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Analyse the various theories of desire discussing Gaze and revaluation of ugliness concept. Explore the imagery structure of the artist Cristina Rizzi Guelfi, the relationship between women, media phenomenon and digital gaze in her practice and the paradoxes of contemporary society.

“In some ways, desire seems to be taken for as much granted as space – that is, it's everywhere, but often difficult to articulate or analytically pin down. For us, what makes desire distinct, but not discrete, from the vocabulary of affect and emotion is that it operates as both absence and lack, on the one hand, and as a profoundly productive motor and motivating force, on the other.” (D. K. Seitz, 2019) The concept of desire, even seems to have archaic roots “....and I suffer and desire”, (Sappho 630 BC- 570 BC) seems still so far to be indefinite, however, it often refers in a certain way to the concept elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche “Wille zur Macht” (F. Nietzsche, 1901) which discusses the evolution of desire based on the individual capacities to exercise power on predetermined goals in order to achieve those. “The Will to Power (F. Nietzsche, 1901) could represent the matrix for some of the theories that have followed and which implicate human perseverance. Is evident the elasticity of the desire that in the processes of mutation takes different shapes. For

instance Machiavelli examined its structure “Desires are decoded starting from another desire, which allows us to understand its constitution: ambition” (S. Torres, 2014)

“Desiring-machine” the static “to be” is replaced by the fluidity of becoming.(H.Ruthrof, 2009)

“Production and acquisition” (G. Deleuze & F.Guattari, 1972)

But what is the form of desire that most reflects contemporary times? The philosopher

Miguel De Beistegui tried to give it a form through his "Man of Desire", citing Michel Foucault

“defines who we are today in ways that we are not always aware of” (M. De Beistegui, 2018)

following 3 specific denominators: “homo oeconomicus, homo sexualis, and homo

symbolicus” “sexuality, political economy, and recognition/self-love” (M. De Beistegui, 2018)

“ Posthumanism focuses on the critique of the humanist ideal of ‘Man’ as the universal representative of the human” (R. Braidotti, 2017 pag. 34)

But if this figure of desire is conceived as the reflection of society “desire might ‘have emerged at a particular time and under specific historical circumstances”

(M. De Beistegui, 2018).” to be identified with the norms of interest and utility

(M. De Beistegui, 2018) ,how much can the threshold of objectivity cross?

“We are constituted as liberal subjects” (M. De Beistegui, 2018) embracing this ‘formula’,

to what extent can the possible shadow of collective desideres make us similar and/or

individually distinct? “Active life is exposed in all its dimensions...ordered according to the

desire that corresponds to each one, and hierarchical according to the natural order of the

community.” (S.Torres, 2014) “A genealogy of desire would help to reveal the historical

constitution of subjectivity, in the form of desiring subject” (L. Lawlor - J. Nale, 2015) .

In this regard, the Spiral Dynamics (D. E. Beck, 1998) could enlighten the evolution of social

priorities through a scale of values “Consciousness level” (C.Cowan - D. Beck, 1998) in

which new variables are integrated on the basis of individual and collective developments,

sometimes meeting and clashing with the criteria of other formulated theories (ethical

consumerism vs conscious capitalism) although from the prospectus the voice "Concern for

ecology and social fairness, egalitarianism, multiculturalism" (M. Hay, 2020) is not latent, I would like to dwell on what the antagonists could embody and which in the postmodern era risk converting the so-called Human progress into inequality regression by fulfilling the functions of realistic conflicts theory and social judgement.

The desire form, not intended to obtain something, but that derives instead as response from the visual culture encounter is called Gaze. "For Berger, the gaze is the correlation factor to understand what images produce in terms of knowledge, identification, attraction"

(S. Torres, 2014). Even though I believe that sometimes a desire that is stimulated through the visual language, as an exception to the rule, brings back something dormant beyond the control of consciousness."The gaze is awakened by shame" Jean-Paul Sartre

(C. P. Jones, 2018.) With the coining and investigation of the term Gaze, however, it is inevitable not to come across its sub variants like Objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997) and the consequences related to it, "Self-objectification" (Fredrickson & Roberts 1997) giving rise to gender inequalities especially when the subject in discussion is a feminine. Laura Mulvey investigated the politics of body finding in Cindy Sherman's imagery, a new artist revolutionary identity representing for feminists art movement the dawn of postmodernism era through the distinction between theory and practice, deconstructing the myths through a "Parody of Voyeurism" (L. Mulvey, 1991). Mulvey in her studies resurfaced the "Freudian" term "scopophilia" "the pleasure of looking as well as the pleasure of being looked at" (M.Biosi, 2019) abolishing the gender bilateral function "voyeurism/ male exhibitionism/ female" (P. Hodges 2014) "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at " (J. Berger, 1972) adapting the term to the concept of "Male Gaze"(L. Mulvey, 1991), based on the dynamics of male dominated cinema industry, in objectification of women for the purposes of spectator amusement. "the male gaze

describes the heterosexual male perspective which dominates art and literature and which often represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer.”

(S. D. Cook, 2020).

The relationship is determined by admirer and admired performing the function of active and passive. But the gaze or better the male gaze is not a modern invention; it is constituted by the hierarchy of social norms and cultural behaviour “set of behaviour norms”

(H. Popitz, 1997) that through the persuasion of institutions have contributed to

“subjectivation', 'discipline' and syntheses of 'coercion and consent' as 'hegemony' “and the consequent unbalance of gender identities.(H. Popitz, 2018)

The gaze is nothing but a response, a way of entertainment, a consolidated habit that derives from the development of social-cultural codes. But how do we break the stereotypes in order to create a more inclusive society?

My artistic intent rejects those that could reflect the canons through which the Gaze is produced, making my visual activism a brand that is distinguished from the aesthetic homogenization through the annulment of roles disparity and factors of prevarication.

“Disidentification entails the rejection of hegemonic identity interpellations and the creation of improper names (H. Asenbaum, 2020) “The ‘subject to change’ is understood as a multiple self which pursues the freedom of self-expression and self-exploration.”(H. Asenbaum,2020)

My attempts is to conceptualise the repulsion/attraction effect and try to introduce the concept of revaluation of ugliness in practice, almost contemplating it and which oppose to

“The gendered aetiology of body image can also be understood in the context of prevailing attitudes that a man’s body is supposed to be “capable, strong, and powerful,” while a woman’s body is supposed to be “sexy” for the pleasure of men”(PMC, 2017) observing the feminist lens and beliefs on body politics, seeking the beauty, or whatever you want to call

different beautifully, in the truth and imperfections, but almost make the audience familiarise with what can contrast the society standards and expectations. Umberto Eco reflects on the fact that ugliness is a concept in its own right and should not be considered at most as a parameter of discussion related to the comparison with beauty. "Ugliness is more inventive than beauty. Beauty always follows certain camps. I think it's more amusing ugliness – than beauty....ugliness is unpredictable, and offers an infinite range of possibilities. Beauty is finite...." (U. Eco, 2007) But even ugliness seems to have hidden its ambiguity and its nuances beyond to represent a denotation of incompleteness and subordinate to the beauty, Marx in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 for example affirmed "Therefore I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness—its deterrent power—is nullified by money" (K. Marx, 1844) bringing out some of the contemporary dynamics, that in already dissolution of things, reinforce the stereotypes such as the binomial ugly and rich or in the "equation" the ugly equal deepness as the beautiful equal superficiality. For the sake of truth the cliché in the guise of social banality, has its potential and can hardly be broken, so how much it can really influence, determining the complete social failure, giving space to a modern fluctuating idea of the categorization of the human being dictated by contemporary human behaviours as an effect of social stigmas?

Greek mythology for instance had a very standardised principle of beauty representations.

"The Greek ideal of perfection was represented by kalokagathia, a term that comes from the union of kalos (generally translated as "beautiful") and agathos (translated as "good") (U. Eco, 2012) such as a conceptual notion that can be found, for example in the movement of The Age of Enlightenment "articulate the flowing grace and expressive naturalism" (The Frick Collection in New York, 2014) or philosophies of beauty; "aesthetics was a form of purity" (C. Sartwell, 2022). But sometimes the function of beauty, widens into the spaces and

not only to subjects like Aristotle intended “proportion, harmony and symmetry” (Noorzaratek18, 2021), evoking an utopia through a lyrical idealisation of expectations, which through the history, memory, photographic remake brings into dialogue the moaning of visual sublime that reveals a different reading key. Although in the most recent works artists have tried to give rise to the ugliness of redeeming ourselves, even today there are still those who refer to it as disturbing, recalling the spectrum of parallel distinction between substance and appearance and not as factors of a single discourse. The concept of revaluation of ugliness however, is not synonymous of ugliness understood as an inspection of the form and the casing, but bases its purpose on the impactivity that creates a disturbing, as impactful but “indirect” effect just in order to lead to the veracity of things.

There are works that give back, through the “aberrant” form, the justice of being looked at from another perspective embodying the authenticity of the narrative and opposing to “Exaltation of the beauty of classical art, the only state art, clean and reassuring.”

(G. Echites, 2018) . Even Botero's women who do not incarnate the conventional canon, although he was keen to specify, "I am interested in volume, the sensuality of form" (Artdaily, 2014) are looked at with suspicion “Botero's figures are destroyed by detractors as simplistic caricatures of fleshy figures, placed in sunny familiar contexts”(Redazione, 2016)

“an artist detached from reality” (Redazione, 2016)

“Botero is recognised throughout the world for his singular style incorporating rotund whimsical figures and objects, often suffused with a subtle brand of satire. By manipulating space and perspective, he draws attention to the monumentality of his figures, showing them in spaces that seem too small to contain them.”(Christies, 2022) this denotes the power of “ugliness” intended as diversity which is not an end in itself and is more than capable of delivering a reliable message.

The deconstruction of an image is a theme also investigated by the artist Alfredo Jaar, a moral commitment in an era in which the mass media tend to manoeuvre the visual information. "Information' is as much about disinformation as it is about information because images are selected, edited, presented and promoted while others are ignored or denied on a basis which ultimately obeys a political agenda" (O. Chow, 2021)

Some of his installations are minimalist in a penetrating climate of austerity, they undergo a process of renovation of information suppressed by the media, giving to his artwork a new function of alternative communication and perception "In the 'document', the post-traumatic gaze is both revived and buried, acknowledged and mourned." (O. Chow, 2021)

In the various classification of desire and their variables discussed, which embody the flow state, what perhaps is the most underestimated but no less important, is the repressed desire. If we observe the statement of Luigi Cecconi describing his work "Incorrect Theory" (L. Cecconi, 2017-2022). "Incorrect Theory is the story of an escape that never happened....an evasion frustrated by the impossibility....a work on desire, on broken dreams. But it's also a visual catharsis in which the author allows himself an escape - not geographically, but imaginatively. A way of showing how the imponderable is possible through art and how belonging is only a question of self-representation". (L. Cecconi, 2017-2022) we can realise how much this interrupted desire reflects the lack asserted by Lacan "The object a is a paradoxical "object" directly because of the relation between its emergence and loss" (The Dangerous Maybe, 2019)

This interrupted desire could find also fundament in the "theory of an underlying support" "Hence the presentation of desire as something supported by needs, while these needs, and their relationship to the object as something that is lacking or missing, continue to be the basis of the productivity of desire" (Atlas, 2018) and/or "restriction retroactively produced

what they forbid.”(The Dangerous Maybe, 2019) A further distinction could be represented by the variable/invariable structure of desire in function to the subjects by which it is exercised from. “The language of desire -of desires-, but, on the other hand, it also speaks to us of ‘fickleness’ ‘variability’”. (S. Torres, 2014)

In the present case the desire that becomes static in women who keeping the desires that are not properly fulfilled, translating it into an irreplaceable desire (rights denied; female genital mutilation, forced marriage, virginity tests, gender-pay-gap, forced abortion, or forced sterilization) and which could in a certain sense fit Freud's affirmation “profound mourning, contains the same painful frame of mind...the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love “(S.Freud,1917) even it has been associated close to the political act rather regardless the desire. “Freedom is a political problem that depends on virtue to intervene in conflict, not an ethical quality as far as it can concern from desire”. (S. Torres, 2014) “We have to be vigilant. No triumphalism” (S. A. Rad, 2022) Ferrante affirmed in an interview expressing her point of view on Iranian women's rights battle and the similarities with the women figures presented in her works from the Neapolitan context of Post-war, as if to delineate the raw realism of poised or slow conquests. At this stage after an investigation of desire typologies in which way the desire manifests itself into the digital platform? According with the Politician Minetti the post-capitalist era, is introducing a new strategy to deal with what has been caused by the ascent of technology information proliferation “The abundance of free information in contrast to the system of monopolies, banks and governments” (S. Minetti, 2018) affecting the global socio-economic balance, proposing salvation through a unique concept “The challenge of inequality and the paradigm of sharing”(S. Minetti, 2018).

“From the ashes of the economic failure of the West it would seem possible to build a more

humane, equitable and sustainable society.” (S. Minetti, 2018) What have we deduced from this historical moment in terms of overwhelming?

James Bridle talks about “New dark age technology and the end of the future”

(J. Bridle, 2018) “An age in which the value we have placed upon knowledge is destroyed by the abundance of that profitable commodity, and in which we look about ourselves in search of new ways to understand the world.” (J. Bridle, 2018) The work #nyc (J. Mermelstein, 2020) by Jeff Mermelstein seems to testify the society's vulnerability, a cross-section of reality in which are evident the fragilities we have acquired in the process of dehumanisation.

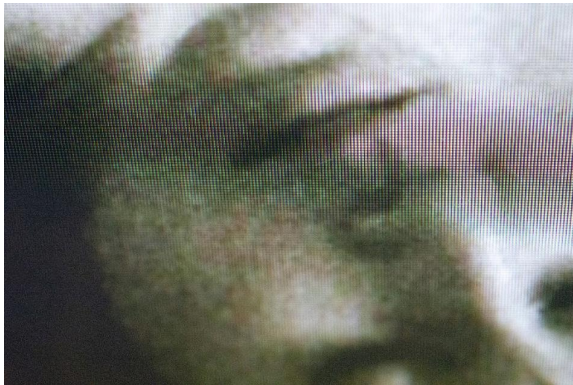
“Postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. Whoever lives by meaning dies by meaning”

(R. Chidwick, 2012)

“What will remain of us” (2019) was an exhibition placed at College Street Gallery, Swansea curated by the artist Abby Poulson, that regrouped 12 artists with singles own interpretations on the reinvention of the new world, describing how the advent of digital network culture impacted on society. A clear statement on the hybrids become and as part of an established cybernate society which is the milestone of our future, exploring themes like virtual connectivity, virtual feticist performances, in an atmosphere that seemed to be an annunciation of consequences and a reflection on the uncontrollable flow of human activity; a sort of induction to reevaluate the traces of human behaviours.



"Unexpected Error Occurs" (A.O'Brien,2019)



"Unexpected Error Occurs" (A.O'Brien,2019)

Alex O'Brien through "Unexpected Error Occurs" (A. O'Brien, 2019) is a documentation of how desire and the diffusion of the relationships on networks manifested in a virtual reality. I think his aim was to transfer the sensation of alertness perceived when the nascent phenomenon demonstrated its ambivalence translating into a deviant behaviour, recalling the work "Virtual Lovers" (C. R. Guelfi, 2022) "Sometimes it is in the virtual world that we allow ourselves to be real. In this way, even the relationships we live, become virtual and can feed a narcissistic personality, whose characteristic is to play the role of barker or charmer, who seduces on the basis of qualities that they do not actually possess." (C. R. Guelfi, 2022) I agree with the fact that individuals protected by a barrier tend to reveal their nature more easily, often becoming predators. Cristina Rizzi Guelfi is an auto-didactic photographer who, in a retrospective aura and cinematic staged scenarios which has become her signature and which places her in the Olympus of artists who are recognizable by their own identifying trademark, investigates social phenomena that are constantly interpreted by feminine

subjects. Her practice seems to perform a temporal cycle in which even if an initial feminine unawareness is caught, it makes her a participant and protagonist of this evolution. The exploration of social topics that encapsulates what the codified behaviours are. "The role of the sign as part of social life"(D. Chandelier 2002) in a confined space where social mechanisms are consumed in solitary form, but which summarise everything that can be shared and perceived by the rest of society. C. R. Guelfi is concerned of transferring the revealing messages by narrating contemporaneity without stigmatising it, but making use of the "reconfiguration of clichés" (E. Linden, 2020) . From the practice of selfies, to the feminine mystique, the cult of beauty to the desire transformed into a new cultural identity, she retraces the possession and awareness of the instruments by which society on the one hand consolidates and on the other crumbles and which makes us all a bit automatons. "the object that exists on the subject" (Tim, 2018) . The colonisation of the object, in this case non-abstract, as an integral part of the self definition "Symbolic Selves" (R. A. Wicklund P. M. Gpallwitzer, 1981)

Inspecting the images there is an exuberant physicality of woman which however, even if at first glance can be slightly misleading, in my opinion does not represent an argument of distraction and which does not detach the artist from the intent to show how dependence and subversion of gender roles play. In a purely feminine climate the imagery seems almost to appeal to a female audience in a sort of desired and sought-after male exclusion emphasising the reversal of emotional dependence which used to be consumed in a domestic ambience.

Some images are characterised by a male narcissism figure that often is miniaturised, as if to contain its ego, the passage from the attitude of contemplation to the act of mockery wrapped in a palpable resentment. Seems that the transition between the projects "Phobia"

(C. R. Guelfi, 2019) and "Domestic Bliss" (C. R. Guelfi, 2021) had equipped her woman with the desire for affirmation, while maintaining that veiled female "vulnerability" that makes her closer to the memory of the collective male idealisation, "Such gender rules and expectations are socially constituted and socially changeable" (I. M. Young- 2004) and that the retrospective setting of the images reinforces that meaning, in a representation suspended between reality and fiction where emerging an artist, as bearer of beauty as an ephemeral value, deliberately declared, and the tentative to normalise the woman attractiveness which has always represented a stereotyped condition. The suburban context is an ulterior font of information, the peripheries are the margins and the territory represents the castration of desires and expectations "place of absence: of history, of meaning, of "identity; or as a place of loss: of forms, of relationships, of qualities....it has come to encompass a series of stereotypes, negative meanings and prejudices turning into an adjective that indicates a condition more than sometimes represents a physical place." (Rizzoc, 2013) but the periphery also represents the desire of changing for a social redemption, where the Feminine Mystique (B. Friedan, 1963) took place and evolved with the consequent awakening of women that recognised the stratagem to domesticate them in order to reinforce the male supremacy. Domestic Bliss (C. R. Guelfi, 2021) is the project prior to Virtual Lovers (C. R. Guelfi, 2022) which narrates this phenomenon.

Do we need a face? (C. R. Guelfi, 2021) It is the revised acceptance of selfies as a social value and cross-section of contemporary society in terms of communication and gratification of exposure "Being envied is a solitary form of reassurance" (J. Berger, 1972) "The desire for response is heightened to abate the paranoia of invisibility" (C. P. Jones, 2018) and which gives to the digital gaze the polyvalence of gender inclusiveness and the possible conversion of "Men act and women appear" (J. Berger, 1972) in all variables.

"No gaze is stable, or rather, in the neutral furrow of the gaze piercing at a right angle

through the canvas, subject and object, the spectator and the model, reverse their roles to infinity" (T. Richardson, 2014) C. R. Guelfi exploits it in her own way by pointing at the deviant function of the information that is intended to deliver. "the possibility to show yourself to the world exactly in the way you want to be seen" (C. R. Guelfi,2021) quoting Arthur Shopenaper "A person's face as a rule says more, and more interesting things, than his mouth, for it is a compendium of everything his mouth will ever say, in that it is the monogram of all this man's thoughts and aspirations " - (C. R. Guelfi,2021) a form of expression compromised by social trends, showing in this series the potential anti-apotheosis of platform culture, which it mainly feeds on interaction through the concept of appearance, questioning how necessary this practice is? without demonising, but parodying this compulsion. This project slightly recalls, even in a completely different composition, the concept behind the masks of Ralph Eugen Meytard "denies not only individuality but intimacy" (B. Karl, 2017) as if to underline two qualities lost in favour of media exhibitionism.

Cristina Rizzi Guelfi images from the series:

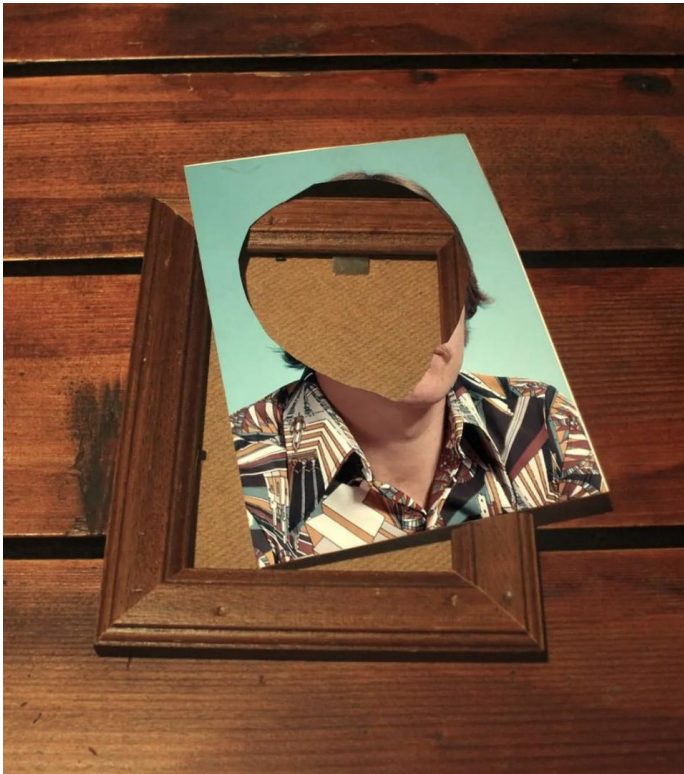
"Virtual lovers",

"We need a beauty [?]"

"Do [o]mestic Bliss"

"We need a face (?)"













Conclusion

Virtual Lovers Cristina disputes how in virtual relationships there is a risk of feeding a narcissistic ego on the other hand according to her statement "in the virtual world that we allow ourselves to be real,".(C.R. Guelfi, 2021) The woman depicted in a platinum hair incarnating a classic stereotype, sexually attractive in forms and gestures, what emerges from this series is a desire that crosses the border with what was once an unfeasible desire and that internet give access. Flaubert affirmed "Create a harem in your head and crowd it with dreams and fantasies.... indulge in the corrupt fascination of multitude because the mind is the only place in our body where abundance is not insane....the only corner where murder is not punished, incest is not judged, the only alcove in which to welcome the friend's woman without betraying him ... an advantage of our mind that is inside it abolished good taste " (Flaubert,1853) But is it possible that deepest thoughts, not specifically those indicated by Flaubert, could be materialized in times when morality no longer seems to reflect its more conventional meaning? Is it possible that nowadays the digital culture could be recognised as "responsible" allowing us, becoming a democratic tool, to give space to the no erupted and unexplored desires changing the social response to the cultural codes structure and moral ethics which society has felt the weight and repercussions of?(Slave Morality, Nietzsche, 1887) shaping us into a society where sexual innuendo is more explicit, compensating that privation? The journalist Paula Kommos defined them the "New Intimates" for how much the human interaction in order to establish an intimacy, predominantly sexual, has been distorted. "These modes of online communication are increasingly generating the paradox of physical anonymity and virtual intimacy." (P. Kommos, 2021) Could the sexual interaction practiced on media and the excitement deriving from digital gaze, be considered a fulfilled pleasure enough to fit into the statement of Foucault

“sexuality becomes an essential construct in determining not only moral worth, but also health, desire, and identity”? (Gary & J. Oksala, 2022) or represent a simulacrum of sex as Ballaurd affirmed? Is it possible to detect some mechanisms of domination, like sometimes happen in a physical relationship, in terms of couple role prevarication?

According to Jean Baudrillard, the effect of digital culture compromised the faculty to distinguish the difference between reality and fiction “The hyperreal is "more real than real": something fake and artificial comes to be more definitive of the real " (K. Douglas, 2020) .

It's safe to say that contemporary times don't represent ages of clarity, “We oscillate between the desire to be seen and the desire to draw away from the public eye; between resentment towards and appetite for "being looked at ". How does one reconcile the dual needs of recognition and anonymity?” (Fresheyes, 2020), and the new era of advanced platform culture, the politics of desire and persisting gaze create different perspectives, in agreement and in contradiction with each other, and hostilities, demonstrating that the cohabitation between 2 or more schools of thoughts, despite all, is plausible, in a sort of a new alliance between physical- virtual, real- unreal- hyperreal.

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