

## Quantum Filmmaking: Appraising the 21<sup>st</sup> century Modernist Neo-autonomy of Art

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### Abstract

Throughout art history, the practice of collage has motivated the beginning of progressive Modernism and the decadent Postmodernism, leading to the enunciation of the end of art. Thus, during the course of this paper I will be exposing how the practice of [Quantum Filmmaking](#), or participatory video-collage building upon the contemporary mobile media, may be inspiring the initiation of a new cultural epoch in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the innovative avant-garde spirit of progressive Modernism. This paradigm shift entails the beginning of “art for the arts’ sake” or the Neo-autonomy of art from the ideological strings of the market and institutions.

**Keywords:** Quantum filmmaking, collage, Neo-autonomy of art, 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive Modernism, eutopian aesthetics, mobile social media

## **Introduction**

The practice of collage is the art form and technique that stimulated the beginning of both progressive Modernism and the decadent Postmodernism. In the former, collage flourished as an innovative technique introducing elements of everyday life, whereas in the latter, it symbolised the inability of art of renewing itself, which led to the enunciation of the end of art. Therefore, during this article I will be exposing how through Quantum filmmaking, which is the practice of participatory video-collage building upon the contemporary mobile media, we are entering into a new cultural epoch with the innovative avant-garde spirit of progressive Modernism, which entails the beginning of “art for the arts’ sake” or its Neo-autonomy from the ideological strings of the market and institutions. For this, firstly, I will be introducing the Quantum filmmaking projects. These projects are at the core of the practice-based PhD I am currently undertaking at University of the Arts London (UK), in which I am developing [Quantum Film Theory](#) as aesthetic method, merging expanded cinema with subatomic physics, for the study of the Physics of Narrative in participatory mobile phone cinema (Fernandez, 2014c). After, I will be discussing the theories in regard to the autonomy of art, as well as the role of the practice of collage throughout art history. Finally, I will be analysing the paradigm shift provoked by the introduction of the mobile social media in contemporary art, such as, the eutopian aesthetics inherent to the projects, which gives rise to the Neo-autonomy of art during the 21st century progressive Modernist era.

## **Quantum Filmmaking**

Quantum filmmaking is the live process of the production and reception of participatory video-collages building upon the medium specificity of video mobile phones, Bluetooth and mobile social media, whose physics of narrative follows the ontological and epistemological principles of subatomic physics; the digital narratives materialise formally and semantically, anywhere and anytime, when interacting with the observers in their present tense, while entangling artists internationally into co-creation.

Quantum filmmaking is composed by the projects Kino-Present, Now&Here=Everywhere, and Re-constructing the X, which emphasise the agency of the observers and cinema to transform reality through the action of making films with camera phones. Each project has a different space-time approach to narrative in which, as in subatomic physics, past, present and future coexist in superposition; the past tense of the images allows the observers their future editing in the present tense.

[Kino-Present](#) (Fernandez, 2011a) is a multispatial and multitemporal single screen video-collage project, in which participating artists upload on to the website or send to us 15 second video clips. These are broadcast via Bluetooth in the public domain, creating ephemeral multiscreen mobile phone cinemas. After, the video clips are uploaded on to the website from the mobile phones, which can finally be edited online creating new video collages.



Figure 1. Kino-Present: Online video-editing



Figure 2. Kino-Present: Ephemeral multiscreen Cinema

[Now&Here=Everywhere](#) (Fernandez, 2011b) is the shortest international art collaboration in the history of humanity lasting for just 30 seconds, in which participants are invited to co-create multiscreen video-collages representing simultaneous moments from different locations of Planet Earth. The project invites participants to make a 30 second film with their camera phones at a certain date and time, and send them back straightaway to us via email and *WhatsApp*, to be published on to the *Gallery of Moments* of the website. The multiscreen video-collages are randomly composed every time the observers interact with them.



Figure 3. Now&Here = Everywhere

Finally, [Re-constructing the X](#) (Fernandez, 2014a) is a multiscreen video-collage project representing the different perspectives of an exact point in space and time. During the process, participants film for 30 seconds with their mobile phones their point of view shots of X, which is a specific moment in space and time, to co-create a multiscreen collage reconstructing the situation. In this project the video-collages are also permutable, as all the possible compositions render into one when the collapse button is pressed, transporting the moment in space and time.

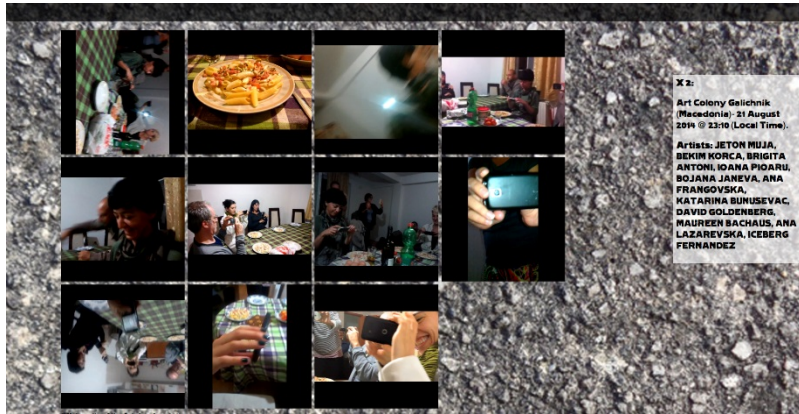


Figure 4. Reconstructing the X at Art Colony Galichnik 2014 (Macedonia)

Quantum filmmaking aims to carry on with the late Modernist project by merging art with everyday life, providing the framework to proclaim the Neo-autonomy of art in the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive Modernist era, a cultural epoch that I would like to suggest started manifesting with the development and implementation of the ubiquitous social media, circa 2006, in Post-Fordist societies.

### From the Autonomy to the Neo-autonomy of Art

The autonomy of art is a contradictory paradigm whose meaning has evolved throughout history. For instance, during the Renaissance, art gained its autonomy from religion, constituting itself as a discrete social system, whereas during the Enlightenment, toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, art as an institution was fully formed as we know it today, entailing the expansion of the institution to the public exhibition in the form of the “Salons”, as well as the development of art criticism. The Enlightenment created Aesthetics as a separate branch of Philosophy, which meant the separation of art from the praxis of life while becoming its own content. Thus, during the Modernist period, avant-garde artists began attempting to return art to the praxis of life. With the invention of photography, art becomes autonomous from the representation of narratives through the exploration of the abstraction of reality. Nevertheless, Theodor Adorno claims that “autonomous art is contradictory turning social by its opposition to society, criticizing it, as otherwise it becomes commodity” (2002, p. 225).

Upon seeing the first daguerreotype in Paris in 1839, the painter Paul Delaroche claimed; “From today painting is dead” (as cited in Lindsay, 2000). Nevertheless, the invention of photography served as a catalyst and turning point for Modern art to evolve, and painting as an artistic medium to explore and find its own self-referential autonomy, from mimesis to abstraction, while introducing elements of the quotidian life. Since the invention of photography, art did not have to mirror reality, but conversely, avant-garde artists wanted to create a new reality through art. On the one hand, the Impressionists left the studio behind and started painting with easels *en plain air*, representing “impressions” and scenes of everyday life with a sketchy and loose stroke, while exploring form, light and colour, and thus, challenging the coetaneous conservative artistic standards. This gesture meant a step forward towards the autonomy of art from the institution’s dictums while motivating its expansion through the creation of alternative circuits, such as, the *Salon de Refusés*

or *The Salon of the Refused*, and the later independent exhibitions organised by the group of Impressionists in order to show their work. The *Salon de Refusés* was organised by Napoleon III in Paris in 1863 to offer exposure to the artists rejected by the official Salon, whose tastes derived from the Romantic aesthetic ideals of the Academy, where historical and mythological themes with high moral values and a neat finish were the standard. In this context, Manet's [Luncheon on the Grass](#) (1863) was criticised for its subversive presentation of classical subject matter and its loose technique, as the painting represents a contemporary everyday life scene of two ladies and two gentlemen having a bucolic picnic in the forest, in which one of the ladies is deliberately naked and looking off-frame at the audience in a tranquil and pensive manner.

On the other hand, collage is one of the central techniques of the progressive Modernist art movements, which allowed artists breaking with classical visual narrative traditions and contributing to the discourse of the self-referential autonomy of art by introducing in the two dimensional surfaces of their paintings, textures and elements extracted directly from reality. This ideal of self-referentiality was sought by the avant-garde filmmakers who, exploring the cinematic medium, claimed its autonomy from traditional narrative forms inherited from literature and theatre, as expressed in the *Futurist Cinema Manifesto* (Marinetti et al., 1916). According to David Curtis (2007), the use of collage techniques, derived from Cubist collage, shed light on the development of narrative film in the 1920s and 1930s by giving new meanings to found fragments, as Fernand Léger did in [Ballet Mécanique](#) (1924), and thus, it contributed to the development of the montage techniques by Sergei Eisenstein in [The Battleship Potemkin](#) (1925) and Dziga Vertov in [Man with a Movie Camera](#) (1929).

With the advent of photography and cinematography, Walter Benjamin [1936] argued that the work of *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was a work of art designed for reproducibility, intrinsically grounded on the practice of politics. According to the author, the advent of photography, which coincided with the rise of socialism, provoked the liberation of “art for the arts’ sake” denying its bourgeois social function. During the text, Benjamin criticises and condemns the “aestheticisation” of politics, devising World War II as the result of it, which ended up symbolising the failure of the Modernist project. This aestheticisation of capitalist and fascist politics was also condemned by Clement Greenberg, who three years after published *The Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, in which he highlighted the avant-garde as a superior and a more critical culture while denouncing the *Kitsch* as the proliferation of the mass culture in the industrial West Capitalist and totalitarian societies, condemning it as the “simulacra of genuine culture”, cultivating the insensibility of the “masses”, through mechanical and “faked sensations” (Greenberg, 1939).

This division between “high” and “low” culture was dissolved by the practice of collage in the late 1950s, which meant the “transition” from Modernism to Postmodernism. While Modernism conceptualised its work as a continuous process of renovation, Postmodernism distanced from this principle re-appropriating past material forms, which led to the enunciation of the end of art. Nevertheless, as Lyotard points out “Postmodernism (...) is not Modernism at its end but in the nascent state” (1984). A remarkable manifestation of this transition, from late

Modernism to Postmodernism, is the work of Robert Rauschenberg, who in the 1950s with the Fluxus aim to merge art with life, assembled appropriated physical objects extracted from everyday life contexts and commercial photography, merging the realms of the *kitsch* and fine art. As example, the artist creates in 1959, [Canyon](#), a three dimensional composition supported on a two dimensional canvas, made out of very miscellaneous materials, such as: oil, house paint, pencil, paper, fabric, metal, buttons, nails, cardboard, printed paper, photographs, wood, paint tubes, mirror string, pillows and a “bald eagle”. Rauschenberg studied at the Black Mountain College in North Carolina, with other artists such as, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Stan VanDerBeek, who is the artist who created the [Movie-Drome Theater](#) in 1963; the first multiscreen collage pioneering expanded cinema practices.

Expanded cinema artists in the 1960s-70s defended with a progressive Modernist approach the discourse of the autonomy of cinema and explored its medium specificity. They rejected mainstream linear narrative because they found it manipulative and oppressive, and they engaged audiences into participation in order to “expand consciousness” (Youngblood, 1970). This approach is in the discursive line of the Enlightenment as it intended to reform society, challenging the authority of institutions such as the Catholic Church, driven by the slogan enunciated by Immanuel Kant [1784]; “Sapere Aude! Have courage to use your own reason!”

## Appraising 21<sup>st</sup> century Modernism

If collage has symbolised in art history the rise and the decline of Modernism, Quantum filmmaking, as the practice of participatory collage within the burgeoning field of the mobile social media, aims to invigorate the latent, positive and progressive spirit of Modernism. This Modernism does not mean to go back in history because, as Greenberg contends, “Modernist art continues the past without gap or break” (1965). Josephine Berry argues that contemporary Postmodernist net artists’ focus on appropriation and nonoriginal production is part of the logic of the Internet and inherent to the functioning of computers. Thus, as every copy that is made is indistinguishable from its “original”, “the whole notion of the original becomes obsolete” (Berry in Cox & Krysa, 2005, p. 138). Nevertheless, the Modernist co-authored video-collages created in Quantum filmmaking are composed by original videos filmed by the participating artists with their camera-phones. Further, according to Quantum Film Theory (Fernandez, 2014c), the physics of the digital narratives on the net follows the ontological principles of subatomic physics, as they can be anywhere and anytime, or everywhere at once. Subsequently, they are all originals.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive Modernism emerges with the development of the social media during the worst economic recession in the history of humanity which, since 2008, has made people all over the world rise against neoliberalism resembling the riots of May 1968, reimagining other socio-political alternatives, under the French Revolution’s slogan *Freedom, Equality and Fraternity*, and advocating for progress, innovation and social change. This scenario has given rise to Quantum filmmaking that, as participatory practice, has its roots in the anarchist Happenings of Allan Kaprow in the 1960s who believed “that audiences should be eliminated entirely” (Kaprow in Bishop, 2006), introducing the observers in the action and space of the performances, in order “to produce, a more positive and non-hierarchical social

model” (Bishop, 2006). Nevertheless, Peter Bürger remarks, “the failure of the avant-garde utopia of the unification of art and life coincides with the avant-garde’s overwhelming success within the art institution” (2010, p. 706). Thus, Quantum filmmaking continues the avant-garde Modernist project of the 1960s, merging art with everyday life through the ubiquitous mobile social media. The projects aim to promote creativity in society by reminding everybody that creativity and imagination are qualities inherent to the human condition. These thoughts are in the discursive line of the *Social Sculpture* theory by Joseph Beuys, who believed in the artistic potential of every member of society and art’s potential to transform it. The aim is to stimulate more critical and original thinking, in order to escape from the endless Postmodernist labyrinth of simulacra imposed by the mass media, in which we think thoughts already conveyed and thought for us by somebody else and, echoing Baudrillard, their repetition and simulation are more real than reality itself.

## Eutopian Aesthetics

Participatory online art practices have provoked controversy among critics and practitioners. As Lev Manovich (1996) points out; “For the West, interactivity is a perfect vehicle for the ideas of democracy and equality. For the East, it is another form of manipulation, in which the artist uses advanced technology to impose his/her totalitarian will on the people.” Eggo Muller (in Van Den Boomen et al., 2009) labels these two opposing discourses as “utopian” and dystopian respectively, concluding that they create two different fields of study. Further, Claire Bishop highlights the fact that participatory art is not as radical as it used to be in the 60s, as neoliberal governments are instrumentalising it for social ends “as a way to provide homeopathic solutions to problems that are systemic” (Bishop in Barok, 2009). Or, in other words, they are using participatory practices for the “social inclusion” of “marginalised” sectors of society when the problem is rooted in the capitalist system itself. Subsequently, I would argue that the only way to achieve a real social equality would be by transforming the current status quo; if this system has been created by us, it follows that we can also re-invent it. Therefore, Quantum filmmaking presents eutopia as the possibility of “utopia” in the present tense, emphasising the agency of the observers to transform reality, as it has been scientifically demonstrated in subatomic physics. But in this context the camera phone replaces the microscope. Thus, the Physics of Narrative of the experimental projects introduce the eutopian discourse in the context of contemporary participatory art, which consists of promoting not just the value of a non-hierarchical society, but also emphasising the agency of the observers to transform it, as the mobile social media could be used as tools in a truly democratic system legislated by the citizens through referenda. Hereby, artists working in any discipline would have the freedom they need to operate, as art would also be liberated from the neoliberal ideological demands of the market because, as Clement Greenberg contended in the *Avant-Garde Art and Kitsch* [1939], the real autonomy of artists to create would be achieved only in a socialist political system.

The eutopian aesthetics of Quantum filmmaking thrives in the Neo-autonomy of art and artists within the context of the ubiquitous mobile social media, entangling artists internationally into co-creation in the realm of quotidian life, for the arts’ sake. The

projects dissolve the hierarchical binary opposition between art producers and receivers, roles that coexist in superposition, implying a distantiating from the hegemonic relations of production; the artworks are in a continuous process of becoming in which their use value equals their exchange value. Hence, since there is not a final product, and therefore, there is not a profit, the art projects achieve the Neo-autonomy from the market, promoting in society the value of teleological participation with attribution or coauthorship. The eutopian aesthetics of participation allows the harmonic coexistence of different approaches and opinions, connecting the creativity and points of view of art practitioners with nonpractitioners, from different geographical locations, celebrating difference and diversity. Participation in the projects is based upon free association, which means that anyone with access to a camera phone and the Internet can get involved. As a matter of fact, the age demographics of participation in the projects range between 4 and 93 years old. During the projects, artists have the freedom to choose whether they would like to participate in the projects or not. They have the autonomy to choose the visual aesthetics of the video by selecting, or not, one filter from the range featured in the mobile phone, the framing of the video and the camera movement. Therefore, the assemblages of the video-collages, random or intended, are the consequence of the sum of all the free choices made by all the artists involved in the systems. Subsequently, within the context of the mobile social media, I would suggest that the accessibility to the tools of art and film production and exhibition is transforming the “masses”, created and despised by the culture industry (Adorno, 1991), into a multidirectional network composed of proactive individuals, which favours the development of creativity and individual discourses beyond the neoliberal parameters dictated through the mainstream media.

## Conclusion

Benjamin started the pessimistic essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [1936], by quoting a fragment by Paul Valéry from the poem, *The Conquest of Ubiquity*, dated back in 1928, in which the poet anticipated the transformation of our perception of art and its structures through a technological evolution. Thus, the pervasive mobile social media seem to fulfil the paradigm shift projected by Valéry’s messianic prediction as they are democratising the production of art, its exhibition and, therefore, its perception. This new paradigm entails the subsequent expansion of the official institution and the alternative exhibition circuit, initiated by Napoleon III, into the realm of everyday life. For instance, artists finally have achieved the freedom to show their work online and critics have the chance to publish their reviews without having to depend on the legitimisation of their narratives by the institutions. The immediate consequence of this decentralisation is that since the standardisation of the social media, there is not just one metanarrative in art history but a multinarrative; archaeologies of the present archived on the Internet and accessible to *anyone, anytime*.

All the arguments exposed during this paper lead to the conclusion that the evolution and the progressive implementation of the mobile social media in Post-Fordist societies is transforming the ontology of art and expanding the institution created during the Enlightenment in a progressive Modernist fashion. Nicolas Bourriaud



proposed in 2009 the term *Altermodern*, suggesting the starting of “other” Modernism and different possibilities to a single route. However, recalling Lyotard’s assertion about Postmodernism in which he claimed that it is “Modernism at a nascent state” (1984), and following Greenberg’s statement “Modernism continues the past without a break” (1965), the research suggests that it is not “another” Modernism, but the same one that keeps re-inventing itself and blossoming according to the technological developments of the different epochs, in this case, the mobile social media. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that Quantum filmmaking as avant-garde collage practice building upon the mobile media, is introducing a new artistic approach during the cultural epoch of the 21<sup>st</sup> century progressive Modernism in which, echoing Beuys, everyone is an artist on a global scale, *for the arts’ sake*.

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## **About the Author**

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