

Where Creativity meets the Web: a pataphysical partnership

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I. INTRODUCTION (*HEADING 1*)

Even if I will talk for only 10 minutes, I will take time to make a little time travel and bring you to somewhere in the second half of the fifties (1950s). It was there that began my remarks today.

At that time I was a child, I was born in nineteen fifty four (1954). It is at this time that me and my sister had realised that we were always sick while on a car ride. I refer to nausea and vomiting.

I think the adults had tried on me and my sister all the pills and existing drugs available at that time to care for our "car sickness".

One day, my grandmother said that she had heard that people wearing printed newspaper directly on their bodies were not sick. She swore she knew someone who had experienced it successfully.

Later came the time for a ride. My grandmother had prepared for me and my sister two garments made entirely of printed newspaper. It looked like a shirt, sleeveless, with the sides under the arms held together by small needles.

We had to wear it directly on the skin and it covered the whole upper body, with our clothing over that. Imagine us in winter. To our great misfortune, during the first test ride, we were not sick. We had to move slowly because of the needles and because of the strange noise we were doing. It lasted a long time. Often we were joking about it but it was also a pretty traumatic time. It is in this "scratchy" way that I had my first contact with the "information age."

At about the same time, in nineteen fifty nine, we had our first home TV. At that time, I had never watched television. Soon enough my sister and me found that there were programs for children. We had a daily half-hour television because there was a program for us around 4:30 pm.

And on Saturday morning, maybe an hour and a half, for some "cartoons", as Felix the Cat.

Saturday morning was always a time of intense activity in the house and there were electrical devices that were involved, including the sweeper and the mixer in the kitchen. Each time it was unmistakable: our "cartoons" was disrupted, image and sound, by interferences caused by these appliances. In fact, disrupted is a weak word. They were totally destroyed. Then, suddenly, the picture returned to normal, for an unknown period, according to the starts and stops of cakes blender or vacuum cleaner.

When it happens, this phenomenon always hit me in the guts, destroyer of my new childish pleasure. But after some time, that's the most important in that story, I had also started to observe these distorted images for what they were and also see them as a window to a world hidden from my eyes during normal times.

It was another one of my firsts contacts with the "information age", entering my life in an unexpected way.

During the 1960s, Sony began selling a relatively portable video recorder with magnetic tape. With a matching camera, it became possible for a person to go from being TV consumer to content producer. The artists, within the excitement of the 1960, began to appropriate this new tool and they gave birth to video art through a lot of freedom and a thousand experiments.

After a certain period since the early days of TV, a logical development quite "linear" of this technology would help to create the beginning of a surprising and unexpected creative explosion and new types of content.

In nineteen seventy eight (1978), I created a video installation on two screens in which I used electrical devices to alter and modify images of an analog TV. My childhood experience was still common at that time - and I wanted to draw attention to a phenomenon that most people do not take the time to grasp.

I think this sequence of events is interesting and can be inspiring for us today.

Here is a short extract of one of the screen.

Interference 1978



Imagine in nineteen fifty nine the overall disintegration of Mickey Mouse.

Now it's time to jump to two thousand and sixteen.

For clarity and simplicity of my remarks, I often use the term "information", but it must be understood here as encompassing the terms "data, metadata, information and knowledge."

Information is a very common material in two thousand and sixteen and the Web contains an ever increasing portion. Today there is on the web the extension of many things from real life: war; jihad propaganda and recruitment; drug deals using bitcoin and TOR; philosophy books; pornography obviously; and also many pictures of kittens. And also, a lot of digital content generated in this form. You know these things.

From a formal point of view, it's very defined for a standard user (the screen, the browser, the clicks etc.). In a sense, the hardware and software tools are very limited in regard to the content, which it is almost infinite. So it seems. This is the current reality before us.

Today, all that is basic material for artists as were parks, fields and landscapes for the impressionists in the nineteenth century.

One of my most recent projects is visible in the exhibition *Imagination WWW'P* in the Exhibit Hall. This is a large work, quite red, including eighteen (18) sections, which contains about 10,000 pieces of textual information from the web and also sources and newspapers dating back to the nineteen eighty five. They refer to contents related to the last fifty years, according to choices personal and arbitrary that I did.

My initial goal here was to be able to stand in front of a large amount of information, pieces of information, and to observe and interact with this set. I have not seen that in the real world, I could not be in this situation, so I wanted to create it to know the effects it would have on me, "and you", and what I will think about it, and what you will think.

Let me conclude by describing a recent experience - short and simple :

I studied history of art and also computer science. From the late eighties and until recently, I worked in a large company here in Montreal. First in the archives, especially paper at the time, to finish in SAP enterprise systems, as functional administrator of SAP Portal. I say that just to be sure you will not think that I am naive and full green with technology.

There is a statement related to the web that sounded funny for me, long time ago : the expression « Wow, I get ten thousands hits ». Later it becomes « Wow, I get 1 million hits »

Better than that. Searching « Art » a couple of days ago, I got almost 6 billions hits. Not millions, billions.

OK It's more than necessary for my experience. So I look for the term "Pataphysics", using a standard search engine and a standard browser with a basic configuration : a very common setup (it is what I want)

I get one hundred and seven thousand (107,000 hits) / 10 per page.

I'm curious to see the last result of this set (I have not do that since a very very very long time).

I have to navigate through the pages - for there is no function to go to the last at page twenty nine (29), it is the end and down a message appears. In order to display the most relevant results, we have omitted some entries very similar to the two hundred eighty one (281) current entries.

If you like, you can repeat the search for the omitted results included. I click the Repeat the searchlink

I am back to one hundred and seven thousands (107,000) results / 10 each page. I navigate into the pages, at page 68, it is the end, at the top of page 68, I read "on page 68 of 107,000 results."

Now six hundred and eighty results are available.

Wow, more than one hundred and six thousands (106,000) results have evaporated during the search process and the software does not seem to know that. Very good result, it is not what I was expecting.

I told myself that this disappearance, this big void, is the best result that I get and may well be the starting material to think about one of my future projects.

For sure, I know there is software working behind the screen. But it is a black box for a user. Maybe the process is for shopping a coffee machine. But for concepts or exhaustive search, it's quite strange.

I think this simple example tells us about the world in which we exist and limits that we accept by conventions, not seeing them anymore. The simple act of examining these limits generate the exception.

I think a creative act often begins with the recognition and acceptance of these exceptions. Maybe, here is some 'Pataphysics. Then, with intuition and analysis, reflection can begin from a formal point of view or from any other.

In the end, as a possible result of art creation, for example, we obtain visuals forms of knowledge.

Thank you.