person or small group.

5. Technoscience. Computing discoveries do not come on their own; other aspects of science and technology, which are just as important or more so, are flashing up before us so fast that we cannot even begin to glimpse their consequences. We are witnessing a techno-scientific revolution which is affecting every area of our existence, and of course artistic activity is no exception.

6. Mutation. We live in a world where the mysteries of days gone by are transformed into definite realities. As a result, it is not just the forms that vary; contents are mutating too. Many of the mysteries shrouding our fatality until recently are now being solved. The process of human reproduction, for instance, has undergone constant and radical changes in the last quarter of a century: having a child is a voluntary act, manipulating the embryo outside the womb is a reality, we have à la carte fathers (sperm banks) and surrogate mothers, we're talking about cloning... How can Hamlet avenge the death of his father if he's the son of a sperm bank and a surrogate mother or, even worse, a clone of his uncle? We have to change our conduct to adapt to this situation. The contemporary world calls for other forms of representation.

7. New Order. We belong to the first generations of artists who are colonising the resources being offered by new technologies. Certain aspects of the world of art are bound to undergo through changes in their structure. By way of example, just look at how hypertext / hypermedia technologies are turning the characteristic gestures of twentieth-century avant-garde art movements into reality: expanding traditional disciplines by introducing new ideas and new attitudes, or by stretching the limits of the disciplines themselves. The present-day division / classification of the arts is open to other forms of interconnection and order. We have a new tool which allows us to conceive of art and its history in a different way. There are attitudes which cannot be classified by the "old order". How many artistic practices start out from the scenic and end up in the visual, how many begin in the musical and continue in the plastic, or, quite simply, how many projects are the product of the interaction of disciplines in a single expressive code?

8. Visual Theatre. When the text ceases to be the preferred medium, the other disciplines involved in a work of theatre interact very differently. It is something, else altogether. From this point of view, certain compositional procedures of the "visual theatre" are very similar to those on which multimedia works are based. They have elements in common: the polygamy of their languages, the possibility of varying the perceptive hierarchy of the spectator between one medium and another, bringing about simultaneity of action... Yet from the point of view of technology, the possibilities are greater. As we have already said, it is possible to vary the order of contents and intercalate other information, which means that we are not limited to a closed time sequence. It is also possible to produce an unalterable, enduring version of the work, because it is written in the theoretically unalterable computing applications; we are no longer dependent on the human convention established between actors and technicians, so subject to human error and outdatedness.

9. Aphasia. This is the title of my latest work. I chose this term —meaning the loss of language due to a disorder in the central nervous system— because I find that it admirably expresses this inexorable transformation of the textual to the audiovisual. Aphasia is, in fact, an audiovisual piece. Yet it goes beyond this definition to enter the world of live presentation. Aphasia is an unclassifiable object, it has visual and sculptural elements —both for the importance of the treatment of image and the development of the robots—, but it also has something in the scenic —it is performed for an hour in a theatre. Aphasia is an interactive action, performed by a single actor: myself. During the performance, the piece may vary in order, duration and form. The different elements involved in the spectacle are interactive and are subject to my will. It is a hypermediatic action. Aphasia takes place on a multimedia support, but it also extends its limits. Not just because it is a live performance in which robots are employed, but also because the interfaces used —identification of the actor'' position in space and the exoskeleton— make for the full integration of virtual and real elements, which go beyond the two-dimensional nature of multimedia works.

Finally, Aphasia partakes of this mutation of contents. It partakes of the paradoxes involved in confronting new definitions. It invents new realities.