

CONCLUSION

We have seen how metadata has several downsides. It is pre-formatted along top-down-defined categories, asymmetrical in its folksonomic nature (following the cool), and ultimately as constraining as it is inspiring. The dangerous principle behind it is the exploitation of immaterial work - the very imagination of identities - to forage the rhetorics of urban development (bohemia/ghetto) and encourage spatial and identity polarization (cultures/markets). The promise of belonging is what leads imagination to format according to the most circulating paradigms, ultimately guiding imagination along the pre-determined grid of interface.

Although the scenario described seems a bleak one indeed, constructive strategies of resistance seem to emerge out of the overall pessimistic literature I have examined.

David Harvey formulates the hypothesis that “if capital is not to totally destroy the uniqueness that is the basis for the appropriation of monopoly rents, then it must support a form of differentiation and allow of divergent and to some degree uncontrollable local cultural developments that can be antagonistic to its own smooth functioning.”¹ The tool for political actions in such a context is the mobilization of collective memories and collective symbolic capital².

For Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, the multitude has to acknowledge its monstrous nature and embrace its own transformations, learning how to perform differently and deal with different types of monsters³.

1 Harvey, David, *The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly and the Commodification of Culture* (retrieved at <http://www.16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/archives/001966.php>)

2 Ibidem.

3 Hardt, Michael, Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: Penguin, 2004. p. 196

Matteo Pasquinelli sees “unproducing and deaccumulating the symbolic⁴” as the only way to sabotage the immaterial value accumulation⁵, a “productive sabotage against a consensual hallucination⁶”. With Agamben, he states that the task of the coming generation is the “profanation of the unprofanable⁷”, through autonomous video/mythopoiesis – new genres and formats rather than alternative information⁸.

Franco “Bifo” Berardi also calls for the creation of video-poetic strategies as today's main political task⁹, by learning how to target the effect of any action on the social imagination¹⁰. The tool for this are of course image-dispositifs, semiotic engines able to act as the paradigm of a series of events, behaviors, narrations, and projections modeling social reality¹¹.

As I have begun to illustrate in the section about the Comedian, certain actions on the collective imaginary are already taking place, through the very interface that is spreading stereotypical metadata all over the world.

The example of *The Awkward Comedy Show* is one of several recent attempts to hijack the collective imagination, anchored to particular coordinates, to less explored territories of metadata.

World audiences have been refreshed by the sci-fi South Africa depicted by *District 9*¹², and YouTube has saluted with enthusiasm the destruction of Uruguayan landmarks, instead of American, in the short *Ataque de Panico*¹³ by young director Fede Alvarez. If it is still through the patronage of established show business personalities, like Peter Jackson and Sam Raimi,

4 Pasquinelli, Matteo. *Animal Spirits: A Bestiary of the Commons*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers / Institute of Network Cultures, 2008. p. 150

5 Ibid. p. 104

6 Ibid. p. 151

7 Ibid. p. 186

8 Ibid. p. 198

9 Berardi, Franco, *The Image Dispositif*, p. 1 (originally part of a text published on rekonbinant.org, now unretrievable on the site)

10 Ibid. p. 4

11 Ibidem.

12 *District 9*. dir. Neill Blomkamp. TriStar Pictures, 2009. Film.

13 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dadPWhEhVvk> (last viewed on August 16, 2010)

that such products can reach the most powerful interfaces¹⁴, it is optimistically arguable that something is moving. Another enlightened example is David LaChapelle, who years ago injected hip hop clowns and krumping in the collective imaginary through his beautiful *RIZE*¹⁵, relieving for a while certain areas of the Los Angeles area from the destabilizing monopoly of the gangsta stereotype. There are, however, imaginary perturbations that reach interface from the bottom up.

Born as a Roman-Catholic of Irish descent and converted to Islam, Michael Muhammad Knight wrote a book about Muslim punks, *The Taqwacores*¹⁶. The subculture didn't exist before, but the book became a cult (through the typically punk practice of DIY printing and distribution) and a movie¹⁷. Now Taqwacore is growing as a new metadata configuration, documented by documentaries¹⁸ and displaying unprecedented combinations of collective imagery.

These new subcultures and genres (hip hop clowns, Muslim punks, second and third world sci-fi) represent the alliance of new creative impulses with the parasite of a hosting infrastructure. Since they cannot appear as novel interface options out of thin air, such an alliance is necessary for locality to filter through the global lenses of imaginary.

In the coming years, it will be important to map these phenomena and learn their specific strategic qualities, in order to develop new and more sophisticated tactics to tweak interface.

This work has explored the dynamics and implications of metadata, through an analysis of the infrastructure that channels it and the interface it is chosen from, as well as a description of four main types of metadata and their differences. I believe a conceptualization of metadata can help us understand the change in dynamics of symbolic exchange and identity-building, as materially connected with each other and both dependent on contextual

14 <http://www.almostnothing.org/2009/12/29/panic-attack-is-sci-fi-going-global/> (last viewed on August 16, 2010)

15 *RIZE*. dir. David LaChapelle. David LaChapelle Studios, 2005. Film.

16 Knight, Michael Muhammad, *The Taqwacores*, Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2005.

17 *The Taqwacores*. dir. Eyad Zahra. Rumanni Filmworks, 2010. Film.

18 *Taqwacore*. dir. Omar Mayeed. EyeSteelFilm, 2009. Film.

asymmetries based on global factors. I think such a contextualization could also be used in the analysis of other settings than the few I have here arbitrarily chosen to discuss.

A theory deploying both a conceptualization of flow (with its content-seizing logics) and a qualitative critique of content (considering both its semiotic formats and folksonomic nature) could maybe help us question the use we make of stereotypes and the implications they have on various scales, applying a possible “metadata ethics” to the exploded field of visual linguistics the media (and us) are imbued with. While on one hand a political critique of infrastructure, protocols, and flows is necessary, on the other a parallel analysis of the weight visual language - too often easily encapsulated in the convenient and resigned term “postmodern” - should be integrated. A more fine-grained conceptualization, then, going beyond the four American limit-figures I have used, might be useful in outlining such ethics.

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