The use of still image in the post-internet era

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Introduction

Art and technology seem to have always went together. Whether it was the invention of geometrical perspective and its adaptation to painting in the Renaissance, the invention of camera obscura, and, subsequently, photography, or more recent developments in digital technologies and internet - art was always by the side, being influenced or making use of these new inventions. All of those technological innovations also influenced how still images are created and perceived by the public.

This work concentrates on the recent developments in digital technologies and the art practices that use these technologies fully or partially, such as photography, new media art and post-internet art. The status of images is always changing, therefore it seems necessary to have an outlook into the status of images in the context of continuous flow of media, which the internet and other digital technologies have created, as well as users' and creators' relation to them. By exploring the use of the still image within the context of technological advances, the goal of this thesis is to find out how still images work and circulate in the post-internet context. As study objects of this thesis only still images and their sequences (series, slideshows, selections, etc.) were chosen, because of their popularity as well as the relatively high speed of their dissemination throughout the web. Despite .gif files and internet videos being increasingly integrated into the distribution platforms on the web, still image files still seem to play the major role in the internet culture through image boards, blogs, social media websites, surf clubs or personal websites. Moreover, not only the online presence, but also the physical form of these images as well as its relation to the network will be examined, as the post-internet condition allows images to move almost seamlessly from digital to physical states.

Despite new technologies affecting various art practices, examples of the changing use of the images as well as the art practice itself will be taken from the more relevant art movements of the past few decades: net art and post-internet art as these movements are greatly connected to the use of technology and indicate different aspects in the use of various media, which will be discussed in the following chapters. The art movements will be used to indicate the recent developments in the use of images and art practice in general, but the case studies used in this work would not necessarily be related to these specific movements as the developments in the art practice and use of images seen in those art practices are not necessarily specific to them anymore due to the impact the omnipresence of world wide web had on other art practices. Therefore it could be said, that post-internet art indicates wider tendencies that escaped the context of the movement itself in the same way that in today's networked society internet culture became just culture. Therefore, if the image on the web does not belong to the movement of post-internet, it is open to the same possibilities of dispersion, recontextualization and gradual mutation as the artworks of post-internet art.

The case studies in this work are from photography, street art and glitch art background, but they largely indicate the current trends of art on the web as well as in their physical form. Therefore it could be said that the technologies of creation and dissemination would be the common denominator of these works. It is worth mentioning, that most of the artworks discussed in the case studies are made by young Lithuanian artists - these artists, working further away from the great western centers of art, are chosen to indicate the relevance of dispersion the internet and other digital technologies provide for young artists from smaller countries, providing and granting them the ease of access to the same contexts any other person can find on the web.

In the first chapter, named *What is the Post-Internet art-condition?*, the notions and definitions of post-internet art will be analyzed, as well as the movement's relation to net art - a movement that is widely considered to be the predecessor of post-internet art. The goal of this chapter is to formulate what exactly post-internet condition is and how it affects today's society and the status of still images in it.

In the second chapter, *Digital and Physical Presence*, the digital and physical states of art objects and their relation post-internet context will be analyzed. This chapter will also cover the influence of the distribution systems on the perception of the art objects, the impact of the internet as a fairly democratic structure, the loss of value due to increasing speed of data flow on the web. In the case study, the notions of liveness and performativity will be compared to possible experiences on the web by analyzing two different approaches by two Lithuanian artists: Morfai, who specializes in street art and actively participates on the web and Glitchr, who creates digital intrusions to the normative space of social network websites which could be called digital graffiti or social network performance art.

In the third chapter, *Photography's Relation to Reality*, the historical perception of photographic images through the discourses of mimesis, code and index will be analyzed, therefore exploring the evolution of photographic image and the discourses surrounding it. The referential realism of photography here is seen as relevant notion that provides context for the further inspection of changes in creation and perception of photographic images, which will be discussed in further case studies. The chapter's case study will be conducted to determine how digital alterations in photographic images enable or strengthen the self reflectivity of digital photography.

The fourth chapter, *Aura in the age of network*, will be dedicated to exploring the changes in the aura of the artwork in the age of digital reproduction. The original formulation of the aura will be introduced, by later examining its displacement into continuous practice, where, as some theorists claim, it still exists. In the case study the artists' continuous engagement with the web culture and its possible translations into physical spaces and objects will be examined.

1. What is the Post-Internet art/condition?

1.1. Introduction

According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, the world is becoming more and more interconnected, but on the other hand more complex, unpredictable, networked and divided.[1] With the advances of every new technology the world seems to become even more complex. However, people are always engaging with the new technologies and adapting to them, whether through IBM pavilion at the New York's World Fair in 1964,[2] which let the visitors to explore the abilities of computation devices and see the world through the eyes of the computer, or later developments in user interfaces, which led to the interactive engagement with computers through the screen and took various everyday tasks under its roof.

The art world, in the presence of new technologies, is also keen on expanding and claiming new territories for its practice. Whether it would be a boom of new artistic practices, such as video art, photography, assemblage, intermedia, , installation, multimedia, conceptual art happening or performance art in the second half of the 20th century, or newer developments in digital art after the introduction of internet, the art scene reflects and quickly respond to the conditions of the world.

Anyhow, as new media theorist Lev Manovich points out in his 2001 article *Post-media Aesthetics,*

In the last third of the twentieth century, various cultural and technological developments have together rendered meaningless one of the key concepts of modern art – that of a medium.

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October* 59 (Winter, 1992): 3-7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/778828 (accessed August 19, 2015), 5-6.

[2] IBM Archives, "New York World's Fair pavilion," *IBM*, https://www-03.ibm.com/ibm/history/exhibits/vintage/vintage_4506VV2085.html (accessed August 19, 2015).

However, no new topology of art practice came to replace media-based typology which divides

art into painting, works on paper, sculpture, film, video, and so on. The assumption that artistic

practice can be neatly organized into a small set of distinct mediums has continued to structure

the organization of museums, art schools, funding agencies and other cultural institutions -- even

though this assumption no longer reflected the actual functioning of culture.[3]

Such assertion closely relates to the differences between Foucault's disciplinary society and

Deleuze's society of control characterized in his essay *Postscript on the Societies of Control*:

Deleuze states that all of the institutions related to the disciplinary society - closed environments

through which individual passes throughout his life - are in crisis: factories, schools, hospitals,

prisons, etc. While they are being reformed, it only extends their periods of expiration, but does

not remove the crisis itself.[4]

Such an example of the art world could be found again in photography, video and various

other arts that use mass media for their practice: these practices are grouped by the material base

or technology which is used to make them, thus eliminating the real conditions of those media.

Therefore those easily reproducible mass media began circulating as limited editions in the

economy of the art world. To illustrate such a crisis in the art world, Manovich's example about

television and video can be used: while television was a mass medium and video - art medium -

despite of the differences in aesthetics and conventions of representation, both of them used the

same electronic signals, which could be either transmitted live (in case of television) or recorded

and replayed later (in the case of video). Due to using the same material base - electronic signal -

they should have been considered as the same type of media in the art system. However, what

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[3] Lev Manovich, "Post-media Aesthetics," *Manovich*, 2001, http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/post-media-aesthetics (accessed August 19, 2015), 1.
[4] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4.

played the main role here, was not the materials used, but the size of their audiences and channels of distribution (one being television network, the other - galleries and museums) as well as editioning works in the case of video. Therefore the distinction of media based on the materials used could not be applied here - as Manovich points out - "the only justifications of treating them as separate mediums were sociological and economic".[5] Over the time the criteria for distinguishing the media shifted from the material base to distribution mechanisms and the size of the audience. As William John Thomas Mitchell stated, media are ecosystems in which images are brought to life - it includes materials, technologies, traditions, skills - in other words - all the practices that enable mental images to connect to material bases and become a visible image. For example, painting would not be made of only canvas and paint, but also subframes, studio, galleries, collectors, museums, critique, etc. In such case we see art, especially the avant-garde one, in the need to be placed in a museum or gallery, get reproduced and published to be accepted as such. As american artist, writer and curator Dan Graham pointed out:

Through the actual experience of running a gallery, I learned that if a work of art wasn't written about and reproduced in a magazine it would have difficulty attaining the status of "art." It seemed that in order to be defined as having value—that is, as "art"—a work had only to be exhibited in a gallery and then to be written about and reproduced as a photograph in an art magazine.[6]

However, with the advance of digital technology in the 1980s and 1990s the relation between media and its material base became even more threatened. Digital technology made it easier to translate artworks into multiple media and present them through different distribution

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[5] Manovich, "Post-media Aesthetics," 2.
[6] Dan Graham, "My Works for Magazine Pages: "A History of Conceptual Art,"" *Maryland Institute College of Art*, September, 2006, http://digital.mica.edu/departmental/gradphoto/Public/Upload/200609/GrahamHistory.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015).

networks to different audiences. As distribution and adaptation became easier, the dissemination of the artwork was not that greatly influenced by the hierarchical structure of galleries and magazines of the art world anymore. For example, the same photographic documentary project could be issued as a book, an exhibition of prints, an interactive website, a mobile application and a slideshow, reaching different audiences through specific distribution channels. While the prints, the book and the slideshow, despite their differences in narration through space and time, are close to the traditional concept of photography, the website and app could easily fall into the realm of Net art. The internet offered a lot easier distribution and translation of artworks into new contexts, moreover, by being more democratic than the art system, it offered new experiences for the users and omnipresence of the internet can now be seen in our everyday lives. In such a light, the artwork in the context of digital technology and internet becomes more like a corporation in the society of control described by Deleuze: it becomes a spirit, a gas, which easily passes from one place to another[7] and easily transforms into different material or digital states therefore enabling greater dispersion and distribution. The best example of such dispersed existence of the artwork can be found in post-internet art, which will be discussed in the next few sections.

1.2. The definitions of "Post-internet"

Lev Manovich mentioned "post-digital" and "post-net" cultures while proposing a program for Post-media aesthetics back in 2001[8], but the first use of the term "Post-internet art" is usually attributed to artist, curator and critic Marisa Olson: she mentioned the term in 2006

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[7] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 4.
[8] Manovich, "Post-media Aesthetics," 5.

and 2008[9] while describing her art practice after compulsory browsing on the web, where she usually finds inspiration or materials for her artworks. It is worth mentioning that she did not try to describe an art historical period or a mode of exhibition and distribution, but rather define a shift in the artist's way of working which was highly influenced by the omnipresence of the network.

The term was further developed by Gene McHugh in his blog called *Post Internet*, which ran between December 2009 and September 2010, and was later compiled and published as a book of the same name by Link Editions.[10] McHugh connected the Post-Internet to a historical shift of the web (web 2.0), as described by Michael Connor in an article *What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?*, "the explosion of online creators on centralized web services constituting an internet culture in which artists increasingly acted as participant-observers".[11] In McHugh's words, from the introduction of *Post Internet*, such shift meant, that:

No matter what your deal was/is as an artist, you had/have to deal with the Internet - not necessarily as a medium in the sense of formal aesthetics (glitch art, .gifs, etc), bus as distribution platform, a machine for altering and re-channeling work. [...] Even if the artist doesn't put the work on the Internet, the work will be cast into the Internet world; and at this point, contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it.[12]

Therefore the post-internet art could be described as an art that acknowledges and reflects on the conditions the omnipresence of the network has created, such as "ubiquitous authorship, the

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[9] Jennifer Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: Cornerhouse and Space, 2013)*,* 1.

[10] Gene McHugh, *Post Internet. Notes on the Internet and Art* (Brescia: Link Editions, 2011).

[11] Michael Connor, "What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?" *Rhizome*, November 1, 2013, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/ (accessed August 19, 2015).

[12] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 5.

development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials."[13]

As the term entered circulation not through the official channels and institutions of art theory, it was, and still is, highly discussed and critiqued in the art world for its lack of description of the art it refers to, being a vague neologism or just attributing too much historical significance to itself.[14] Most of the critique is concentrated of the prefix "post-", which, to a person that has not encountered post-internet art before, may sound as if the authors and critics declare that the internet is dead and over and humanity moved to a new type of philosophy, as in the case of modernism and postmodernism. Hito Steyerl actually declared the death of internet in 2013 and this declaration is strongly connected to the notions of post internet art - the internet is no longer a closed domain - it is everywhere and acts as a part of our everyday reality, but it is clearly not dead in the sense of being over - now it is everywhere.[15] Therefore the post- rather means not the time after the internet is done with and over, but the contrary - the time in which it escaped the constraints of being a closed system into being omnipresent, ever expanding and changing the way people think and engage with the world, the time when it started affecting society at increasing speed.

The situation of critique regarding post-internet art changed a bit after the exhibition Art Post Internet in Beijing, which was opened on March 1st 2014 and presented post-internet art, which is usually created by western artists, to the Chinese public. But maybe a more important work that the curators of the exhibition Karen Archey and Robin Peckham did was publishing an

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[13] Artie Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," *Jstchillin, 2010*, http://jstchillin.org/artie/pdf/The_Image_ Object_Post-Internet_us.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015), 3.

[14] Brian Droitcour, "The Perils of Post-Internet Art," *Art in America,* October 30, 2014, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-perils-of-post-internet-art/ (accessed August 19, 2015).

[15] Hito Steyerl, "Too Much World: Is The Internet Dead?" *E-flux journal* 49 (November, 2013), http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8974420.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015).

extensive exhibition catalogue, which not only contained the documentation of the exhibition, but also theoretical insights, attempts to clasificate the post-internet art and comprehensive interviews from practitioners, theoreticians, curators and critics of post-internet art and art in general. The exhibition catalogue provided, what Paddy Johnson called "Finally, a Semi-Definitive Definition of Post-Internet Art"[16] in her article with the same title for October magazine. In order to keep up with the changing definitions of post-internet art, I feel the need to quote it:

[…]art that is controversially defined as "post-internet," which is to say, consciously created in a milieu that assumes the centrality of the network, and that often takes everything from the physical bits to the social ramifications of the internet as fodder. From the changing nature of the image to the circulation of cultural objects, from the politics of participation to new understandings of materiality, the interventions presented under this rubric attempt nothing short of the redefinition of art for the age of the internet.

This understanding of the post-internet refers not to a time "after" the internet, but rather to an internet state of mind—to think in the fashion of the network. In the context of artistic practice, the category of the post-internet describes an art object created with a consciousness of the networks within which it exists, from conception and production to dissemination and reception. As such, much of the work presented here employs the visual rhetoric of advertising, graphic design, stock imagery, corporate branding, visual merchandising, and commercial software tools.[17]

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[16] Paddy Johnson, "Finally, a Semi-Definitive Definition of Post-Internet Art," *Art F City*, October 14, 2014, http://artfcity.com/2014/10/14/finally-a-semi-definitive-definition-of-post-internet-art/ (accessed August 19, 2015).
[17] Robin Peckham and Karen Archey, "Art Post-Internet," *Art Post-Internet,* October 14, 2014, http://post-inter.net/ (accessed August 19, 2015), 8-9.

Here, not only all the stages of an artwork - from conception to reception - but also the artists'
and publics' state of mind come under the term of Post-internet. The latter could be understood
as the idea of Manovich's informational behavior taking its form in practice - the artists, and,
consequently, the public, not only reflect on the conditions the internet has created, but also are
experiencing, engaging with and adapting to them all the time. As Post internet artists reflect on
these conditions, a great example of the need to adapt to changing conditions in the society
influenced by the internet is Katja Novitskova's Post Internet Survival Guide. As stated in the
foreword:

the Internet is an invisible given, like roads or trees, and is used to navigate not just
information but also matter and space. The notion of a survival guide arises as an answer to a
basic human need to cope with increasing complexity. In the face of death, personal attachment
and confusion, one has to feel, interpret and index this ocean of signs in order to survive.[18]

Therefore, it could be said that Post internet art is not only about reflecting on the
changing status of art objects (both physical and digital, in all the stages of production and
dissemination) in the context of the internet being omnipresent, but also about the changes of
human perception and relation to both digital and physical spaces.

1.3. Post-internet and Internet Art

In this section I will try to compare the two art movements which developed the closest
relation to the internet and its culture: Post-internet art and Internet Art (or Net Art). The both
movements sound quite close even from their titles, but there is more to that.

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[18] Katja Novitskova, "Post Internet Survival Guide 2010," *Katjanovi,* 2010, http://katjanovi.net/
postinternetsurvivalguide.html (accessed August 19, 2015).

Firstly, the creators of Net Art were the most active in the 1990s and early 2000s and created their artwork to be more or less confined in the medium of the internet, thus avoiding the traditional distribution platforms of the art system and showing that it is possible to deliver aesthetic experience through the web. It is worth noticing that back in the 1990s the internet was more of a space for hackers and geeks, rather than the internet how we experience it to be today.[19]

Net Art was usually distributed through personal websites of the artists, however, the internet was gradually changing and by mid 2000's there was a great expansion in popularity and use of centralised social media websites, such as blogs, social networks, video sharing sites, etc. This shift from mostly passive viewing of websites to more or less interactive centralised networks was called web 2.0. The popularity of centralised networks increased the content shared on the internet and made it easier to distribute material in the centralised networks, as it was dispersed in the smaller amount of separate websites.[20] Moreover, it became a lot easier to share various type of media, whether it was images, animated .gifs, audio files or videos - since they became integrated in these social networking sites. That not only exacerbated the evident pictorial turn and the ever-increasing stream of media, but also stimulated visual literacy of the users.

Post-internet artists, as opposed to Net Art, do not seem to use internet in the same medium-specific way, but rather accept the internet as everyday experience and strive to produce artworks and experiences that reflect on internet's role in the society that are dispersed through the popular systems of distribution.[21] This not only includes social media websites or other type

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[19] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 5.
[20] Connor, "What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?"
[21] Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," 112.

of digital media, but also physical artworks, which become dispersed through traditional art distribution systems, such as museums, galleries and biennales. In the words of Tyler Coburn, results in the "work that exists within a gallery but which has a relationship to a broader set of cultural conditions influenced by the web."[22] This circulation of objects not only through digital distribution systems, but also "IRL" (in real life) spaces, as well as the artworks' capability of having both digital and physical forms, is the distinctive feature, which separates post-internet art from Net Art. Part of an explanation for such digital-physical presence could be found by linking post-internet to the financial crisis of 2008, which led to many art institutions losing their strength and "forcing" artists to at least partly move their practice and distribution to the web. Therefore post-internet art is sometimes related to as "Post-crash art."[23]

The post-internet artists and writers seem to emphasize the differences between post-internet art and Net Art, as well as the other New Media practices. As Gene McHugh states in his blog *Post Internet*, "This blog is dedicated to artists who use new media technologies but are not new media artists."[24] Such statements seems to be an attempt to place post-internet art more in the context of contemporary art rather than internet-specific practices of art closely related to technology.

An example from Artie Vierkant's *Image Object Post-Internet* is worth quoting:

Post-Internet also serves as an important semantic distinction from the two historical artistic modes with which it is most often associated: New Media Art and Conceptualism. New Media is here denounced as a mode too narrowly focused on the specific workings of novel technologies, rather than a sincere exploration of cultural shifts in which that technology plays

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[22] Frieze magazine, "Beginnings+ends: survey," *Frieze* 159 (November-December, 2013), http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/beginnings-ends/ (accessed August 19, 2015).
[23] Rozsa Zita Farkas, a talk about Post-Internet art, as part of the project *BCC: curators go to the bar*, given at National Gallery of Art, Vilnius, Lithuania. March 27, 2015.
[24] McHugh, *Post Internet*, 31.

only a small role. It can therefore be seen as relying too heavily on the specific materiality of its

media. Conceptualism (in theory if not practice) presumes a lack of attention to the physical

substrate in favor of the methods of disseminating the artwork as idea, image, context, or

instruction. Post-Internet art instead exists somewhere between these two poles. Post-Internet

objects and images are developed with concern to their particular materiality as well as their

vast variety of methods of presentation and dissemination.[25]

Such descriptions of the new relation to technology the post-internet offers was seen by Mark

Tribe as an attempt to "crush the past", however many of the artists linked to post-internet

acknowledge the importance of the forerunners of art and technology and post-internet art still

"emerges as a useful term for tracking artists' shifting relationships with the rapidly-changing

cultural objects we know as "the internet," in that its definition has changed so dramatically since

Olson's original articulation."[26]

According to Michael Connor, while Marisa Olson described her practice of being after

the internet in 2006, the cultural conditions of internet did not stop changing - they only

accelerated - therefore her perceived boundary between being on the internet and after the

internet was eroded by the spread of smartphones (the first ones appeared in 2007) and growing

attention-based economy. The state of being "after the internet" was displaced by ubiquity of the

web. Internet culture was bound to become just culture. In such context, where there is no longer

a position of being outside left, the artists are also bound to lose their critical distance and be

unable to translate the internet culture into other contexts.[27] Furthermore, artists become acting

less as "interpreter, transcriber, narrator, curator, architect,"[28] and more as immersed users.[29]

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[25] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 3.
[26] Connor, "What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?"
[27] Ibid.

However, the increasing engagement with the internet is happening not only to the artist, but to everyone using the new technologies - it describes the contemporary moment of mixture of art, internet and liberal capitalism. According to Marshall McLuhan,

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.[30]

Therefore, it should not be that astounding that a new generation of artists are immersed in the new technology, as long as they still provide new insights into our use of technology, reflect on the cultural conditions of networked society or appropriate, translate and redistribute material into new contexts. Therefore, to quote Aian Wallace, "Post-Internet art is distinctly of the now [original emphasis]; and that quality, so far, is its most definitive feature."[31]

1.4. Conclusion

According to Lev Manovich, societies are always experiencing shifts in informational interfaces and behaviours which challenge the information processing capabilities of the society. He states that history of art is not only about formal struggles of depicting both the inner and outer environment, but "...it is also the history of new information interfaces developed by

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[28] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 8.
[29] Connor, "What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?"
[30] MarshallMcLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/mcluhan.mediummessage.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015), 8-9.
[31] Ian Wallace, "What Is Post-Internet Art? Understanding the Revolutionary New Art Movement," *Artspace*, March 18, 2014, http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_ features/post_internet_art (accessed August 19, 2015).

artists, and the new information behaviors developed by users."[32] And in today's information society we have to adapt to even more informational interfaces, whether it would be navigating in the city streets or using new or updated software to complete one's work. According to Manovich

> *Information behaviors of an individual form an essential part of individual identity: they are particular tactics adopted by an individual or a group to survive in information society. Just as our nervous system has evolved to filter information existing in the environment in a particular way suitable for information capacity of a human brain, to survive and prosper in information society, we evolve particular information behaviors.*[33]

And in current situation, the databases and the web connected by hyperlinks symbolize the structure of the changing world, change our understanding of our everyday surroundings. This does not mean that society became super-human, cyborg-like augmented creatures from science fiction scenarios of the 1990s, but the introduction of internet changed our perception of the world - whether it is a possibility to video chat with strangers from around the world or order food online. These are not the only changes in today's society. We are experiencing shifts not only in informational behaviour, but the liberal capitalism is also changing the way of living and working conditions. The worker of the control society (or a post-fordist worker) is constantly facing perpetual training, self-employment, and continuous emulation.[34] These new conditions have created new requirements for "the productive, creative individual,"[35] the internet - the space of 1990s hopes for utopian realm - became commercialised and highly integrated into our

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[32] Manovich, "Post-media Aesthetics," 8.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," 5.

[35] Huw Lemmey, "Mission Creep: K-Hole and Trend Forecasting as Creative Practice," *Rhizome*, March 26, 2013, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/mar/26/mission-creep/ (accessed August 19, 2015).

everyday lives, attention-based economy is generating unimaginable amounts of user-created, freely accessible data every second, while anyone with an internet connection can freely use the same creation or distribution tools used by mass media. And in this context post-internet art seems to be constantly reflecting and commenting on these specific changes in our culture.

2. Digital and physical presence

2.1. Physicality

Throughout the history of art, reproductions of artworks were more spread as more easily accessible copies of the artworks, therefore distancing the viewers further away from the original itself, whether it was a lithographic print, a photograph or a video documentation of the piece. The best example could be found in the readymade, more specifically - Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917). As Seth Price articulates in *Dispersion,* "The power of the readymade is that no one needs to make the pilgrimage to see Fountain [...] few people saw the original Fountain in 1917."[36] That is quite clear, since the Fountain was never exhibited and was lost quite soon after its creation. It entered the art world's circulation not through its physical presence, but rather through reproductions: the photograph Alfred Stieglitz made, which was later published together with an article in Blind Man magazine.[37] Only more than half a century later after the original artwork, 17 replicas of the lost original were issued by Duchamp, which now circulate the art market.[38] However, since there is no original of the Fountain, its widespread fame proves the strength and importance of distribution systems for the artworks.

As one of the founders of Reference Gallery in Richmond, VA - Conor Backman - points out, bringing distant viewers closer to the artworks is a lasting issue for the artists, galleries and museums, and internet seems to be the well suited tool for that purpose.[39] The internet, still

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[36] Seth Price, "Dispersion," *Distributed History,* 2002, http://www.distributedhistory.com/
/Dispersion2008.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015), 11.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Sophie Howarth, "Fountain," *TATE,* April, 2000, revised Jennifer Mundy, August 2015,
http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573/text-summary (accessed August 19, 2015).
[39] Robin Peckham, "Post Internet and Post Galleries. Conor Backman and the Reference Gallery,"
Digicult, http://www.digicult.it/digimag/issue-072/post-internet-e-post-gallerie-conor-backman-e-la-
reference-gallery (accessed August 19, 2015).

being a mediated experience, can provide photographic, audio, video or CGI documentation of the artworks with full detail, and to expand this, even panoramic views or virtual tours through museums are gaining even more acceleration, Google's Art Project Street View being a perfect example for this. And all of this can be accessed with an internet connection capable device fitting in one's pocket. The internet is becoming, if not became, the most powerful tool for display and dissemination of the artworks as well as increasing the participation of the viewers.

To quote Seth Price:

The problem arises when the constellation of critique, publicity, and discussion around the work is at least as charged as a primary experience of the work. Does one have an obligation to view the work first-hand? What happens when a more intimate, thoughtful, and enduring understanding comes from mediated discussions of an exhibition, rather than from a direct experience of the work? Is it incumbent upon the consumer to bear witness, or can one's art experience derive from magazines, the Internet, books, and conversation?[40]

As Gene McHuhg argues, the representation of artwork in the artist's website is getting more and more importance. People start to prefer, if not expect, of seeing the documentation of artworks in the artist's website and, according to McHugh, the line between the actual, physical work and its representation online gradually becomes blurry as for the artist's audience, including arts professionals, the digital image of the artwork is appropriate enough in the global character of modern art and, gradually, the image of the artwork starts playing a role at least as important as the artwork itself.[41]

Such a status of objects and their representation closely relates to the notion of translation, which is widely used in today's society to describe continuous mediation of objects

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[40] Price, "Dispersion," 8.
[41] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 241.

between various states and contexts. As German artist and writer Hito Steyerl states in her text *Beyond Culture: The Politics of Translation*: "In a postdialectical era, which is regarded as having overcome binary divisions and metaphysical thinking, translation provides a model for a process of unceasing mediation, which does not allow for fixed identities and stable border lines."[42] In his article Painting Beside Itself, David Joselit uses the word "transitive" (Oxford dictionary: "expressing an action which passes over to an object") as a term that best represents the status of objects circulating and being translated into new contexts within networks.[43] As he elaborates near the end of an article, he sees transitivity as a certain type of translation: "...when it enters into networks, the body of painting is submitted to infinite dislocations, fragmentations, and degradations."[44]

These ideas of translation and transitivity in the contemporary world seem to have had an impact on post-internet art. As Artie Vierkant points out in *The Image Object Post-Internet*, in the post-internet context, different versions of the artworks are almost equal: whether it is a physical piece in a gallery or museum, the images published in a book or disseminated throughout the web, or their appropriation and recontextualization by other artists - there is no "representational fixity" to the different versions of post-internet artworks, therefore there is no "original copy."[45] Consequently, when post-internet artworks enter the distribution networks, they are exposed to dislocation, fragmentation, translation, degradation and all other possible alterations of context and artworks themselves. Such a treatment of the artworks as equal in their various digital and physical states could be considered a critique of commodification of art

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[42] Hito Steyerl, "Beyond Culture: The Politics of Translation," *Translate,* http://translate.eipcp.net/concept/ steyerl-concept-en (accessed August 19, 2015).

[43] David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," *October* 130 (Fall, 2009), http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/ abs/10.1162/octo.2009.130.1.125?journalCode=octo#.VdTvwVOqqko (accessed August 19, 2015),128.

[44] Ibid., 134.

[45] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 5.

objects - there is no single original copy, no limited editions, as the artworks disperse and and change their state. It becomes not an object to be sold, but the idea to be easily dispersed throughout different media.

However, Huv Lemmey in his critical article *Mission Creep: K-Hole and Trend Forecasting as Creative Practice* observes that the practice of post-internet art is moving into a form that can be monetized. He questions how much the immateriality of the artwork and its dispersion throughout networks is still the major concern of the post-internet artists and how much it is influenced by the material needs of the artists - in short - the need to support their lives through their practice. And if one sees the internet as a new way to break out of age-old cultural and social traditions influenced by the flow of capital - the tendency of post-internet art moving to physical spaces for Lemmey seems like a big step backwards, rather than the one engaging with the platforms of distribution through the art practice.[46]

In contrast to that, as David Joselit claims in his 2009 article *Painting Beside Itself*, commodification of art can still have relevance to the circulation of art objects - reification does not mean that the object stops circulating in the networks of the art world - it changes hands from galleries to private collectors, museums and vice versa, gets reproduced and published. The movement of objects in the art network can never be fully stopped - "only subjected to different material states and speeds of circulation ranging from the geologically slow (cold storage) to the infinitely fast."[47] Therefore post-internet art seems to have a healthy point of view towards the both physical and digital distribution systems of the artworks - reflecting on the current conditions requires multiple states of the artwork to be used and reflected on. Moreover, internet is not an utopian dream coming true, as much as one has anticipated it - it still relies on

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[46] Lemmey, "Mission Creep: K-Hole and Trend Forecasting as Creative Practice."
[47] Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," 132.

expensive high-end devices, therefore the engagement of digital and physical presences and incorporation of marketing techniques into art practices seem to better reflect the contemporary condition. To quote Gene McHugh:

The notion that the Web has accomplished some sort of Hegelian transcendence is precisely what, say, Steve Jobs wants consumers to believe: Go on, keep chatting with your friends, watching videos, listening to music - it's all fluid and immaterial now and that's great - just so long as you do it through the iPad.[48]

2.2. Democratic structure of the World Wide Web

The internet, by allowing users to easily submit content, is a powerful tool for democracy, allowing various information to be submitted and seen without strict hierarchic structure. However, such a claim mostly depends of the relatively cheap and easy accessibility of data and not, lets say, on the popularity of the sources available and the rules of those most popular sources themselves. For example, with the introduction of page advertising on Facebook, it became a lot harder for pages to reach their audience, since, if not advertised, most of the posts would not even reach the feed of the users who are following certain pages, or a recent Free The Nipple movement on Instagram and Facebook, which fights against double standards regarding the depictions of female upper body in the community rules of these websites. Therefore, even if the internet is fairly democratic, its main traffic is still concentrated on various popular social networks and media channels - in other words - even if there exists another opinion on certain issues, it does not mean that the majority of people will hear about it, since the declared democratic structure also depends on the democracy of the sources itself. A good example can be

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[48] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 149.

found in recent events: while european leaders were standing in a Je Suis Charlie demonstration in Paris this January, the major media channels were silent about a devastating Boko Haram massacre in northern Nigeria.[49] While surfing the web in January 2015, various blogs and image boards seemed to be full of critique for the western media's silence about the Nigerian tragedy, the death toll of which was estimated to be around 2000 people.

Although the structure of the internet is not as democratic as many have claimed, it does offer possibilities of decentralised, non-hierarchical distribution as opposed to a top-down relashionsip. As Jogging Collective stated in their essay Redefining Exhibition in the Digital Age,

The internet offers a chance for art's users to experience organizational models of viewership in ways that are non-dependent and non-hierarchical. Allowing institutions to dictate the function of the Internet, be it through copyright, privatization, and/or the commoditization of information, simply digitizes pre-existing modes of viewership built upon problematic power relations.[50]

A great example of such non-hierarchical distribution through social media overthrowing official media channels can be found in the events leading to the Arab Spring[51], as well as in Syrian civil war, where the rebels constantly update their video channels to show feedback to their foreign supporters. One does not even need to look that far away, as in recent Greek debt crisis, a crowdfunding campaign on indiegogo.com was set up by Thom Feeney[52] as a bailout fund

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[49] John Campbell, ""Je Suis Charlie" and Northern Nigeria," *Africa in Transition*, January 12, 2015, http://blogs.cfr.org/campbell/2015/01/12/je-suis-charlie-and-northern-nigeria/ (accessed August 19, 2015).
[50] The Jogging Collective, "Redefining Exhibition in the Digital Age," *The Jogging Archive 2009-2010,* http://thejoggingarchive.tumblr.com/post/11304614393/redefining-exhibition-in-the-digital-age (accessed August 19, 2015).
[51] Frieze magazine. "Beginnings+ends: survey."
[52] Thom Feeney, "Greek Bailout Fund," *Indiegogo*, June, 2015, https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/greek-bailout-fund#/story (accessed August 19, 2015).

encouraging the people to support Greece, therefore bypassing the reliance on official monetary institutions of the European Union.

In the art world, the official institutions seem to be in the need of change, too. As the omnipresence of the internet and its non-hierarchical structure makes it easier for artists to distribute, promote and increase the visibility of their work, the authority of art institutions as provider of legitimacy and value for art seem to diminish. As Conor Backman states, the internet, by being free and accessible, offers a more democratic space for distribution, since a regular user can also be an active participant. By using a blog system like Tumblr, the user can easily (and a lot faster than in physical spaces) be a curator by reposting media from around the world into his own blog, where a whole different context for the artworks could emerge.[53]

On the internet, due to fast distribution and constantly changing contexts, artworks seem not to have a fixed state, but rather be in continuous condition of change, limbo or flux. The experience of surfing (or rather scrolling) through internet blogs, where these artworks - pieces of visual language - continually move with the scroll of a mouse, could be compared to the condition of free fall described by Hito Steyerl: "The horizon quivers in a maze of collapsing lines and you may lose any sense of above and below, of before and after, of yourself and your boundaries."[54]

2.3. Zero value

The democratic structure of the internet allows various types of media to circulate freely on the web. As Hito Steyerl pointed out in her essay In Defense of the Poor Image, in the last

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[53] Peckham, "Post Internet and Post Galleries."

[54] Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," *E-flux journal* 24 (April, 2011), http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8888222.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015).

few decades of the twentieth century, "the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring non-commercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible."[55] As she states, it became too expensive to keep screening those works in cinemas as well as they were too marginal to be shown on television networks, therefore these genres almost disappeared from the public sphere. However, these works were kept in the archives and collections and when it became possible to download or stream videos online, these rare movies also reentered the public sphere and became available to more users than intended by their original media of cinema.[56] This can easily be related to various other types of media, since internet offers easy access to users around the world. It makes distribution really easy and even young artists are able to reach huge audiences, which was not really possible in time before the internet.

However, the increasing amount of information on the web makes it really hard to stand out in the continuous data stream. As Artie Vierkant points out in his statement about cinema,

[...]once an experience of cinema was that of receiving an absolute, fixed icon - a definitive copy, inaccessible and precious - that is now far from the case. Cinema now becomes encapsulated, transferrable and transformable in the same vain as everything else, a "file" to be treated with all the levity we reserve for any other file.[57]

Therefore, even if certain information is worth being seen, it does not mean it will get noticed in the abundance of other information surrounding it. In the context of increasing data streams, which are impossible to fully perceive and sometimes act as a noise, funny images of kittens are equal to, for example, philosophical writings or classical cinema, or as McHugh said, "in this

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[55] Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," *E-flux journal* 10 (November, 2009), http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_94.pdf (accessed August 19, 2015).
[56] Ibid.
[57] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 8.

scenario, both Proust and pornography flatten out in value to right around zero - each just a drop of water in a continuously expanding ocean."[58] One is only able to scratch the surface of data available on the internet and the value of a meaningful work by an artist is bound to decrease due to vast amount of other data revolving around. Even if the artwork gets a lot of attention, is widely discussed, there is no doubt that due to continuous flow of new data, it will be forgotten after a few days or weeks. In other words, humanity might have reached Andy Warhol's prediction about the future - now everyone can be famous for 15 minutes, or at least 15 seconds. As American writer, artist and professor David Hillel Gelernter points out, "The effect of nowness resembles the effect of light pollution in large cities, which makes it impossible to see the stars. A flood of information about the present shuts out the past."[59]

Such a condition of many-to-many production, as opposed to the old hierarchy of one-to-many distribution systems,[60] encourages to surf through the available media rather than engage deeply with it, the continuous flow and transformation of images becomes more important rather than a single instance of an artwork and the value of an artwork on the web is no longer influenced by only its aesthetic qualities, but also by attention given to it. As Artie Vierkant claims, the development of attention as a currency is one of the signs of the contemporary moment, together with the ubiquitous authorship, demise of the physical spaces in contrast to networked culture and the mutability of digital materials.[61] Gathering "likes" of Facebook start to become more important than having the public to deeply engage with one's work and becomes a tool for seeing the value of one's cause by tracking the attention given to it. In the words of Hito

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[58] McHugh, *Post Internet, 219.*
[59] David Gelernter, "Time to Start Taking the Internet Seriously," *Edge*, March 3, 2010, http://edge.org/conversation/time-to-start-taking-the-internet-seriously (accessed August 19, 2015).
[60] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 8.
[61] Ibid., 3.

Steyerl, it shows the "affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction."[62]

However, treating attention as a commodifiable material and having the economy based on 15 minutes of fame leads to anxiety. Huv Lemmey to the reasons for anxiety adds the uncertainty about the financial and professional futures (after all Post-Internet artists are young professionals most of whom emerged during the time of financial crisis) and the uncertainty about the future due to the rapidly increasing speed of the technological change.[63] In a society of high-speed media distribution, where artworks and art movements change one another at speed impossible to imagine less than a century ago, the task of the artist seems to have become to be a constant participation, or as Jennifer Chan puts it, "This is the anxiety of internet art: if you stop contributing, you will be forgotten."[64]

2.4. Case study: Liveness and Performativity in the internet context - Glitchr and Morfai

In this case study two Lithuanian artists of the young generation, Glitchr and Morfai, who use the internet both as a distribution and creation platform in relation to the physical states of their artworks, will be discussed in the context of liveness and performativity on the web in relation to physical presence of their artworks.

Glitchr is an artist name of Laimonas Zakas, who uses bugs in the Unicode system, codes and scripts to create visual glitches and interact with the structure of various social network websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr and disrupt the strict aesthetic norms of these

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[62] Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image."
[63] Lemmey, "Mission Creep: K-Hole and Trend Forecasting as Creative Practice."
[64] Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," 114.

websites. His artworks, despite being carefully programmed and tested aesthetic objects, create a sense of disorientation and in certain cases remind more of a chaotic assembly of symbols rather than a carefully created artwork, therefore creating a sense of confusion for the users encountering it. His practice was called "Facebook Page Performance Art,"[65] "Digital Graffiti"[66] and "The Weirdest Thing On Twitter"[67] among other definitions given to him. However, as Glithr's popularity grew, it attracted many social network developers among his followers on the social networks he was posting to. This resulted in gradual fixing of the bugs that provided a foundation for his artworks to function, even Glitchr facebook page was shut down once due to changes in the coding of the network.[68] Due to this ever changing environment Glitchr's art finds itself in, it's life as intervention in the strict aesthetic norms of social network websites is deemed to disappear and live only as material archived through screenshots. This already happened to his Facebook page, where it is hard to encounter original posts of the artworks as they disappeared with the fixes of the network, and only the documentation of previous interventions is provided. Moreover, Laimonas Zakas also presents his artworks in physical spaces, for example his 2014 exhibition "GLITHCR: The Social Breakdown" in Rome[69], where most of the artworks were projected as archival dia slides in a physical space therefore referencing to the state of artworks

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[65] Alexia Tsotsis, "Facebook Page Performance Art Glitchr Purposefully Tries To Activate Code Glitches," *Tech Crunch*, January 11, 2012, http://techcrunch.com/2012/01/11/facebook-page-performance-art-glitchr-purposefully-tries-to-activate-code-glitches/ (accessed August 19, 2015).

[66] Mark Wilson, "Glitchr: Digital Graffiti That Defaces Facebook Pages," *Fast Company*, April 10, 2012, http://www.fastcodesign.com/1669485/glitchr-digital-graffiti-that-defaces-facebook-pages (accessed August 19, 2015).

[67] Ibid.

[68] Nadja Sayej, "Glitchr Is The Most Interesting Artist-Hacker On Facebook," *Vice*, March 24, 2014, http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/glitchr-is-the-most-interesting-artist-hacker-on-facebook (accessed August 19, 2015).

[69] Lietuvos Respublikos Ambasada Italijos Respublikoje, "Tinklo menininko Laimono Zako projektas "Glitchr: The Social Breakdown" Romoje," *Lietuvos Respublikos Ambasada Italijos Respublikoje,* May 7, 2014, https://it.mfa.lt/it/lt/naujienos/tinklo-menininko-laimono-zako-projektas-glitchr-the-social-breakdown-romoje (accessed August 19, 2015).

as they are not available as original interventions in social media anymore due to changing conditions of the websites they were created in.

The other artist, Morfai, works in the field of street art and constantly looks for new forms of expression in the urban areas - from traditional spray paint and stencils to the use of bottle caps, torches, adhesive tape, digital renderings of possible artworks or creating pieces on white cube gallery walls. Many of his artworks are conceptual or contextual and closely related to the functions (or lost functions) of the objects he transforms, one of the examples being a series of artworks, where he uses leaf patterned adhesive tape or arranges masking patterns using black and white tape to cover abandoned advertising frames, kiosks and other structures that have lost their original functions as a way to ironically mask them in their surrounding and simultaneously attract attention to them. Due to usually being illegal, the time period when someone can see his artworks in their original surroundings can range from only a few hours, as with the case of "Monumento krustelėjimas" (Movement of the Monument)[70] to a few years - it usually gets overpainted, dismantled or destroyed. Therefore, the only way of preserving these artworks is to photographically document everything and publish it online, as Morfai does by using several blogging platforms and social networking websites such as Facebook, Blogspot and Tumblr or in various street art publications. The constant changes in physical spaces and engagement with the public through social media gradually makes the web the main place where one can see Morfai's art through documentation as it was originally created.

What is in common for both of these artists is continuous engagement with their audiences throughout various internet platforms and physical artworks. While Morfai's artworks

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[70] Dovilė Stirbytė, "Kūrybiškumas pagal Morfai arba „Apie stumbrus, mamutus ir dideles piktybines karpas,"" Artnews.lt, May 14, 2015, http://www.artnews.lt/kurybiskumas-pagal-morfai-arba-apie-stumbrus-mamutus-ir-dideles-piktybines-karpas-28587 (accessed August 19, 2015).

can be simultaneously found both in physical and digital spaces (despite viewers mostly encountering them online, as the physical artworks are spread around in various physical locations mostly in the city of Kaunas, Lithuania), the place where one encounters Glitchr's art is almost exclusively online. However, the posts of Morfai have a certain aspect of liveness in them, as they are quickly spread through online distribution channels as soon as the piece is done. The definition of "live" in Oxford English Dictionary is "Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc." In the case of "Stole the Moon," the video of making the artwork as well as photographic documentation of it probably got far more views and spread around more quickly than the original physical piece itself as well as was probably noticed by citizens of Kaunas more in the online channels rather than in the physical location of Karaliaus Mindaugo avenue, which is quite a remote location in terms of people traveling through it at night. Therefore the quick distribution of documentation could be compared to the the liveness that is experienced at a time of its occurrence in the sense that it spreads quickly and attracts more audience than the real life piece itself. However, this liveness experienced through the news feed could not be compared to the experience of seeing the physical works of Morfai live, as well as scrolling through documentation on a blog could not be compared to a real life street art tour. As Gene McHugh stated in *Post Internet*:

There's always going to be something more visceral about the sharing of physical space that needs to be preserved and honored. For example, jumping up and down and slamming into other sweaty bodies for an hour and a half while listening to loud, deliriously pounding rock

music would be more exhilarating than the experience of watching the same music through a live

stream on the web.[71]

However, in the case of the artworks made by Glitchr, a different sense of liveness could be felt

if one encounters Glitchr's art piece in his or her timeline feed on Tumblr, Facebook or Twitter

as it is the original place where his art occurs comparing to the physical reproductions of his

artworks. Such an act of encountering a post which intervenes with the standards of the social

network it is in directly on someone's news stream present certain liveness, which could not be

reproduced in physical documentation of the piece. To quote Walter Benjamin:

> *The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may*
> *not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds*
> *not only for the art work but also, for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the*
> *spectator in a movie. In the case of the art object, a most sensitive nucleus – namely, its*
> *authenticity – is interfered with whereas no natural object is vulnerable on that score. The*
> *authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from*
> *its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the*
> *historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction*
> *when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical*
> *testimony is affected is the authority of the object.*[72]

This performative element of Glitchr's artwork, impossible without technological mediation of

internet connection capable device, is different from a physical body performing an action, but

its duration and a sense of liveness it creates could easily name it social network performance art.

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[71] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 234.

[72] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm (accessed August 19, 2015).

However, the reproductions of these artworks, whether reposted on Glithr's facebook page or presented in physical locations as slides or prints, lose the most important quality of his artworks - live interaction with the engines of social media websites and the possibility to experience them at the moment they occur.

These art practices of Glitchr and Morfai can be seen as an example of opposite uses of the web - where one's digital art depends on the 'liveness' of timeline stream to engage with his audience and only presents documentation of his digital art in real world as a type of archival material, and the other sees social networks as a way for followers to engage with the physical site specific artworks which gradually disappear in the real world. As seen in the artworks of these two artists, there can be no clear division between digital and real life distribution of artworks or the experience of receiving them online or in physical state, as it depends on the use and the idea of the artwork itself. Therefore the notions of liveness and performativity can be related to computer generated digital materials as well.

3. Photography's relation to reality

In the first issue of Unseen Magazine, writer, researcher and editor Taco Hidde Bakker divides the history of photography into three separate stages: first one beginning with the announcement of photography, the second beginning when photography gets accepted into art institutions (Museum of Modern Art in New York being the first to start collecting photography in 1930) and the third one beginning with the first commercial release of Adobe Photoshop in 1990.[73] These divisions are rough, of course, but generally reflect the changes in production and perception of photography. While Bakker discusses the status of the author itself in these stages of history of photography, this chapter will be dedicated to tracing down how perception of the image changed throughout these historical periods by focusing on the truth claim, which seems to have accompanied photography throughout all these stages.

3.1. Indexicality. Belief in the truth value of a photograph

In the nineteenth century photography was considered to be the reflection of reality due to the image's resemblance to the object it depicts. It was considered to be an analog, a copy, which was different from mimetic painting due to its automatic, objective, documentary reflection of reality without a touch of the artist's imagination. The aspect of referential realism is characteristic to photographic theories of various periods of time, and eventually it is more and more being linked not to the production process of photographs, but with their use and perception. The special relation between photography and reality was probably first described by the inventor of calotype photographic process William Henry Fox Talbot in his work "Pencil of

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[73] Taco Hidde Bakker, "Writer, researcher and editor Taco Hidde Bakker takes a look at the shifting categories of photography through its past, present and future," *Unseen Magazine* 1 (2014)*,* 22.

Nature" (1844): "The plates of the present work are impressed by the agency of Light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist's pencil. They are the sun-pictures themselves, and not, as some persons have imagined, engravings in imitation."[74] A plenitude of fine details in the image was seen by Talbot not as lack, but rather as advantage, because they allowed photographs to be closer to the real view than any painting.

During the second half of the twentieth century, due to the influence of structuralism, semiotics and deconstruction theories, the concept of photography being a construct of reality became firmly established: photographic image, similarly as language, was considered to be culturally coded, and its truthfulness to be an artificially constructed effect. The discourse of index, or referential realism, - started by Andre Bazin and problematized in the ninth decade of the twentieth century, when Pierce's semiotics was rediscovered - is a new point of view to a relation between the photographic image and reality, not connected to mimetic illusionism. Photograph is a trace of one concrete reality, a sign-index, always single, peculiar and related to its referent through physical causal relationship.

German philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, who in his famous essays *A short history of photography* (1931) and *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) laid the foundation for phenomenological, semiotic and sociological theories of photography, saw photography as replacing and serving as occult practices. The passed reality is fixed in a photograph as a trace of light and saving of aura might only be possible by renouncing the new technologies, since "the sphere of authenticity is outside technical".[75] The aura, a

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[74] Henry Fox Talbot, *Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33447/33447-h/33447-h.html (accessed August 19, 2015).
[75] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*

"unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be"[76], in photography exists due to the trace, the close distance, but it is not enough to bring the reality back - imagination is required from the viewer. According to him, the human face serves as the last refuge for the aura, because of the image covered with the aura, there is always someone looking at us, interacting, replying to our look.[77] This confrontation of gaze is not translatable into language, the same as shock, creating involuntary reminiscences when consciousness is not capable of quickly processing the irritation. With losing the aura photography became an optical medium, tasks of which are to create the new human through renewed visual experience and optical subconsciousness and also reproduce artworks. These artworks - especially architecture and sculpture - are easier to comprehend in an image rather than in reality itself - with the help of photography they became collective images. However, the true purpose of photography, according to Benjamin, is social rather than aesthetic. The response to art photography, which tries to remind or raise associations, would be constructive photography, goal of which would be to construct or expose. However, for such task he saw photography having the need to be accompanied by text.[78]

Roland Barthes' turn from semiotic to phenomenological interpretation of photography was of the utmost importance for the development of the discourse of referential realism. In his book *Mythologies* (1957) Barthes analysed photography next to clothing, food, etiquette, music by using the concept of Saussure's arbitrary sign, according to which, any object of reality can be transformed into meaningful signifiers, and "myths" there meant the cultural codes that occupied these objects, their secondary, connotative meanings. Photographic image, same as the object of reality, becomes an expression only when translated into the verbal language, as dreams in

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[76] Ibid.

[77] Walter Benjamin, *Nušvitimai. Esė rinktinė,* ed. Laurynas Katkus (Vilnius: Vaga, 2005), 298.

[78] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*

psychoanalysis, or verbal code is already inscribed in it. However, the photographer is not able to control all the details of the image, and when the meaning of the image cannot be named, it can affect the subconsciousness, shock, traumatize no less than reality itself. In his later essays Barthes separated the coded, associative meaning - connotation - from denotation - an innocent image of certain reality and made the assumption that photography could also be a message without a code. If a photograph does not have a connotative message, it cannot be described, because interpretation would add a second message, taken from language and not directly related to what the image is showing to the recipient. In his essay *The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Several Eisenstein Stills* (1970), Barthes in addition to connotation and denotation found one more meaning, predetermined not by the relation between image and reality, but relation between the image and the recipient: it is perceptible, but not describable, shocking, dull, personal meaning, the code of only one referent. Any image is not a strict structure of signifiers, but rather a whole galaxy of them, waiting for their referent, and the third meaning can arise due to unconventional, freely chosen sign that became a fetish for the recipient. As fetish, beauty or eroticism it helped to prove that the photographic image is opposite to language: arbitrary signs of language are foreign to what they are signifying and the influence of the photograph is determined by image with the referent visible through it. In the eighth decade of the twentieth century, when he was studying horizontal relationship between text and image in theory and practice, in his book *Empire of signs* (1977) Barthes emphasised that texts cannot be comments of the images and images - illustrations of texts, the junction of image and texts must ensure the circulation and exchange of the signifiers.

In *Camera Lucida* (1979) - a book full of personal experience and mourning - Barthes described photography already not as a system of signs, but as a phenomenon, intentionally

appearing in the bodily consciousness of the referent from interaction with a specific object, and that referent is not ideal or abstract, but rather the only one. For example, Barthes himself, mourning his deceased mother, saw its real existence in an image of his mother as a child. The thought that reality presented in the photograph is that, what appears real for the consciousness of the individual spectator, extends Jean Paul Sartre's insight expressed in his work *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (1940), that when looking at a photograph of a person, people tend to transfer that person into the image and in such way bring the photograph to life. Photography differs from other images not by its codes and not by physical nature, but rather by its mode of application: if its needed, it can make an opportunity to physically feel, experience the photographed one, which is not existing in reality, but which clearly existed.

While going deeper into the aspects of reception of the photograph, Barthes named two elements: an interpretation of moderate knowledge, intellectual, political, cultural, linguistic interest, which he called *studium*, and an element, which denotes a personal, touching detail, that wounds the viewer and establishes a direct relationship with the object in it - *punctum*. Punctum, close to the notion of the third meaning, does not have any relation with the intentions of photographer to shock the viewer, amaze him/her with unique motives, unexpected points of view, frozen movement or enlarged scales. Punctum is felt by specific viewer watching a specific photograph as a trauma or fetish, it is asemiotic, culturally not coded effect of visual understanding: "The *studium* belongs to the photographer, the *punctum* to the viewer."[79] However, this did not answer the question what is peculiar in perception of all photographs and any photograph, therefore he got back to the question of referentiality and conceptualized a

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[79] Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 62.

matter that seemingly goes without saying and was noticed even by Nadar: the referent of the photograph must be real and be present in front of the lens. And specifically due to this unavoidable referentiality, through the notion of that has been, photography differs from other systems of visual representation. It reproduces a single moment, mechanically repeats what existentially can never repeat itself. Therefore "the name of Photography's noeme will therefore be: 'that-has-been.'"[80] Photography interacts not only because of recreation of the event itself, but also because it is an evidence of the fact that what one sees actually happened. Therefore punctum is not only an exciting detail, but also a sensation of time passed.

"For Roland Barthes, the cinema was unable to activate the punctum that he found so moving in the still photograph, that is, the presence of reality, of death, the detail overlooked by its photographer and visible to its viewer."[81] Reality seen through the photograph is closed in the past, in a single moment, it cannot change and repeat, therefore, photography is to be associated with death. Barthes showed the relation between photography and death as indissoluble and manifold. Photographic images of humans are like the resurrection of the dead. Photography for Barthes appeared as some new phenomenon from the anthropological point of view - something real that cannot be touched anymore, and photography itself cannot tell what it is showing. The meaning of this denotative image - nonlinguistic, individual and reckless - comes into being from the desires of the viewer, therefore photography might not be a tool for communication, but rather a tool to return to the time passed.

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[80] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77.
[81] Mulvey, *Death 24x a second,* 182.

3.2. Doubting the representation

Vilém Flusser, probably the best representing the discourse of the code, in his work *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (1983) asserted that the invention of photography is "as earth-shattering an event for the history of humankind as the invention of writing in the second century BC",[82] because it was the first technical image - a combination of symbols that is much more abstract than traditional images. According to him, a photograph is not a symptom of the world, belonging to the same space of reality as its referent - it is rather an image of concepts, coding, created not by human, but inside an apparatus - a black box. According to Flusser, the work of photographers is conditioned by the apparatus with its programmed combinations of symbols - and no photographer has completely comprehended or exhausted its capabilities - they just play incompetently, but the photographs resulting from such play still affect viewers and their behaviour. There is no innocent act of photographing - to set the camera for the images of art or politics, one needs to understand art and politics. Photography does not automatically transfer objects into the negative plane, but presents programmes of apparatus and concepts of photographer transcoded into scenes, combinations of symbols. In an attempt to decipher the message of the photograph, one needs to detach intentions of the photographer from the program of apparatus, but this detachment is only theoretical and can only be explained by a separate image.[83] Flusser described distribution of photographs as analogical to radio waves dispersing through space, and their final meaning being transcoded by media - the channels of dispersion. The concepts of apparatus program dominate in the photographs, therefore most of them are redundant, non-informative. A writing person knows how to read, but the photographing one must not understand photographs, he/she just serves the apparatus. Therefore "the illiterate are

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[82] William Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (Reaktion Books, London, 2000), 91.
[83] Ibid., 44.

no longer excluded, as they used to be, from a culture encoded in texts, but participate almost totally in a culture encoded in images."[84] However, the stream of unconsciously produced images is suppressing critical awareness, stimulating illiteracy. For the users, separate photographs become magically influential models of activity, but in general this automatic game with programmed combinations have no clear strategy; despite photographs expressing the interests of owners of power, apparatus is functioning by itself. Therefore, according to Flusser, a philosophy of photography bearing these cornerstones is necessary: "an image created and distributed by photographic apparatus according to a program, an image whose ostensible function is to inform", "an image created and distributed automatically by programmed apparatuses in the course of a game necessarily based on chance, an image of a magic state of things whose symbols inform its receivers how to act in an improbable fashion."[85] Photography critiqued by Flusser seems to have been reportage, paparazzi, advertising, glossy magazine photographs, made by complex analogue cameras, and in some respect close to digital images therefore relating to current conditions of easily distributed media.

According to photography theorist Ronald Berg, the object of indexicality discourse can only be analog photography, the era of which is already over and which's place now is in the fields of art or archive, because digital images are not photographs - footprints of light fixed on a light sensitive material.[86] However, by expanding the concept of referential realism so that it would take photography not only as a trace, sign-index, but also as a transparent medium, giving an opportunity to see the photographed object, its digital condition would not be disturbing.

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[84] Ibid., 61.
[85] Ibid., 76.
[86] Ronald Berg, *Die Ikone des Realen* (Munchen: Fink, 2001), 9.

For Barthes, same as Bazin, Benjamin, Sontag and other theoreticians, who saw photograph as a trace, the materiality of a photograph did not seem to matter that much. It seems that the most significant aspect of photography is not that the light travelling from the objects left a trace in the photographic material, but rather that through it that light reached the retina of the spectator, proved the existence of the moment passed namely to the viewer. The most admired function of photography seems to be to transparently represent itself and other media, make reproductions that exceed the original, images that allow to experience a direct view of reality itself. However, digital photography, with the ease of manipulation and distribution offers a lot more than that - it can also provide tools to end the obsession with indexicality. To quote Rowan Lear:

When we are surrounded by images that represent - that refer backwards - we are caught in a present cycle of history; stuck on an endless repeat button - a feedback loop between image and event. Escaping this cycle requires radical reversal of the way we think about images. The proposition is thus: we must learn to understand photographs not as a trace of a past event bus as a model for one in the future. Photographs are not copies of the world, they are projections onto it. The difference requires more than a small adjustment. As Flusser wrote, it is a choice between a totalitarian and a dialogic society; between being programmed and being free; between dystopia and utopia.[87]

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[87] Rowan Lear, "You bring the depth," in *Like There's No Tomorrow,* ed. Paulius Petraitis and Justė Jonutytė (Kaunas: Kopa, 2013), 44.

3.3. Case study: The role of digital manipulation in self reflectivity of portrait photography

Photography, as painting, can also be self-reflective. Despite being one of the most transparent media, it can still reflect on itself, contrary to a reflection in the mirror or a shadow. The possibility of looking for boundaries of its transparency and representing them secures photography's status as an art form, however, theoreticians had a significant contribution to it. For example, Rosalind Krauss thoroughly investigated photography of the early twentieth century by choosing indexicality as theoretical model for both paintings and photographs. Georges Didi-Huberman saw in photography not only a trace of light, but also as a contact, visual perception of which occurs from touching or becomes its opposite. Traditional analog photography can present itself as a coded image or through reflections, shadows, various chemical and mechanical treatment of visual material show the state of its own index, the act of photographing, the photographer himself, confrontation between the object and photographic material, the condition of positive and negative. Photography, as a trace, is represented by the images made without the use of a camera (photograms or rayograms), fixed traces of time. The quotations that confirm the status of metapicture usually show the materiality of rephotographed or highly enlarged photographic print, because otherwise the game of lack of transparency would lose its meaning. While self reflective photography is usually associated with means of production visible in the final image, the digital technology, which is more and more prevalent in today's photography has not been much discussed in this context. However, a digital intrusion into a photographic image can not only add to the visible qualities of the picture, but also evoke a deeper insight into the mediums used, which would highlight certain characteristics of

photography itself. Therefore the question to be discussed in this case study is the role of digital manipulation in self reflectivity of portrait photography.

Image no.1: Untitled by Mathias Tang, September 2014

The image chosen for this section, made by Mathias Tang in September 2014 (image no.1) depicts a young shirtless man posing in 45 degree angle against a plain white wall and looking into the light source. The light in the photograph is hard, producing powerful highlights and deep shadows as well as vignetting in the corners of the image. Therefore, the light guides the viewer's gaze into the face of the subject, which seems to be of most importance in the image, since the surroundings - white wall - are laconic. Digital manipulation, which is positioned on the face of the subject as a black net or frame is giving an additional layer of communication and once again drawing attention to the face of a man depicted, which seems to be looking through that net. The image could be called straight or snapshot due to its visual resemblance to documentary photography, however, the direction of the light (clearly not an on-camera flash) and the pose of a subject impose that the photograph was staged and taken in a studio or other kind of controlled environment. In such case the conclusion could be drawn that the photographer had full control over the image both by taking it and manipulating it digitally.

What attracts the eye in this image is the canonical pose and facial expression of a person photographed, which in some way resembles certain passport or other photographs of institutional power[88] by registering only the appearance of the subject and leaving 'inner depths' unrepresented. This feature calls into attention the established norms of portrait photography: these norms stay unnoticed, because photography itself has established them as an equivalent of unbiased observation through its history of one and a half century long.[89] In such case, the poser's behavior in front of the lens describes not one or other aspect of their identity, but rather a canon of posing for documentary pictures itself – the model which does not leave space for individual expression of identity, but which is necessary to follow. This could be related to Roland Barthes' remark on posing: "I instantaneously make another body for myself , I transform myself in advance into an image"[90]

Such canonical representation, as art historian and critic Max Kozloff describes it, transforms faces into an object of attentive, but dissociated, unbiased gaze – a gaze that allows to see the subject of the photograph not as a specific person, but as a set of surfaces, volumes, traits and shapes.[91]

However, the artificial digital element of the image - the grid, positioned on the face of the subject – on the one hand, highlights these norms of posing and draws one's attention to the face, and on the other hand, by visually resembling some kind of construction or framework, or even the grid of biometric overlay, imposes that the face could be replaced by any other without

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[88] For example: in passports of world war II era, exhibited in Fries museum, Netherlands, all the subjects are posing in a 45 degrees angle to the camera.

[89] John Pultz, *Photography and the Body* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), 24.
John Pultz states that frontal portrait on a plain background , separating the person photographed from his social environment, gave an ostensible scientific value to XIX century etnographic photography, and derived this tradition from early daguerreotype portraits.

[90] Barthes, *Camera Lucida,* 10.

[91] Max Kozloff, *The Theatre of The Face. Portrait Photography Since 1900* (London, New York: Phaidon, 2007), 168.

losing the value of the image. The face becomes just another form interacting with the digital grid - a network of curved lines - just a profile picture to quickly pass through the viewer's eyes. The feeling that the face could be replaced without losing the value of the image in other words could be described as highlighting the patterns of picture production and therefore bearing resemblance to the poietic scenario of metapictures, described by art historian and critic Victor I. Stoichita.[92] However, the link is not that obvious, since Stoichita concentrates more on "painting the act of painting"[93] in his texts. The picture discussed relates more closely to William J. T. Mitchell's idea of metapicture as reflecting on the process which is "framed, not inside another picture, but within a discourse that reflects on it as an exemplar of "picturality" as such. This third meaning implies, of course, that any picture whatsoever […] can become a metapicture, a picture that is used to reflect on the nature of pictures."[94]

Since the digital element in the image provided gives certain insights into production and canons of portrait photography, it is less obvious than the examples the discussed authors are providing. However, the significance of digital alterations in photography is still not explored enough and its relation to metapictures is not fully researched, since authors dealing with medium self reflectivity concentrate more on painting and photography rather than intermediary works. Though, it does not diminish the significance the digital intrusion provides to the image and the canons and norms of portrait photography it brings to light. Therefore it can be stated that the image making use of more than one medium is always reflecting both on separate mediums and their relation altogether.

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[92] Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image. An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 226.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Asbjørn Grønstad and Øyvind Vågnes, "What do pictures want? Interview with W. J. T. Mitchell," *Image & Narrative* 15 (November, 2006), http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/iconoclasm/gronstad_ vagnes.htm (accessed August 19, 2015).

4. Aura in the age of network

4.1. Walter Benjamin's Aura

German philosopher and social critic Walter Benjamin, associated with the Frankfurt school of philosophy and social theory, in his still relevant essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), examined the status of art in the context of the new media of reproduction: photography and cinema. Despite Benjamin examining the changing notions of artworks, the essay also became a relevant publication for media theory. Technically reproducible media of photography and cinema were seen by Benjamin as being opposite to art, the technology of dissemination without the purity characteristic to the ideal channel and therefore determining the essential changes in the medium of perception, the whole art system, the status, conception and reception of the work of art and, most importantly, the loss of aura. The technical reproduction of artworks was seen as a historical process by Benjamin: in the antiquity it was moulding of sculptures and casting of coins, in the end of middle ages wood and copper carvings were invented and in the 19th century there was a spread of lithography, which due to its greater speed was seen as a new stage of reproduction, and, of course, after a few decades lithography was outran by photography. Around the 1900s the scale of reproduction grew so large that not only made all the previous works of art into its object and started to change their influence, but also became a new form of art - cinema - which, according to Benjamin, is not a copy of some kind of original artwork anymore, but rather a new type of artwork, assigned to be reproduced by its production technology.[95]

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[95] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*

The aura of the artwork, the fundamental notion of Benjamin's work, expresses the qualities of the artwork itself, the characteristics of its usage and the effects of perception in the mind of the viewer: the uniqueness of the artwork, its existence in a concrete location and the context of tradition, respectful relation to it, inaccessibility and "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."[96] However, the aura does not come from inner qualities of the artwork, but rather is "a conceptual field around the work accused through time as it reflects upon its own history as a material object."[97] Aura was first attributed to the images having a cult value, but from the Renaissance it was also secured by the glorification of beauty, which changed the uniqueness of apparition of the saints into uniqueness of the mastery of the author and, as well, changing the cult value into the value of authenticity and the exhibition value. The cult value urged to hide the images, the fact of their existence, and not the view, was important enough. However, in the course of history, the size and materials of artworks changed in that way, that it became a lot easier to exhibit them. According to Benjamin, the spread and accessibility of artworks due to their technical reproducibility, destroyed their aura - their cult and artistic value - they became images having new functions.[98]

For Benjamin, the loss of aura also meant the change in the structures of perception, which was influenced by cinema: for the reception of traditional works of art the qualities of concentration, contemplation and association are needed, while for cinema - critical view, distraction and the recognition of stereotypes. Benjamin noticed, that in certain stages of their development, traditional art forms strive to create effects, which later on become new forms of art. The viewers of cinema would be prepared for the coming medium by other optical tools as

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[96] Ibid.
[97] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 247.
[98] Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.*

praxinoscope and kaiserpanorama, or, to take Benjamin's example, dadaists also strived to create a distracted reception of their artworks: "Dadaism attempted to create by pictorial – and literary – means the effects which the public today seeks in the film."[99] Benjamin takes architecture as an example of collective distracted reception - the perception of the build while both viewing and using them - optically and tactilely, while the latter does not require concentration, but rather is driven by habit. The viewers were also weaned from the concentration and contemplation, which was needed while viewing the works of traditional art forms, by the spread of illustrated magazines, which provided explanatory text together with the images. In cinema, the reception of every image is determined by the sequence of previous images and, therefore, it is even more suggestive than information provided by the combination of text and photography. According to Benjamin, "Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise."[100] It poses a threat to the consciousness of the viewers, their status of subjectivity, because the viewers are distracted by the tactile plane of the film. The distance between the viewer and the image also disappears due to the transparency of the medium - the apparatus is invisible, because it is not the part of the film's structure, but rather its indispensable condition. According to Benjamin, cinema intensified the aperception of the visual world, but also, by optically exploring the commonplace environments, it also showed new ways of seeing, which in a new way depict the visual world.[101]

Technical reproduction was seen as contradictory by Benjamin: the loss of aura could not be seen only as a damage - it gave new societal and cognitive opportunities for the art world as

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[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

well as diminishing the gap between the author and the user. This specific quality could be used to serve propaganda and manipulate the masses, but it also increases the spread, availability and accesibility of diverse information.

4.2. Displacement of the aura

However, what Benjamin mostly addresses with his notion of aura is the public reception of artworks that occupy a singular place in space and time. In the contemporary moment, where monumentality of public perception is displaced by magnitude of private experiences that are dispersed through various types of media, whether through books, television or internet network - in other words - reproductions of the artworks became more important than the original itself, not because of the ease of distribution, but also because it creates a more private experience for the user and, according to Seth Price, "the constellation of critique, publicity, and discussion around the work is at least as charged as a primary experience of the work."[102] Such a rapid dissemination of cultural artifacts throughout available media, whether it being the reproductions of paintings by photographing them or digitization, which completely removed the link with material objects, seems to show that images can be detached from specific medium as their physical state is changing. According to Artie Vierkant, there are no original artworks after the Post-Internet, since the artwork lies in its various versions dispersed throughout both physical and digital world.[103] To relate it to Benjamin, not only the aura of the artwork has disappeared, but also the artwork became subdued to neverending variations bearing no reference to one singular original. A good example of such dispersion of artworks throughout separate media could be Rob Hornstra's and Arnold van Bruggen's *The Sochi Project,* which equally lives as an

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[102] Price, "Dispersion," 8.
[103] Vierkant, "Image Object Post Internet," 5.

interactive website, a series of photobooks and exhibitions in physical spaces and seamlessly passes from one state to the other. However, some theorists state that the aura has not disappeared, but rather was displaced by other types of relations to the artworks. To quote Hito Steyerl, "By losing its visual substance it recovers some of its political punch and creates a new aura around it. This aura is no longer based on the permanence of the "original," but on the transience of the copy."[104]

Gene McHugh in his book *Post Internet*, pays a lot of attention to these changing notions of aura and the artwork in the context of Post-Internet. Throughout the book he finds the sense of aura in the form of circulation of .gif files, the internet memes or continuous flow of imagery and information. He states that "the aura of an art object is often not its phenomenological properties, but rather its testimony to a creative process."[105] Therefore, coming back to zero value of the media on the internet, individual work no longer has strong relevance, since continuous performance throughout the time, constant engagement with the internet culture through uploading new work is what now creates a meaningful artistic experience on the web. As McHugh states, aura of artwork in the age of internet technologies is not eliminated, but relocated: "Instead of associating cult value with an artifact, one associates it with the live performance of the artist as he or she creates individual works of art and uploads them to the data cloud in sequential order."[106] This notion of the aura being seen in the continuous online performance will be overviewed in the next section.

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[104] Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image."

[105] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 41.

[106] Ibid., 233.

4.3. Continuous practice

The greatest impact of the internet culture for the habits of internet users, is probably the urge to surf through the continuously expanding amount of data presented online. The data flows on the internet are not affected by the usual rhythm of day and night, since they are dispersed from the sources from all around the world - it is just a continuous stream of "the endless "now" of the virtual world."[107] The screen of an internet connection capable device becomes a "sequential image viewing device"[108] as described by the artist Chris Coy. Every day (or night) people scroll through large amounts of images on Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, Tumblr, Google image search or any other website as well as upload their own media online. This expanding amount of data does not allow for a deep engagement with the information one sees, but rather urges to surf through the surface of the vast geography of the internet databases. Due to such impossibility of a deep engagement with the available media, life on the internet becomes revolving around the current moment, making one forget about the past. This makes one wonder, for example, for how long anyone would remember the hot topics trending in the summer of 2015, such as the shooting of Cecil the lion by an American dentist Walter Palmer[109] - an event which currently seems to receive a lot of attention from virtual communities.

In order to keep up with the changing topics and trends in the culture of the now, it is not enough for an artist to create a website or a social media account, upload one's work and wait for the users to notice and share it, because on such occasion, it would just possibly disappear in the continuous flow of various media and, in the best case, might later become a treasure for internet

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[107] Ibid., 135.

[108] Brion Nuda Rosch, "Sequential Image-Viewing Device," *SFMOMA,* August 6, 2010, http://openspace.sfmoma.org/2010/08/sequential-image-viewing-device/ (accessed August 19, 2015).

[109] Matthew Weaver and Mhita Gajanan, "Cecil the lion hunter Walter Palmer faces calls for prosecution," *The Guardian*, July 29, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/29/cecil-the-lion-calls-for-prosecution-us-dentist-walter-palmer (accessed August 19, 2015).

archeologists as it descends into the archives of the web. To quote Ben Werdmuller, "you cannot install a social networking tool and assume that a network will grow around it. You must either have another purpose, or an existing network of people to plug into it. Either way, it's also going to take a lot of work: you need to lead by example, and participate heavily every day."[110] What needs to be done, according to Gene McHugh, is to develop a continuous engagement with the internet communities by constantly presenting new work throughout the course of time, "going into each and every new day with an openness to experience and to the shifting of criteria in one's world, and, then, making meaning out of that"[111], creating "a new type of temporal activation - a "net presence" in which the artist's work is viewed as one ongoing performance; [...] This performance is where audiences are nudged to qualitatively sort out and find meaning in artistic experience on the Internet."[112] A great example for the need of continuous engagement could be found on Tumblr blogging platform, where users can easily schedule their posts to be posted in the future, or make a blog entry by simply sending an email to a specific email address. While surfing through their Tumblr homepage one can easily see the blogs that use these functions - their posts appear at specific intervals of time, no matter if it is night or day, constantly feeding new information for their subscribers. Such an engagement with continuous posting creates new qualities on which users of the online services and their works are judged - it is not a single post anymore that matters, but rather the intervals and the style of updating the information and engagement with the viewers, which seems to be quite close to brand marketing tactics. As post-internet artist Kevin Bewersdorf described his engagement with internet culture and self-branding:

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[110] Ben Werdmuller, "The Internet Is People," *Benwerd*, December 4, 2008, http://benwerd.com/2008/12/04/the-internet-is-people/ (accessed August 19, 2015).
[111] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 224.
[112] Ibid.

The signature also makes my marketing tactics very obvious and shows that I accept myself as nothing more than a product to be marketed. Whether a net artist brands themself with a sparse list of links on a humble white field or with loud layers of noise and color or with contrived logos in a bland grid, they are constructing their own web persona for all to see. They are branding their self corporation. I think this self branding can be done with functionless art intentions rather than functioning business intentions. All the marketing materials are just shouted into the roaring whirlpool of the web where they swirl around in the great database with everyone else's personal information empires. I think these persona empires are the great artworks of our time, and they inspire me to keep building my own brand.[113]*

Therefore, according to Gene McHugh, since a single artwork is not going to be very meaningful on the web, a shift is necessary for contemporary artists and art lovers to focus their attention not on a single instance of an artwork, but "towards an ongoing, daily practice."[114]

4.4. Case study: Continuous practice on the web and its adaptation for physical spaces and objects - Sraunus and Like There's No Tomorrow

In this case study, two projects that are related to Lithuanian photographer, critic, lecturer and curator Paulius Petraitis (artist name: Paul Paper) - a projected exhibition *Sraunus* (eng. - rapid, swift) and a publication of young Lithuanian photography *Like There's No Tomorrow* - will be discussed.

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[113] Gene McHugh, "Interview with Kevin Beversdorf." *Rhizome*, September 30, 2008, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/sep/3/interview-with-kevin-bewersdorf/ (accessed August 19, 2015).
[114] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 221.

Sraunus was a travelling exhibition of projected photographs, curated by Paulius Petraitis. It started in 2010 in Vilnius, Lithuania and until 2013 visited 7 more cities worldwide: Marijampolė, Lithuania (2011), Stockholm, Sweden (2011), Vancouver, Canada (2011), Paris, France (2011), Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2012), Gothenburg, Sweden (2012) and Cardiff, Wales (2013). The exhibition presented a slideshow selection of various photographic works made by around 40 young photographic artists and the selection changed while the exhibition travelled from city to city. Some of the artists included in the show were: Lucas Blalock, Jessica Eaton, Sam Falls, Kate Steciw, Thomas Albdorf, Klara Källström & Thobias Fäldt, Nicholas Gottlund, Go Itami, Jennilee Marigomen, Jaap Scheeren.[115] However, what is the most important about the show is not the selection of images presented, but rather the format of the show itself. By making a one evening exhibition of projected digital photographs in a physical space, Paulius Petraitis "invited critical discussion on the changing materiality of the medium and the place of the digital image in the gallery."[116] The format of the event - a slideshow of images with pre-determined duration, that are selected by a single curator from all around the web, closely relates to how images are experienced today online in art blogs and social networks. The images on the web, as well as in Sraunus shows, are always affected by the ones that are preceding and succeeding them - therefore always not only carrying their own message, but relating to the other contexts that surround them, too. The slideshow then becomes a single piece of art, that provides links to the images that are presented. This experience of scrolling through an image flow on a blog is also strengthened by a uniform size and temporal duration of the images presented. Also, by using the opportunities provided by digital technologies, the show could not only generate discussions on the place of digital photographs in physical spaces, but also the whole existence

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[115] Paul Paper, "Curatorial," *Itismyparty,* http://www.itismyparty.org/two.html (accessed August 19, 2015).
[116] Ibid.

of the show depended on them. The digital projections allowed for a far greater dispersion of the exhibition itself - it is doubtful that it would have been profitable, or even possible, to bring a printed and framed exhibition of the selected authors to various destinations around the world, including a small Lithuanian town of Marijampolė, where it is quite hard to come around contemporary photography exhibitions. Therefore, it could be said that this show brought the temporal experience of watching images online to a physical gallery space as well as allowed itself to have relatively similar ease of dispersion as the easily reproducible digital images.

The other project, Like There's No Tomorrow, edited by Paulius Petraitis (Paul Paper) and Justė Jonutytė, is a publication composed of the works of the young generation of Lithuanian photographers, partly gathered by an open call, most of whom have never been published or exhibited before. The publication includes twelve photographers: Jūratė Gačionytė, Paul Herbst, Jonas Lozoraitis, Agota Lukytė, Ekvilina Milaševičiūtė, Ulijona Odišarija, Paul Paper, Nerijus Rimkus, Rasa Staniūnaitė, Ugnė Straigytė, Vulovak and Kimm Whiskie as well as four short essays by Justė Jonutytė, Paulius Petraitis, Rowan Lear and Monika Kalinauskaitė. The works in the book are presented in a dialogue with each other, without reference to the name of the author or the image or any other text in relation to the images (there is an index of authors in the back of the publication), therefore it allows the viewer to look for the visual links in the images, explore their relation to each other and the whole sequence throughout the book. The selected images reveal the aesthetics, changing relation to objects and underlying meanings of the young generation, which is greatly influenced by the omnipresence of the web.[117] The authors seem to renounce the established rules of photography, such as composition and perspective in the favor

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[117] Artnews.lt, "Šiuolaikinės Lietuvos fotografijos leidinio „Tarsi nebūtų rytojaus" pristatymas," *Artnews.lt,* December 30, 2013, http://www.artnews.lt/siuolaikines-lietuvos-fotografijos-leidinio-tarsi-nebutu-rytojaus-pristatymas-22202 (accessed August 19, 2015).

of creating a feeling of distraction and meaninglessness. The meaningfulness in the work of these authors seems to be found in "going into each and every new day with an openness to experience and to the shifting criteria in one's world, and, then, making meaning out of *that*."[118] The indexicality and objectivity, so much associated with photography, seems to also be lost - the images do not point to an exact moment in the past, do not record reality, but rather act as a quick note or faint observation, close to the notion of perfect crime by Jean Baudrillard. As Rowan Lear described these images in an essay called *You bring the depth.*: "Perhaps they could be best described as fleeting thoughts, little surprises, or 'itches that needed to be scratched'. Here, juxtapositions and metaphors are of a playful kind: a houseplant meets its compelling portrait; a statue of a bear weeps; a camera teeters on a railing."[119]

Most of the authors featured in *Like There's No Tomorrow* distribute their works through internet blogs and social networking websites and constantly feed their creations into the ever growing flow of images. For example - Vulovak posts his photography on his Facebook page, his paintings in Blogspot blog and animated photographic gifs on his Tumblr blog while it is hard to encounter his work anywhere else, unless it is reblogged. However, online modes of distribution seem to also affect the works - they are not designed for a contemplation, but rather work as a quick note or an observation - a single image seems to carry little importance, but as a whole neverending scroll of visual material, these blogs evoke a sense of engagement with the works, looking for connections and different possibilities of interpretation. The definition of the phrase "like there's no tomorrow" by Oxford English Dictionary: "If someone does something like there is/was no tomorrow, they do it very fast, in large amounts and without thinking

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[118] McHugh, *Post Internet,* 244.
[119] Lear, "You bring the depth," 43.

carefully" can partly describe the philosophy and aesthetics of the works that are included in the publication.

The publication of Like There's No Tomorrow seems to also be seeking to evoke the same kind of engagement as the images on the web provide. One can deeply contemplate on one image or its connection to the neighboring ones, look at the links between these images or separate pages, use the index to trace down the authors and google their other works, or just quickly skip through the images as if scrolling through a website, the latter probably being the common way for looking at such images. To quote Rowan Lear again:

[…]these images are thin. They are unburdened by the weight of representation and no longer bound by invisible threads to the past. With lightness, they move quickly. They do not withstand a prolonged gaze, but welcome repeated glances. They are fleeting but often return to vision. They travel the world, touch other images and trigger new associations. They face the future, while we look for the past. Here, photographs bring the light; you bring the depth.[120]

There are numerous examples of digital strategies used in physical spaces or objects that can accompany these two projects: Fotografiska photography gallery in Stockholm, Sweden, which has a dedicated room full of flatscreen TVs on which slideshows of the works of young photographers are played, The Photocopy Club quickly and cheaply distributing and exhibiting photographic prints made by both young artists and old masters, Contemporary Art Daily presenting clean exposition shots online every day and numerous other examples. These are the symptoms of the post-internet climate. Both of the projects seem to express or mimic the qualities of the post-internet culture: quick dispersion, ease of reproduction, the renouncing of image qualities itself and focusing on the importance of the context it is placed in. Such a

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[120] Ibid., 44.

tendency of using digital culture as a basis for physical objects and events can clearly be tagged as specific to post-internet state we currently live in and photographers, curators, editors, museums and galleries are clearly affected by it, too.

Conclusion

The internet, being a relatively new technology of distribution, has already greatly affected the art world - from the everyday practice of an artist to physical galleries. Not only can we see a decrease in indexicality and referentiality, but the use of the image itself has changed - a single artwork does not bear great importance anymore as continuous performance through everyday practice is what engages with the audience and makes the artwork meaningful in the age of ever increasing flow of images. It is no longer astounding to find artefacts of internet culture to be translated into the physical space of a gallery, as the internet culture slowly became culture itself. The continuous data flow, generated by the ease of distribution and accessibility, enabled by the world wide web, makes it easier to distribute media than ever before in human history and this affects the way artists and the public in general treat the images. They no longer require a prolonged gaze, no longer point to exact place and time of past reality, but rather are fleeting thoughts, just small notes in the viewers' daily internet scroll. They create a new aura - an aura based not on the history of the artwork, but on the author's continuous engagement with the work, a daily practice in the quickly changing world.

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