

# The Meaning of Storytelling in the Immediate Future

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## Abstract

The contemporary world is marked by technological developments, especially in communication. The cultural revolution in linguistic caused by the development of the digital communication technologies brought in new codes changing the way we humans relate to each other, accordingly the way we think and the way we live. The end of Grand Narratives announced a post-historical period where the boundaries between reality and fiction, history and story disappeared. The liquidation of the meaning, on one hand, has been celebrated by capitalist logic in form of endlessly expanding markets, on the other hand, it has caused an intellectual crisis within the history of the Western thought. In the contemporary world, the ever increasing human activities haven't been only undermining the planet unprecedentedly but also opening up new horizons. Vilem Flusser points both the creative potentials of the human in the immediate future and the dangers the human creativity is about to face therein. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze points out that creativity has the capacity to de-territorialize the transformative energies of the world and re-territorialize them in order to re-design planet's and human kind's future. This work, in a period of time where the boundaries between history and story have been melting down, speculates on the potentials and the meaning of storytelling in the immediate future of humanity

## 1. Art as storytelling

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche considers the historical human as who is not fully capable of enveloping the present and thus who leaves traces behind itself because of this incapacity. According to Nietzsche, unlike human, the beast lives unhistorically within the present "like a number without leaving any curious reminder. It cannot dissimulate, it conceals nothing, at every moment it seems what is actually is, and thus can be nothing that is not honest"<sup>i</sup>. For that reason, Nietzsche values the historical study, the study of a massive past which presses down the human, as long as it holds the future as a 'life-giving' influence, as what does not guide and dominate but what is guided and dominated by a 'higher force'.<sup>ii</sup>

Today it is a problem to choose among an immense literature of human history and to understand what is written and what is told, combining the ideas doubtfully, to find or to create a basis to rethink the human existence in a meaningful way, to contribute to the historical narrative, and critical thought.<sup>iii</sup> Besides, it is added to that a cultural revolution unprecedentedly noticeable. According to Czech-born philosopher Vilem Flusser at the core of human existence, there lies the question of subjectivity and due to the transformation of the communication technologies, namely of the *media*, the human subject is subject to change radically. This new human subject of the computerised world is freed from its direct relation to the object, thus can interact with the world beyond subject/object dichotomy.<sup>iv</sup> In this context Flusser points to the disappearance of the art object. He opens a path to an intersubjective and immaterial art rather than an objective and material one. What Flusser calls as immaterial art is an evolutionary achievement of human that comes forward as a communication strategy.<sup>v</sup> In this sense, art should not any more in-form the object but should address the electromagnetic and bio-technic developments to catch up with its dimension that in-forms the world. In other words, art should not inform the object but the technology and the science with imagination in order to give a direction to the cultural revolution that has been occurring at the core of human communication.

Nietzsche had conceptualised an immaterial art and placed it at the very core of human being. For him, existence is deprived of any intrinsic or transcendental meaning and thus there is not a truth to discover and the meaning is not to be discovered, but to be created. To give meaning to the world is a manifestation of the will to power and it is the very basis of artistic act. According to Nietzsche, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an *artist*. And he *is* one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science - all of them only products of his will to art. ...Art and nothing but art! It is the great means of making life possible, the great seduction of life, the great stimulant of life.<sup>vi</sup>

Nietzsche considers the artistic activity as the capacity of mean making in a meaningless world, the capacity of creating a reality and continuously re-shaping it. Within a Nietzschean context, then, one could argue that all human are storytellers, and what we call history is nothing but the art of storytelling that informs the future, the latest form of human communication.

## 2. The story of cultural revolution

The capitalist society, once more, has brought us to the edges of a revolution. The cultural revolution in linguistic caused by the development of the digital communication technologies elaborated new codes which are changing fundamentally the way we humans relate to each other, accordingly the way we think and the way we live.<sup>vii</sup> According to Flusser, the world of computers that is based on algorithms and bits has finally the potential to create a model in order to give a direction to our current cultural revolution which will

open up the path for a new communication strategy in course of evolution and which will let us finally call *our communication as our art*.<sup>viii</sup>

According to Flusser, the current cultural revolution is a consequence of historical evolution, and “[m]emory, the central problem of historical evolution, is also the central problem of art, which is essentially a method of fabricating artificial memories.”<sup>ix</sup> He mainly calls into question the *materiality* of human art. According to Flusser, the art being material as the pursuit of human for immortality is problematical, since the material objects through which the human seeks to become immortal are also subject to the rules of thermodynamics and will decay in their turn. In this sense, for Flusser, art should stop seeking immortality through objects but should enter into the immaterial web of information and the art, as it is today, should disappear and perhaps turn into a mere human activity of communication.<sup>x</sup> Art should not inform the world and the cultural revolution that has been occurring at the core of human communication by telling the story of human.

Vilem Flusser pointed to the cultural revolution that the computerised world is facing as equal to the invention of writing for human kind. According to Flusser the invention of writing was the invention of a tool that made the historical thinking possible and today the advanced digital technologies is causing an impact at a similar magnitude on our way of thinking, putting an end to the history as we have conceptualised it so far. According to Flusser, human intellect should be challenged in order to grow. The digital technologies with their complex structure can provide us with a potential of intellectual growth. Yet, Flusser also points to the popular trends for the simplistic use of such technologies that has a stupefying effect on human intellect.<sup>xi</sup> The importance given to the user friendly concept within the highly competitive capitalist market is an example of such trends. The same logic is applicable to the creative fields where storytelling with its all potentials for growth is commonly reduced to a structural formula shaping and feeding on a standardised, superficial common taste by creative industries.

### 3. History as storytelling

The end of Grand Narratives as Lyotard puts it<sup>xii</sup> announced a post-historical period where the boundaries between reality and fiction, history and story disappeared. The liquidation of the meaning, on one hand, has been celebrated by capitalist market in form of free expansion, on the other hand, it has caused an intellectual crisis within the history of the Western thought. One of the earliest theoretician of this crises was French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. He placed the concept of simulation at the very centre of his critique of capitalist society. His theory of simulation distinguishes simulation from imitation referring to a reality principle. “Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever stimulates an illness produces in himself some symptoms.”<sup>xiii</sup> Whereas the imitation doesn’t change the reality principle the simulation eliminates it. This way, the concept of simulation undermines the binary oppositions such as true and false, original and copy since in Baudrillard’s example, it is not possible to say if the person is ill or not, as in the case of simulation the person is both ill and not ill at the same time.

In order to explain further his concept of simulation Baudrillard refers to the iconoclast who is against the representation of divine. According to him, it is so not because the divine cannot be represented but because the iconoclast is aware of the power of the simulation and is afraid that the representations of divine can replace divine itself. The omnipotence of simulacra can efface God from the conscience of man because simulacra present the destructive and annihilating truth that God never existed, that only the simulacrum ever existed, even that God himself was never anything but his own simulacrum.<sup>xiv</sup> According to Baudrillard, if iconoclasts had thought that the images only mask the reality of God, they would have been able to live with the idea of distorted truth. However, the images as simulacra do not merely mask the reality and so distort it, but reign in the absence of the reality.<sup>xv</sup> This way, Baudrillard pointed to the contemporary thought as what undermined the original/copy and real/fiction dichotomy. Due to the emergence of new communication technologies humankind found itself in the new world of simulation. Baudrillard describes this as follows:

[T]here is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity. At the fractal stage there is no longer any equivalence, whether natural or general.<sup>xvi</sup> (1993:5)

The hyperrealism, as Baudrillard puts it, eliminates the referential points in so much as that there remains no place for any kind of value. Now, it is only the dispersal of value. It is no longer possible to speak of ‘value’ at all, for such kind of propagation or chain reaction makes all valuation impossible.<sup>xvii</sup> In terms of Baudrillard “[t]he situation resembles that of a currency which may not be exchanged: it can only float, its only reference itself, impossible to convert into real value or wealth.”<sup>xviii</sup> For Baudrillard<sup>xix</sup> modernity is marked by a vast overproduction of everything from goods to ideas without being able to assign any authentic value to anything. For Baudrillard nothing disappears through diminution anymore. Instead, things disappear through proliferation or contamination, by becoming saturated or transparent, because of extenuation or extermination, or as a result of the epidemic of simulation, as a result of their transfer into the secondary existence of simulation. Rather than a mortal mode of disappearance, a fractal mode of dispersal.<sup>xx</sup>

The reality is eliminated and there remained nothing but fiction. In other words, in the post-historical era the history was turned into a story. Certainly such liquidation of value and reality caused a crises and echoed widely in the post-modern thought. Canadian political philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi illustrated his contemporary consciousness as a movement in an aimless orbit around an

empty centre.<sup>xxi</sup> Yet, he also pointed to the contemporary thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze who underlines the creative potentials of this consciousness and by doing so shows a way out of the crisis that the disappearance of referential points, liquidation of meaning, the end of Grand Narratives, the end of history as it was known to us caused.

#### 4. De/Re-territorialisation of the transformative energies

The capitalist world is not only marked by the liberation from old world's values to the extent that the boundaries between real and fiction disappear but also the undermining the concrete structure of the planet unprecedentedly. Yet, despite of the pessimist illustrations of the era, Deleuze's philosophy points out that creativity has the capacity to de-territorialise the transformative energies of the world and re-territorialise them in order to re-design the planet's and the human kind's future. In order to activate the creative potentials Deleuze suggests a new way of thinking that he calls *nomad thought*. "Nomad thought does not immure itself in the edifice of an ordered interiority; it moves freely in an element of exteriority. It does not repose on identity; it rides difference."<sup>xxii</sup> Massumi explains that Deleuzian nomad thought is that of difference. According to his interpretation, whereas the State thinking tends to fix solid and static identities, nomad thought comes out as a way of thinking which is always floating between concepts, reproducing and affirming difference. This perpetual movement between concepts can be understood in terms of de/re-territorialization. Nomads permanently experience the process of deterritorialization, which means, in terms of Deleuze, the process of going out from a context towards a new and unknown context. Nomads do not own the territory, the space and its context. They borrow it, interact with it, they become with it or they become the territory. They are in a perpetual movement between territories, meanings, between contexts. Their movement is perpetual because, according to Deleuze, nomadism does not necessarily imply a spatial change. His focus is rather on the de-contextualization, deterritorialization of the settled identities, meanings and codes even while staying in the same space. Deleuze writes: [T]he nomad is not necessarily one who moves: some voyages take place in situ, are trips in intensity. Even historically, nomads are not necessarily those who move about like migrants. On the contrary, they do not move; nomads, they nevertheless stay in the same place and continually evade the codes of settled people."<sup>xxiii</sup>

Hence, according to Deleuze, this continuous deterritorialization, of evading the codes, comes out as a positive process where things are freed from their static identities, from 'being something' and are opened to new potentials of becoming something other than what they are. Deleuze states that unless it is an absolute deterritorialization every deterritorialization is relative and implies necessarily a reterritorialization, a re-contextualization; so deterritorialization and reterritorialization exist simultaneously. However, in nomadic thought the orientation from de-contextualization to re-contextualization then again to another de-contextualization is a continuous process of life; it does not seek to stop on a specific context permanently "even if the journey is a motionless one, even if it occurs on the spot, imperceptible, unexpected and subterranean"<sup>xxiv</sup>. Deleuze and his co-writer French psychotherapist Felix Guattari explain this correlated process in terms of nature, since it is not a process exclusively related to humans. Putting the human back in its place in nature, Deleuze and Guattari explain the coexistence of deterritorialization and reterritorialization through the connections of an orchid and a wasp in terms of reproduction:

How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome [.]<sup>xxv</sup>

Everything, like the orchid and the wasp, is in becoming and becomings interlink within the process of deterritorialization on one side and reterritorialization on the other. By doing so they carry the de/re-territorialization process further and further for the creation of new connections. The process of de/re-territorialization is not a relationship of imitation nor resemblance but "only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying".<sup>xxvi</sup> Within this context, whereas State thinking imposes pre-given frameworks to adapt the flow to its structural framework by breaking it down into seemingly solid dispositions and identities, nomadic thinking goes with the flow; not in a chaotic fashion but in harmony with it. And these two ways of approaching life, of thinking, point out a radical distinction towards difference and identity which our perception of 'the self' and even 'the reality' stands on. Deleuze shows this difference by two formulas: 'only that which resembles differs' of Plato and 'only differences can resemble each other' of Nietzsche.<sup>xxvii</sup> These are two distinct readings of the world: one invites us to think difference from the standpoint of a previous similitude or identity; whereas the other invites us to think similitude and even identity as the product of a deep disparity."<sup>xxviii</sup>

State thought defines the life through pre-constructed and pre-given frameworks by a solid 'essential' identity which seemingly resists to change. On the other hand, nomadic thinking creates floating identities to embrace the radical differences which volatile identities stand on, and thus to make the manifold connections between differences possible. In this sense, thinking of Massumi's remark on nomadic thought which is not dogmatic but pragmatic, it is possible to say that accordingly it is not judgmental but affirmative. Massumi says:

The modus operandi of nomad thought is affirmation, even when its apparent object is negative. Force is not to be confused with power. Force arrives from outside to break constraints and open new vistas. Power builds walls.”<sup>xxxix</sup>.

Nomad thought is about affirming life naturally without applying any moral codes to it. According to Deleuze, what Spinoza calls Nature is “a life no longer lived on the basis of need, in terms of means and ends, but according to a production, a productivity, a potency, in terms of causes and effects”<sup>xxx</sup>. Nomad thought increases potency instead of oppressing it. When life is affirmed as life, it does not fall under the hierarchical dispositions of identity categories. The differences are set free to conjoin in a way that they can increase their potency. The free connections bring forth change, including the change of the perception of the self and of the reality. Thus, nomadic thought provides us with a ground where the history and more radically the reality is fluid and in perpetual change. Another French philosopher, Michel Foucault, resumes the call of Deleuze for the nomadic thought for a productive life: Develop action, thought, and desires by proliferation, juxtaposition, and disjunction, and not by subdivision and pyramidal hierarchisation. ... Withdraw allegiance from the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna), which Western thought has so long held sacred as a form of power and an access to reality. Prefer what is positive and multiple, difference over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems. Believe that what is productive is not sedentary but nomadic.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

Such an attempt to affirm life, difference over similarity, would stand on a continuous deterritorialization, conscious dissolution of the previous codes and liberation of thought and creation from parcelled spaces, towards the open space of immanence, towards unlimited potentials. These potentials in their turn would be necessarily reterritorialized, yet within nomadic thought the reterritorialization will again be followed by deterritorialization. In this sense, every de/reterritorialization process always creates a free space for creativity that lets us conceptualize difference as the possibility of conjunction rather than a necessity of dispersion and exclusion. Difference is, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, neither to be denied nor to be refused but affirmed. They affirm life with its actual and virtual dimensions, with what is realized and with what might be realized continuously without submitting it to a set of categorical oppositions.

In this context, Deleuze and Guattari reveal the production mechanisms of capitalism and not only that produce goods but also desires, subjects, perceptions and stories. According to Deleuze-Guattarian analysis, capital does not code the subjects according to a transcendental belief system or a specific ideology but according to the capacity they add to the flow of capital. In this sense, the flow of capital is not based on a transcendental but immanent order which allows the continuity of things as long as they are transformable into the flow of capital. Deleuze and Guattari adopt Marxist analysis of capitalism “as an immanent system that’s constantly overcoming its own limitations, and then coming up against them once more in a broader form, because its fundamental limit is Capital itself” (Deleuze, 1995:171). In this sense, capitalism is liberating to a certain extent since it allows new forms of knowledge and of belief and even the forms of art. Yet, Baudrillard<sup>xxxii</sup> had argued that this so-called liberation was illusory and it was liquidating the meaning rather than being liberating. Deleuze-Guattarian analysis also points to the limitation of capitalist freedom. Capitalism allows new forms of knowledge and of belief and even the forms of art by freeing things from static identities which block the flow of capital yet it does so only if and as long as they do not interrupt the flow of capital. If they interrupt the flow, capital tends to deterritorialize them again and reterritorialize them in terms of the capital. This way, the ideologies, opinions, arts and ways of producing which were once blocking, slowing down and threatening this flow are turned into a market product within this flow. So, capitalism does not oppress the differences as an oppressive system but systematically manages them, reducing the flow of life into one flow for the sake of progress and efficiency, since things are valued as such within capitalism. According to Massumi<sup>xxxiii</sup>, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization comes out as an inherent positive dynamic of the capitalist market and it frees things from their previously set solid identities in order to re-code them in terms of the market. This is how the common structural and contentual language of the popular culture of the creative industries of capitalism stupefy, as Flusser puts it, the general intellect.

## 5. The meaning of storytelling in the immediate future

Vilem Flusser points both to the creative potentials of the human in the immediate future and the dangers the human creativity is about to face therein:

Why is it that dogs aren't yet blue with red spots, and that horses don't yet radiate phosphorescent colors over the nocturnal meadows of the land? Why hasn't the breeding of animals, still principally an economic concern, moved into the field of esthetics? Why can't art inform nature? When we ask why dogs can't be blue with red spots, we're really asking about art's role in the immediate future, which is menaced not only by explosions both nuclear and demographic, but equally by the explosion of boredom.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

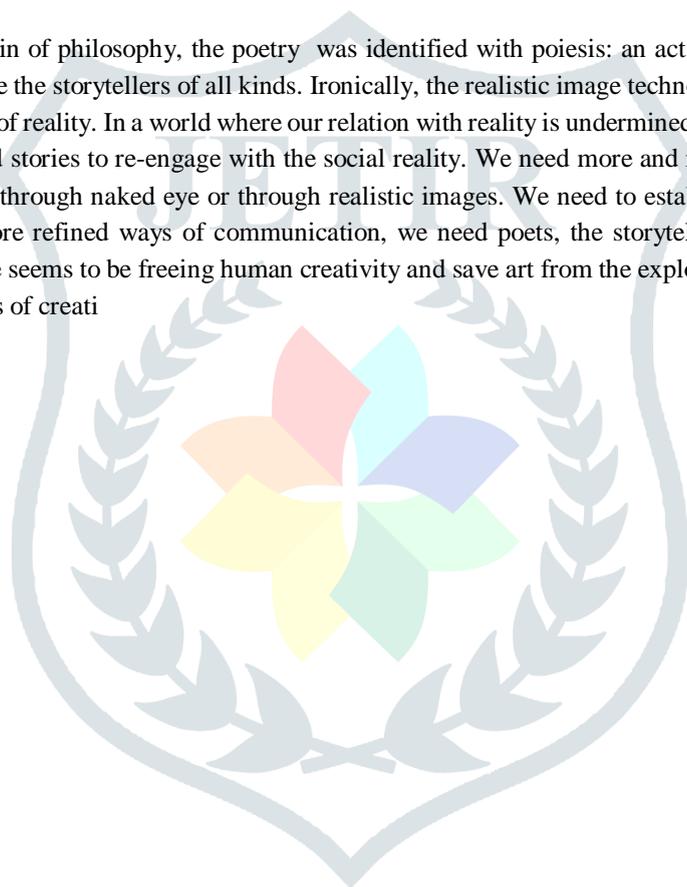
Flusser hopes for a future where even the biology, one of the most materialist aspects of human knowledge, becomes a medium for a more creative storytelling. Similar to Deleuze and Guattari, Flusser is also concerned about the superficiality of a profit-based economy especially when it comes to awaken the creative potentials of human, for they are all aware that in a period of time where history has become a story, where the imagination and creativity supersede the fact, the future of humanity depends on how the story of human will be told more than ever.

Capitalist logic has been on one hand unbinding the old world values and opening up room for human creativity and the new markets, on the other hand coding the newly emerging creative energies in terms of the capital. The still limited use of contemporary technologies with all the potential they brought in is only an example of the limitations of the capitalist freedom. Yet, according to Massumi the capitalist machine oppresses, re-forms and re-orient desire and creativity for the sake of the profit yet due to its deterritorialization dynamics the possibilities of another worlds, of another stories remain open.<sup>xxxv</sup> The capitalism as well as the planet Earth is already a complex system with its de/re-territorialising powers. According to Flusser, the human intellect grows as long as it gives a system, no matter simple or complex in structure, a complex function<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Thus, the new technologies, especially the new communication technologies, should be used in a creative way in order to increase the complexity.

Today, despite of the commercial and social pressure, many people around the world are looking for creative outlets to challenge the capitalist economy, the popular creative industries and more generally the human mind. As Deleuze puts it the struggle in the contemporary world is in-between the powers who try to fix the creative forces of the planet and who try to free them. Deleuze call the latter as poets:

The assassin is one who bombards the existing people with molecular populations that are forever closing all of the assemblages, hurling them into an ever wider and deeper black hole. The poet, on the other hand, is one who lets loose molecular populations in hopes that this will sow the seeds of, or even engender, the people to come, that these populations will pass into a people to come, open a cosmos.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In classical Greek, at the very origin of philosophy, the poetry was identified with poiesis: an act of creation.<sup>xxxviii</sup> The poet, the liar-artist human of Nietzsche, today are the storytellers of all kinds. Ironically, the realistic image technologies with their potential to create simulacra seems to blind our sense of reality. In a world where our relation with reality is undermined we need more and more elaborated ways, more and more sophisticated stories to re-engage with the social reality. We need more and more poetic story-tellers in order to be able to see what we cannot see through naked eye or through realistic images. We need to establish an augmented sense of reality and in order to do so we need more refined ways of communication, we need poets, the storytellers. In this sense, the meaning of storytelling in the immediate future seems to be freeing human creativity and save art from the explosion of boredom and undertake the task to re-create the reality in terms of creati



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- <sup>ii</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich W., (2010), *The Use and Abuse of History*, NY: Cosimo Classics, p12
- <sup>iii</sup> Celik, Isil E., (2012), *From Being to Becoming: Body-Image-Simulation*, MDes in Design Studies, Izmir University of Economics, Graduate School of Social Sciences, Izmir, p8-9
- <sup>iv</sup> Flusser, Vilém, (1988), 'Curie's Children, A new Imagination', *Artforum*, October, p14-5
- <sup>v</sup> Flusser, Vilém; Bec, Louis, (2012), *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, Trans. Valentine A. Pakis, London: University of Minnesota Press, p67
- <sup>vi</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich W., (1967), *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann, R. J. Hollingdale, New York: Random House, p853
- <sup>vii</sup> Flusser, Vilém, (1988), 'On Writing, Complexity and Technical Revolutions', Interview by Miklós Peternák in Osnabrück, European Media Art Festival, September, (10'30")
- <sup>viii</sup> Flusser, Vilém; Bec, Louis, (2012), *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, Trans. Valentine A. Pakis, London: University of Minnesota Press
- <sup>ix</sup> Vilem Flusser, Louis Bec, (2012), *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, Trans. Valentine A. Pakis (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p61
- <sup>x</sup> Flusser, Vilém; Bec, Louis, (2012), *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, Trans. Valentine A. Pakis, London: University of Minnesota Press
- <sup>xi</sup> Flusser, Vilém, (1988), 'On Writing, Complexity and Technical Revolutions', Interview by Miklós Peternák in Osnabrück, European Media Art Festival, September 1988 (10'30")
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- <sup>xiv</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (2006), *Simulacra and Simulation*, Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, USA: The University of Michigan Press , p4,5
- <sup>xv</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (2006), *Simulacra and Simulation*, Trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, USA: The University of Michigan Press , p5
- <sup>xvi</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (1993), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London/ NY: Verso, p5
- <sup>xvii</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (1993), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London/ NY: Verso, p5
- <sup>xviii</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (1993), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London/ NY: Verso, p14,15
- <sup>xix</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (1993), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London/ NY: Verso
- <sup>xx</sup> Baudrillard, Jean, (1993), *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Trans. James Benedict, London/ NY: Verso, p4
- <sup>xxi</sup> Massumi, Brian, (1987), 'Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari', [http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/first\\_and\\_last/works/realer.htm](http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/first_and_last/works/realer.htm), Reach date: May 2011 p90
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