



**NUNO MIGUEL
PEREIRA ESCUDEIRO**

**REPRESENTAÇÃO DE UMA
IDENTIDADE CULTURAL:
ETNOGRAFIA E ARTE
MULTIMÉDIA**



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**REPRESENTING CULTURAL
IDENTITY: ETHNOGRAPHY AND
MULTIMEDIA ART**

Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprir dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Comunicação e Multimédia realizada sobre a orientação científica do Doutor António Manuel Dias Costa Valente, Professor Auxiliar do Departamento de Comunicação e Arte da Universidade de Aveiro.

“Every discourse, even a poetic or oracular sentence, carries with it a system of rules for producing analogous things and thus an outline of methodology.”
(Jacques Derrida)

o júri

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palavras-chave

Representação, Etnografia, Pós-estruturalismo, Identidade, multimédia, estrutura, arte, audiovisual, material thinking

Resumo

“Je est un autre” é uma instalação audiovisual, cujo objectivo é representar uma identidade cultural, através da arte multimédia. Para a execução desta obra, eu pergunto: Como pode ser representada uma identidade? Esta dissertação levanta os conceitos teóricos chave que sustentam a criação da instalação, discutindo a definição de identidade, e o modo como esta identidade pode ser traduzida numa criação artística. Esta dissertação apresenta uma solução conceptual para a representação de uma identidade colectiva, através da reflexão da identidade individual e de técnicas para a desconstrução das estruturas narrativas clássicas. A dissertação estabelece um processo investigativo com base em processos de “Material Thinking”, pensar sobre os materiais utilizados no processo criativo. Este trabalho toma em consideração as relações entre linguagem e interpretação da realidade, através das contribuições de Derrida e semiótica.

Keywords

Representation, Ethnography, Postructuralism, identity, multimedia, structure, art, Audiovisual, material thinking

Abstract

“Je est un autre” is an interactive installation, aiming to represent cultural identity through multimedia art.

In this dissertation I ask: How can we represent identity? The present text raises the key theoretical concepts that sustain this artistic creation, discussing the definition of identity, and how this identity may be translated into artistic creation. The dissertation establishes a research process, based on “Material Thinking”, a method for rationalizing over the materials used in the creative process.

This dissertation presents a conceptual proto-methodological solution for representing collective identity, through a reflection of individual identity and presenting a solution for the use of structure against itself. It takes into account the different actors that take part in the representation process and the relationship between language and reality, through the contributions of Derrida and Semiotics.

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1 Introduction

This artistic project was born from a simple exploration of contrasting and comparing two different cultural identities, laying within the territorial space of Finland and Portugal, the two tips of the European continent, one bordering the East, Russia, and the other bordering the “New World” through the Atlantic Ocean. This project was built during an exchange program, where I, a Portuguese citizen, have worked as a trainee in the city of Rovaniemi, in Finish Lapland.

The first exploration methodological concepts selected for this project were based on modernist concepts and structures, claiming that culture could be somehow represented by Text, by a subjective look that crystalized culture through the artist’s/researcher’s eye, claiming itself objective and faithful. Through reading and research, this method has collapsed, giving way for a whole new conceptual and exploratory insight. The new methodology takes into account not only content and message, but also an attempt to structurally articulate with the abstract operations the mind undergoes while interpreting reality itself. The new art-work aims to be a metacognitive process, simulating the mediation of the world by mind, culture and abstraction in a multimedia installation. The project aims to works upon the consciousness of the user, stimulating his perspective on the interpretation of reality, on its complexity and on the impossibility to fully grasp it.

The artistic project is named “Je est une autre”, a quote extracted from a letter of the poet Arthur Rimbaud. This artistic project aims to explore the relationship between the self and the other, the individual and the collective, the search for the identity and its source. It works on the relation between the individual identity and the collective and how they structure and interrelate themselves. To what point is the individual identity extended into becoming one other, one collective identity? “Is I one other”? What is this extension of other, how far and multiple are collective identities? This is the artistic question, the artistic statement inscribed in the installation. On the other hand, this project disserts on the validity of these questions, on the foundational ideas that allow us to raise them.

This dissertation is the result of the research process to the concretization of the art work, in an integrated Art Practice Based Research. The dissertation works through a Methodology of Material Thinking, reflecting the materials through which the artistic project is built, on all different levels: Ontological, Epistemological and Plastic. The dissertation presents the theoretical framework that sustains the creative process and that formulate the principles of structuring both the installation, the conceptual methodology to collect data and the materials to be used upon the work itself.

This project is aiming to research a methodology to represent visually aspects of identity and culture, within a population. It approaches the problem in a poststructuralist theoretical framework, aiming to apply to image some of the principles Derrida used in his deconstructive reading. Besides approaching the product of the project in a Poststructuralist framework, it also questions the nature of the research done through the same lens, questioning where to position itself within the cultural disciplines of art and science.

This tripartite relationship between defining identity, finding a mean to represent it and questioning how to contextualize it epistemologically, underlie the foundations of this work. On one side, the ethnographic work, collecting materials, studying culture and finding a mean to grasp it through media. On the other, Multimedia art, a way to represent the elements into a structure that acts accordingly to the poststructuralist

approach, resulting in a work, an experimental piece supported by the theoretical concepts.

The significance of this artistic project resides in two different ideas. First, that a complex system cannot be simplified and this project does not pretend to do so, aiming to represent the ambivalence through which a system can be read and, the unstructured fragmented aspects through which it is built (still bearing in mind that representing always means structure). A related statement would be that *Identity* does not reside in artifacts or elements that can be studied separately, but in the whole unattainable *Context* itself, in the whole network of *Signifiers* that individuals define abstractly to interpret reality.

Second, the idea that perspective and interpretation are the mechanisms through which individuals define their collective *Identity*. Also, that collective *Identity* is only defined through the perspective of a sole individual, as a reflection of his own individual *Identity*, not by a collective metaphysical entity (such as society, sex, race, nation). It does not exist outside mind and individual culture, in a metaphysical beacon of logic, a cultural collective structure. Therefore, active control of the interpretation should not reside in one actor of this project, but, instead, the system should be modeled to allow multiple interpretations. The structures of conventional Audiovisual expression will have to be enhanced in this project. The role of Syntactical construction, of the use of the editing process as a construction of new semantics, aiming to be unstructured, unattainable, clean and disposed of intention. I will do this through the use of real time systems selecting random shots, a “real time editing” experience, one infinite documentary, unstructured, simulating a trip across the Tundra of Lapland, across the sea shore of Beira Litoral.

In the field of multimedia communication and audiovisual expression, it raises interesting questions. It explores the role of the spectator facing unstructured representation of ideas, left to mathematical chance, in order to destroy the Semantic charge the images originally have; a creation of a whole new meaning to it, built by Syntax, by playing with Kuleshov effect. It explores mainly the absence of explicit message, by allowing multiple interpretations, allowing the spectator to raise questions

while navigating through the system, instead of adsorbing the answers already formulated by the director, the artist. Instead, it attempts to create a metacognitive experience through its implicit objectives, providing a misguided exploration of the content.

The significance of this project resides in its artistic conceptual value: the exercise of modeling reality, *context* and culture; in the creation of this “machine” that carries culture inside itself, in an attempt to distantly recreate *Identity*, its multiple interpretations, allowing it to be seen, rationalized and questioned through the eyes of the spectator. It may still be far away from reality itself, but eventually be one step closer than conventional documentary or text.

To attempt to create the directive lines of this kind of work, I must return to the question underlying this whole project: “How can we represent identity?”

1.1 Finality

Discuss and define the materials needed to create a multimedia installation that represents cultural identity, through the lens of poststructuralist theory.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 Material objectives

- Capture a wide number of interviews, video, still image and sound elements.
- Create an artistic multimedia installation to incorporate the multimedia pieces in an articulated relationship, relating all the pieces as one single documentary/installation.

1.2.2 Content objectives

- Create a possible audiovisual representation of the relationship between the individual and the collective, the self and the other.
- Explore the common and contrasting elements and traits of culture, drawing a possible interpretation of the *Identity* as a whole.
- Create a metacognitive system where the spectator may reinterpret and question his own interpretation of *Identity*, both of the self and of the collective realities he belongs/opposes to.

1.2.3 Axiological objectives:

- Represent the complexity and the multiple possibilities of interpreting *Identity*.
- Represent the role of individual *Identity* in the constitution of collective identities.
- Represent *Identity* and culture as a function of language.
- Educate for poststructuralist and postmodernist guided interpretations of “reality”.
- Raise awareness of the intrinsic fragmentation of the collective *Identity* and, therefore, the individual *Identity*.

- Make a political statement against generalizations; objective, reductive and structured interpretations of complex systems; modernist western thought in a global manner.

1.3 Problem

The research problematic works through the specific idea of finding a methodology to represent identity, cultural space and the search for validation upon these representations. It presents itself questioning of what material considerations needed for such a task.

Working with poststructuralist theory, we assume that any Cultural Sign has an undetermined meaning, completely relational and contextual. Though, what is the source of meaning and value of these signs? How can we interpret them and reveal them through media? What are the structuring operations that go through mind and how can we relate them to the operations of building value on the representation? How can we achieve some sort of validation on the results, escaping the cultural artifacts and generalizing identity stereotypes cultures built upon itself? What values can we rationalize upon the created art-work?

All these questions are specific points of this research project. The common ground of these questions can be reflected on the problem question for this dissertation:

“How can we represent Collective Identity, through multimedia art?”

There are three key concepts on this question, I must define clearly: Representation, Cultural Identity and Multimedia art.

First, Representation, the operation of representing something, of grasping something from its unstructured nature, from reality, and confining it into a structure, therefore, validly (to some extent) attributing a center of meaning upon it.

Secondly, Collective identity as a complement of individual identity, a reflection of the image we have of our individuality and how we reflect it on the others and on ourselves, defining and inscribing ourselves within or outside collective cultural groups.

At last, Multimedia Art, a representation in multimedia installation, through video, sound and still image. I define it in Multimedia Art, for this research aims to support an art project, materializing in a multimedia artifact. It places itself, in the

border of scientific and art work, created through the reflection of poststructuralist theory on ethnographic work and video/art creation.

The nature of this dissertation is to reflect upon the materials for such a creation, representing the intellectual growth that the author achieves while taking up such task. This work does not aim to reach an answer to the research question, but to build an Hypothesis through its formulation, one possible answer to a question that cannot be truthfully answered. It explores the concepts mentioned above and articulates them, in order to produce a poststructuralist work, somewhere between ethnography and art, scientific representation and philosophical artistic statement.

2 RESEARCH CONTEXT: PRACTICE BASED RESEARCH

The context, that this research process inscribes itself in, is quite complex in the nature of its development. It integrates the specificities allocated by the disciplines it works with: on one side, scientific research, through ethnographic considerations and, on the other, artistic creation. I inscribe this project in the context of a Practice Based research (Research/creation), with the project's objectives aiming to create knowledge reflective of the material process and concretization of an artistic object.

Nevertheless, this project has in its grasp also to create an Ethnographical product, which objectives are wider than those of an artistic creation, summoning some considerations from the social sciences. Where is the border drawn in this project? What is valid in terms of process and in terms of result in both the language of art and the language of ethnography? Where should this focus be lit upon? How do we define a methodology that puts both disciplines into consideration in the process of creating an art work?

2.1 Artistic Practice based research

In the first place, it is important to define Artistic Practice based Research, distinguishing between this modality and pure practice, in the way that I clearly identify the purpose of the research within the creative process. In “Practice Based Research: A Guide”, Linda Candy defines the elements that characterize both types of research.

In pure practice situations, “searching for new understandings and seeking out new techniques for realizing ideas is a substantial part of everyday practice”. However, what we define by research in an academic context does not relate to the individual's particular goals towards their production. But, rather to research which adds to our shared store of knowledge. Not what the individual gains for himself through research, but what he gives to the scientific/artistic community. “Scrivener argues that the critical difference is that practice-based research aims to generate culturally novel apprehensions that are not just novel to the creator or individual observers of an artifact; and it is this that distinguishes the researcher from the practitioner (Scrivener, 2002)”. In other words, the objectives of this project have to focus on a contribution bigger than my own intellectual growth, but rather creating something that may be valued in a latter sense, usable by other researchers and artists. “To generate novel apprehensions” is the objective of a Doctoral Thesis, a work done through a wide length of time, and since this is a Master Thesis, I cannot establish such high objective. Nevertheless, the methodologies should be considerate of such aims, and work concepts that, if further developed, could culminate in a creation of such value.

But how can I ensure that this research takes the right path? The United Kingdom's Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB, 2000) has defined guidelines for artists to take into account in the course of their research. One should:

1. Define “a series of research questions or problems that will be addressed in the course of the research. It must also define its objectives in terms of seeking to enhance knowledge and understanding relating to the questions or problems to be addressed.”

2. Specify “a research context for the questions or problems to be addressed. It must specify why it is important that these particular questions or problems should be addressed, what other research is being or has been conducted in this area and what particular contribution this project will make to the advancement of creativity, insights, knowledge and understanding in this area.”

3. Specify “the research methods for addressing and answering the research questions or problems. In the course of the research project, how to seek to answer the questions, or advance available knowledge and understanding of the problems must be shown. It should also explain the rationale for the chosen research methods and why they provide the most appropriate means by which to answer the research questions.”

The points above are established to research oriented projects and PHD thesis, and not necessarily to Master Dissertations, in the way that is not the necessary objective of a Master Dissertation to create new knowledge on a specific theme. Nevertheless, I appropriate them, establishing my methods through them. The first step into defining a methodology is to assure that I fill in these pre-requisites. I may assert that:

1. By defining a research question (“How can we represent identity?”), I am establishing clear objectives about knowledge I am producing, and problems I am addressing, on both an epistemological and practical/technological level.

2. While establishing the research question and theoretical framework that supports the definitions at work, I gave a supporting context in which I address the questions, integrating both the concept of the representation of the identity itself and the ways the materialize into a work of art. Raising how such solution might experiment with new semantic structures, in the field of Expanded Cinema, or the way it defies the point of view problem. These are not necessarily advancements in the field, but at least experimental transgressions that might add to the visual art lexicon.

3. Through all the phases of the project, I search for an answer to research question and problem, addressing related questions, and interrelating all the elements to

the initial question. All the work done, adds to the research on the theme, exploring a potential answer to question I have given my work.

To add to the establishing of epistemological dimensions of this work, I shall also consider the concept of Material Thinking. As put in the editorial of the journal “Studies in Material Thinking” this “term is awkward, defeats an agreeable definition and is conditioned by the different author’s preoccupations” (Young, 2011). I may connect several perspectives to inscribe my work within this research nature. One earlier definition may present Material thinking as thinking about the material of creativity, not only on the physical materials through which we execute our work, but, also, the network of values and concepts through which we involve the creative process. From the idea to the execution, this transition phase, from the exploration of the idea, through the materialization into work, and until the generation of a new idea in the viewer/spectator/user of the product. In a poetic form, we can simply say: “Material thinking is performed in making – making thinking, thinking making...”. (Young, (2011).

I integrate this concept in my work, by stating clearly the materials I am working with, they are Material/Cultural/Ontological, Epistemological/Scientific and Plastic Materials, and they all play a role in the definition of the problem.

On one side, Material/Cultural/Ontological materials, I define it as the main material I work with; inscribing in this group the people in the study; the common cultural elements that they define, the structures from which this research is born; what we rationalize upon; the own material of this study: **identity**, as it exists in the Universe despite of the several cultural meanings we attribute upon it, unstructured, *a priori* to the inscription of cultural network of meanings. The use of the term Material Materials, relates to Engels’ definition of Materiality, what exists, what is. On these reside the axiological values in study, the whole ideological and cultural elements that I aim to study. We do not approach these materials directly, for that is impossible. We can create statements and theoretical structures upon them, but only grasp them and work on them through the Epistemological Materials.

The Epistemological/Scientific Materials relate to the theoretical framework I use to process and rationalize the Material/Cultural Materials. These are the ideas I study through the biography to attribute sense and value to the unstructured materials, the observational and rational structures I use to interpret and grasp reality. In these materials, reside the axiological, ideological and cultural network of concepts that allow us to transform immaterial unattainable elements, into structures of meaning, even if still immaterial.

This distinction of Ontological Materials and Epistemological materials is a reflection between the distinctions of the Nature of things themselves (Ontology), and the Nature of the Knowledge over things (Epistemology). These are definitions commonly present in Philosophical studies.

At last, the Plastic Materials are the materials through which I turn the immaterial concepts into plastic reality, into a work of art, that others can interact with. These are the means through which I capture the Material/Cultural ideas, through the lens of Epistemological/Scientific materials into an object, a creation.

Material thinking reflects on all these levels, as we can see by the questions I raise in our project:

Material/Cultural: How can we approach identity in order to grasp it into an art creation? How does identity manifest in the world? Who are relevant actors to involve in the art project?

Epistemological/Scientific: How can a representation of identity be valid in the eyes of the academic sphere? How do we define identity? How can we apply Derrida's post-structuralism to the concept of identity? What theoretical knowledge can use to define and solve our problem?

Plastic Materials: How can we materialize this work of art in a real artifact? How can we reflect Ethnographical and Semiotic concepts in the artifact materialization? What are the technical devices through which we can capture the data

to represent? How can we materialize an art installation, disposing it in the space? What computer software should we use to make our project happen?

Somehow, all these questions are extensions of my research question “How can we represent identity?”.

3 FROM ONTOLOGICAL TO EPISTEMOLOGICAL MATERIALS

In this chapter, I define the epistemological materials through which I research upon the unstructured cultural materials, how things really are in the Universe.

As I will present later on this document, it is not possible to address the material/cultural materials directly, for there is not one possible single representation of them, but rather countless of ways to approach and interpret them. In this chapter, I define the lens through which I will address the problem of identity, the glasses through which we will see the world, defining the key concepts to be used in the course of the Art Work.

3.1 Defining Culture and Identity

The Representation of *Identity* has continuously been discussed by the greatest scientific, philosophical, romantic and artistic minds of the modern age, from Marco Polo to Malinowski, from Marx to Rimbaud. Even though they differ on perspective, aim and conclusions, *Identity* has been present as a key concept on their research, as well as the structural models through which they aimed to represent their ideas.

First of all, I should attempt to clarify the concepts of *Culture* and *Identity*, to be considered in this project. This theoretical framework is based on the work of poststructuralist authors. Therefore, I make a statement of the indissociable relation between language and abstract interpretation of reality, building up our framework through it.

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) has created a unique view that changed Human perspective on culture and the way individuals interpret the surrounding reality. He has proclaimed that language is not a mere way of communication, but the means through which we perceive and interpret reality. He introduced the concept of *Signifier*, defining it as a linguistic element, a word, an abstract concept which stands for an element of the concrete world (*signified*).

For example, the word pear is as an abstract concept that stands for an unspecific fruit, belonging to a family of fruits which have some traits in common. It stands for a different number of different fruits (even different species of fruits) we can find in the world, not for a specific pear, but a generalizing concept. He concluded that language is the mechanism through which we create these abstract operations, the devices for attributing meaning to the unattainable concrete world. This perspective, and respective development, broke with the classical humanistic views, proclaiming culture and socialization as the processes through which the individuals attribute meaning to the surrounding reality. Based on Saussure's Structuralism, Levi Strauss has defined *culture* as a shared attribution of meaning to the *Signifiers* within a specific population. This theory, and related developments, is known to the world as *Structuralism*.

Taking further the contributions of Saussure, Derrida in his life work has presented ideas that were made known to the world as *Post-Structuralism* and later, with the developments from other authors and respective applications in other fields of knowledge, as *Postmodernism*. He ruptures with *Structuralism*, stating that we only perceive reality through language, that every *Signifier* is perceived, by an individual, due to the relations it has to other *Signifiers*. For example, we can only perceive the meaning of the word marriage for we are able to relate it to the meaning of couple, ritual, commitment, and these words are themselves related to other *Signifiers*, spreading infinitely through a complex network of definitions. So, without the network of knowledge, we cannot perceive a word, a *Signifier* as one, without relating it to other *Signifiers*. Therefore, Derrida concludes that there is no relation between the *Signifiers* and the signified, but, instead, a relation between *Signifier* and other *Signifiers*, attributing to each *Signifier* a cultural subjective interpretation. Each *Signifier* has an intrinsic relationship to an infinite number of *Signifiers*, without which the word would lose its meaning, standing solely as mere sound, mere ink in paper, mere abstract shape in the frame. This polemical statement works the other way around, stating that we cannot perceive reality directly, for we could not attribute to signs any abstract meaning. We only interpret them through language and its respective infinite network of *Signifiers*.

Derrida exchanges the definition of *Signifier* with the definition of *Trace*, for he considers that no *Signifier* can be considered alone, but only in the infinite network of meaning.

Every *Signifier* works throughout an infinite and redundant network of concepts, which cannot be objectively represented or even interpreted. The related elements one *Signifier* allocates define a *Context*, a specific attribution of meaning that varies depending on the specific condition in which communication occurs (watching a film, reading a book, etc.). Every element, every human action takes part in a specific *Context*, and, without the respective *Contextual* knowledge, one cannot perceive its cultural meaning. To attain a cultural idea of the action itself, one must not only represent the action, but its *Context* alike, creating a thick description of the action (Geertz 1973). Still, as the network of meanings gets thicker, we realize that *Context* is

too vague, too big to be perceived or represented. We can only get to a specific distance, leaving out some *Contextual* concepts misrepresented, misinterpreted, simplified by our personal interpretations, represented, interpreted, by our own cultural *Context*.

So, in the context of this work we define culture as a mesh of interdependent, interrelated concepts that individuals retain during their socialization.

Another important idea is to find the source of meaning. What element does create meaning and where does meaning exist?

3.2 The Source of meaning

These attributions of meaning occur when to an individual is presented a *Signifier* he must interpret, and he will do so, relying on the *Context* and his own individual culture. We can, then, state that meaning only exists within the individual, and his related *Contextual* interpretations. If we say that the definitions exist within society, we are in fact claiming that definitions have a metaphysical existence, and they exist within a non-corporal abstract system (Society).

Saying that there is an objective form of shared meaning is either: making a metaphysical statement, or, making an interpretative generalization of collective *Contextual* interpretation, through a reflection of our own *culture*, our own perspective.

Here I can either take on of two turns: refuse absolutely the existence of common knowledge, or, understand how these theories represent a new approach to knowledge, that allows us to reinterpreted and read surrounding culture with another degree of complexity.

Another important notion that Derrida has introduced to us is the use of structure attributing meaning to the surrounding reality. Reality, distanced from human individual perception, is unstructured, it has no necessary meaning upon itself, is concrete and ambivalent. Only through abstract operations the individual attributes meaning to it, summoning context, individual culture, ideology and values. Putting the complex unstructured reality within the confinement of a structure, of a meaning, is a simplifying operation that reduces the signified into a narrow context, resulting several times in contrasting opinions and interpretations over the same phenomena that cannot be nullified, validated or invalidated. This is a product of the Modernist way of thinking that conceives that there is an objective truth. This notion is repudiated by some of the most radical authors, stating that there is no such thing as objective truth and that the search for it is a mistake.

On the other end, Derrida presents an apparently less radical perspective on the subject, that does not repudiate the notion of truth, but claiming only that truth cannot

be attained, due to its complex nature. He introduces the notion of center of the structure, the fixed origin, the point of presence of it. All the elements of the structure are fixed around it, and the *freeplay* characteristics of the unstructured reality. He expresses should be thought of as a flexible element, that transforms and changes, putting into play a series of sign-substitutions that attribute meaning to the unstructured concrete reality.

Merging the two ideas together, I may say that there is no such thing as structured meaning independent of the individual, that abstract meaning is achieved through mediating the unstructured reality by individual culture.

I may make a radical statement saying that, in fact, there is no such thing as a shared cultural meaning. Or, putting it in a paradox: Meaning is relative in an absolute manner.

Shall we consider the Signifier God. Obviously, I might find that I do not share meaning for this concept with an unspecific Hindu or any member of polytheist religion. But, do I share meaning of this signifier with anyone sitting right next to me? I might be surrounded by two Catholics, two Mormons, two atheists and two agnostics and still realize that none of us share a definition of God. Every single individual has his own motivation, his own context to attribute meaning, defining apparently similar interpretations of Signifiers, but largely different, in fact. Stating something like “Catholics believe that God is...”, would be making an erroneous metaphysical statement, through a generalization of the definitions of God, Catholic, and belief.

This is an important conceptual rupture with modernity, creating an idea that all definitions and attributions of meaning are subjective, for they lay within the individual and his respective cultural background. Every attribution of meaning depends on the individual and his individual culture, every attribution of meaning is a personal interpretation. The socialization process is crucial to define these personal interpretations. Individuals may experience similar personal interpretations on reality, but socialization is not a deterministic, behaviorist process and the respective results are always different. I may assert that there are not two people psychologically alike in the world and, therefore, there are not two equal interpretations of the world. I may assert

that there not two processes of Socialization completely alike in the world and, therefore, there are not two equal interpretations of the world. I may say that, independently of the specific *Context* of the action or communication, individuals carry an individual *Context* that lodges the interminable network of *Synchronic* relationships they summon upon each interpretation (trace).

3.3 Meaning, culture and identity

If the only source of cultural meaning is the individual and all generalizations are metaphysical, I may say that identity is also an individual propriety.

Following this concept and taking it further, I cannot define *Identity* as something that exists outside the individual, outside his *Context*, for it would also be a metaphysical statement. I can only define *Identity* as a personal subjective representation that each individual has in its own conception, a personal “choice” he delivers to the representation of himself, the personal interpretation of his own *Context*, through his own *trace*. This is the definition presented by *Social Identity Theory*, a contribute from social-psychology. Here I apply Derrida’s work to Materialist concepts, distancing them from the abstract formulations of everything to apply to individual perspective on individuality, collectivity and the self within the collective.

A Collective Cultural *Identity* may only be defined by a third element interpretation on the personal interpretations of multiple individuals. This means that Collective Cultural *Identity* are generalizations created within individuals to perceive and interpret reality. They do not exist in absolute and they do not define reality. They are mere interpretations defined by individuals to describe a reflection of themselves individually within a social group. Putting in other words, Collective Culture and related statements are interpretations that only find validation within the individual who claims them. These generalizing cultural concepts (eg. Portuguese People, People from Lapland, Catholics, Lutherans, Women, Homosexuals) are tags, that only exist within the individual who describes them. They are abstract simplifying definitions through which man processes reality, and establishes insight on the Universe. Many individuals may share a definition, a sign, but the meaning they allocate to them is divergent. Another question that is raised is: How, through which operations, do I interpret and establish our individual identity against/within collective identities?

It is important that I present the definition of *Reflexivity*, discussed by Anthropology since the discovery of Malinowsky infamous journals, this notion of reflecting our own *Identity* into the other, thus interpreting other through our own

Context. Western thought simplifies this reflexive interpretation, by establishing binary oppositions in order to simplify the complexity of *Identity*, resuming it to belonging/not belonging, absence/presence. This reflection is a quite complex phenomena, for it does not obey binary oppositions aesthetics (severely criticized by Derrida), where the individual either accepts or refuses this *Identity* as his own. The individual does not necessarily validate his position towards the *Identity*, either accepting or refusing it, but, instead, makes a qualitative statement. For example, I may be critical of certain aspects of what I define as the Portuguese culture and still remain uncertain if these aspects represent me somehow, not refusing my *Identity* as Portuguese. I do not refuse or accept Portuguese *Identity* and I do not objectively define it, I reflect on it some interpretations of my own persona and my own ambient, projecting in it aspects to which a binary judgment is not possible to assert.

What is national *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group? What is sexual *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group? What is *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group?

Cultural *Identity* is defined in the ambit of this article as a generalizing idea of all the cultural elements that any individual accepts for himself. Not formed by different superposition of multiple unrelated identities, but by all the surrounding elements that define him as a being. Individuals might use cultural artifacts to describe themselves, resorting to describe their collective identity into a stereotypical image, accepting some elements of this identity, but never necessarily living up to it. These artifacts are fake, living within the discourse of the collective cultures for political and ideological reasons. True identity is individual and impossible to generalize. It might be common to find a Finnish person arguing that Finnish People are cold, and, at the same time, be much warmer than he describes his culture (himself).

In my perspective, based on the poststructuralist theory, *Identity* is an element that reflects from the inside to the outside, from the individual to the culture. The *Culture* of the individual overlaps with the collective *cultures*, not the other way around. The being is socialized and reflects apparent common traits to the involving society, but

acquires distinctive perception of them, developing a different individual *culture*, interpreting the involving culture and *Identity* in a personal distinct (even if apparently not) perspective. Gender, Nationality, Sexual Orientation, Race are definitions created differently by any individuals and shared with different (even if apparently not) meanings. The overlapping definitions of the different perspectives of a number of different people living in the Finnish political territory may result in one of the many possible interpretations of the Finnish Culture.

By accepting or considering these key concepts, I find myself without the tools to attempt any univocal or objective method to represent *Identity*, traveling from the rigid, structured claims of modern science to the ambiguous, axiological power of postmodern art, shifting from the demands of answers to the ability to raise new questions, accepting the subjectivity of the individual, perspective, values and ideology as the substances to work with.

4 EPISTEMOLOGICAL MATERIALS: VALIDATION AND NATURE OF THE ARTIFACT

After having defined my vision on how the Cultural materials exist on the concrete world, and the Epistemological Materials lens to approach them, I face another problem: the problem of inscribing the created object into the dimensions of human activity.

I have defined the abstract theories and concepts, but at this point I have to define how I can articulate a congruent strategy for representing these concepts in a plastic, real artifact. Unfortunately, on this problem there are some Epistemological discussion yet to be done, to contextualize a creation and to discuss upon its value, on which kind of cultural institutions it is recognizable and integrable, and what kind of validation it has to undergo as a creation.

In this chapter, I discuss the epistemological nature of the artifact I want to create: somewhere between ethnography and multimedia art. Also, I discuss upon the methodology through which I aim to validate the created artifact as an Art Work and/or as an Ethnographic study.

4.1 Science and Art as Cultural discourses

Even though this project is an art practice based research, the materials it works upon are those most commonly explored by the disciplines of Ethnography, Ethnology, Anthropology and Cultural studies. It is, in fact, one of the objectives of this work to unify both the disciplines under the light of post-modern knowledge, to some scale, unify Art and Science, or, most accurately, criticize and defy the beacons that crystalize the two fields as cultural definitions.

In my perspective, these two fields of Human Activity are segregated by a series of codes and structures, behaviors, norms and rules, crystalized over the centuries in order to make a clear statement to what belongs to each language, and that both the languages only interconnect in well-established grounds of contact, well contextualized and justified. What Post-modernity is showing us is that they are two types of discourse, crystalized in western social structures and institutions, which breed them as values bigger than the materialistic existence of man. Science and Art expose themselves not only as pure forms of Human activity, but also as metaphysical institutions, mainly due to the residual positivistic values that still fill their discourse and those of the educational structures who lecture on both fields. If we address to Snow, C.P. lecture, “The Two Cultures”, we understand how he launched the problem of this division, in a way that the world was breeding two different Intellectual Western Macro Cultures, divided upon the professional specialization bred by modern education (S. Wilson, 2002). He has showed how the two cultures have go so apart they simply do not understand each other language and worldviews.

As S. Wilson (2002) discusses, up until Derrida and Critical Theory, Epistemology had given us the tools to understand how these definitions, standards and protocols (that exist differently on all the fields of knowledge) are one and the same, struggling to label and validate all the Human Production that is done under their protection.

At this point, I want to make a clear statement that, even though I struggle to contextualize my work within both the Academic, Scientific and Artistic spheres of

creation, I do not recognize as it belonging to any of the specific institutions. I categorize all the work that I do under the aesthetics and value of Human Production, under the same category as an agricultural production, an advertisement concept, a painting or a machine. Art, Science and Academics are mere tags that I use to ensure that my work is recognized within these cultural institutions. I consider all the discourse that I involve my work in as a struggle for validation to it belonging elsewhere, not absolutely present or cataloged under neither of the culturally defined fields of creation.

Therefore, I want the reader to understand that my next chapter works as a quest to deconstruct the need for validation and for establishing a border between the artistic and academic value of my research; and to understand it not as a statement to refute and refuse them, but to raise doubts about need for them.

4.2 Ethnography, validation and methodology(ies)

Our first step is to categorize what defines a work valid on the fields of Ethnography and cultural studies and contrast it to what defines a work valid on the field of Artistic Expression.

On Ethnography and Cultural studies, much has been written on the substitution of the positivistic notion of truth with the postmodern validity. Paula Saukko has summed up several thoughts on methodology in her book “Doing research on cultural studies”.

I may consider a classical academic system where a cultural theory is considered as truth. Then, a second researcher conducts a new study and reaches completely different conclusions from those of the previous cultural theory. P. Sakko (2003) introduces us the discussions on how two different truths have to null each other, in the positivist intellectual systems, for there is only space for only one metaphysical truth. Historically, these situations generated complex questionings on how the conduction of research conditions the elements that are studied themselves and how individual political agendas conduct and condition individual/institutional academic research, many times working as self-assuring mechanisms to search validation for pre-determined political opinions and messages.

For example, in this study of mine, the reader can clearly recognize my ideological affiliation, how I have inscribed some of my personal beliefs into my work, or even how I stress some ideological concepts that I do not personally accept for the sake of the congruency of the artistic and scientific work. We can clearly understand the existence of strong connection with cosmopolitan political values, that do not recognize nationality (nationalism?) as defining cultural trait, but rather as a generalizing political concept that is only defined in the Discourse of the countries institutions and not in the individuals' daily life style/culture; or my beliefs that popular culture (and to some extent institutional culture) is infused with positivist values, with a generalized notion of truth that keeps western society to progress into a more open and democratic space, truly conscious of its true nature. All researchers struggle with these kind of axiological

conflicts, all of them inscribe their personal beliefs in their work, for Man is a cultural being, and culture is a mediated interpretation of the world, therefore subjective and infused with axiological and ideological inferences. In a positivistic scientific academic system, it would be extremely incorrect to write this paragraph, for it would denounce that I was forging a truth, based on my personal beliefs. On an artistic academic system, that would be the only way to proceed, for that is how I would expose the artistic concept of my project. Nevertheless, exposing or masking these political arguments, is not an answer if I want to create valid academic research in contemporary social sciences or even contemporary art. It is my personal belief that my research should serve an intellectual/research concept and struggle to be congruent towards it, serving both as an aesthetical experience (as an art project) and a contribution to the intellectual academic contexts it belongs to (as a scientific project), rather than belonging explicitly to any of these two natures, distancing itself from the complexity of the systems it describes. Also, we inscribe this research in the methodologies that Clifford, J. & Marcus, G. (2011) have inscribed in their book *Writing Culture*. How we should adopt reflexivity methods while writing, reflecting the research process on the individual that conducts. This the reason why I choose to write in the first person, clearly stating my own personal subjective approach to the problems.

In contemporary cultural studies, the methodology we consider is an alternative notion to validity, defined as validities. As Paula Saukko, points this has mainly two advantages: “First, it draws attention the fact that the theories, methods and modes of writing that underpin our research open up different and always partial and political views on reality”, asking us “to be more critically aware of what drives our research”. “Second, acknowledging that there is more than one way of making sense of social phenomena, asks one to come up with a more multidimensional, nuanced, and, tentative way of understanding one’s object of study”. These multiple validities do not mean that there are no rules for conducting research, but simply that there are no universal rules, just different rules that make us relate differently to reality.

We are presented, then, three alter validity methodologies:

- Dialogic Validity, creating work that reflect on the “natives” point of view, taking into consideration the multiple possible interpretations and sensitivity to the social context of the studied event. It takes into account three different criteria:
 - Truthfulness: How research should take into account and reflect the perspectives of the people being studied.
 - Self-reflexivity: How researchers reflect about the discourses that create inferences on the way that they perceive reality.
 - Polyvocality: The conscience that they are not studying only lived reality but many, a complex network of different voices and perspectives.
- Deconstructive Validity, that act upon the social discourses, exposing how they reflect “historicity, political investments, omissions and blind spots of social truths”, acting through the theoretical perspectives of either Baudrillard, Foucault or Derrida. It works through three criteria:
 - Postmodern excess: The Baudrillardian notion of ‘excess’ that states there is potentially an infinite number of “truths” and ways to approach reality. The objective of this research is to destroy cultural notions of truth and a fixed understanding of one specific phenomenon.
 - Genealogical historicity: Associated with the work of Foucault, acting as challenging truths by exposing its historicity. Its objective is to unmask taken for granted truths and how they are not Universal or timeless concepts, but products of historical and political agendas.
 - Deconstructive critique: Associated with the works of Derrida, tries to deconstruct how culturally we categorize through the simplifying mechanisms of binary oppositions. This methodology tries to assert and distinguish the elements of speech that categorize cultural dimensions into oppositions, charged with political inferences: Primitive/civilized, Good/Bad, religious/profane, Nordic/southern, etc.
- Contextual Validity, is a methodology that aims to locate the studied phenomena within the wider social, political, and even global context. This methodology tries to reveal the historical time and social place certain phenomena takes part, exposing the relative dimensions of the phenomena. It works through two different criteria:
 - Sensitivity to social context: A researcher should exercise a practice of caution, discussing the complex social dimensions that the phenomena inscribes itself in: the social hierarchies, political systems and the way the system in study interacts with bigger systems it inscribes itself in.
 - Awareness of historicity: This criteria stresses the fact that the both the research and the studied object are inscribed in historical structures, and

their validity is related to these dependencies, and their past history. The research should be able to critically evaluate the role of the course of History in its analytical analysis.

P. Sakko (2003) develops these concepts on how we can cross the different methodologies to achieve and even more solid solution. I will take these concepts into account on the execution of these work, trying to formulate a concept of validity while exploring the problem.

As I have stated before, the objective of this work is not necessarily to evaluate the content according to several validities, but rather create awareness to the multiple truths that can be read upon an object. Also, it is not necessarily to create a qualitative analysis of a specific phenomenon in the world (Ethnography/Cultural studies), but rather create a methodology, a rational exploration to inscribe a work of art within.

At this point, I have explored all the conceptual definitions that would lead us to create an Ethnographical product, an object relating to the scientific study of a cultural aspect of life. Applied to this specific work it would result in the study of “the individual identity of the inhabitants of Finland and its relation to the collective cultures it inscribes itself in”.

Now it is time I step away from these definitions, and work on the elements that materialize this work in an art artifact. Being these the elements that recognize validity on an Ethnographical study, what are, then, the criteria that validate an artifact as art?

4.3 Classification (validation) of art

Art theory is a big, complex discipline that, alongside with History, has been explored systematically Art resorting to the same lenses that explored the scientific disciplines. It is an interesting phenomena, that we can clearly see the influences of poststructuralist theory, from the initial Philosophical contribution written by Derrida, to Art Theory.

As Artur Danto has defined in the introduction of his work "*After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History (1996)*", there are parallelisms between the Historical instances and the aesthetics of modern, postmodern and premodern art. These phenomena suggest that the divergences between the aesthetic principles that characterize these three eras, obey an historical narrative in an evolutionary sense, in an intimate relationship with Philosophy and Scientific development.

In this point, I will determine what defines an artifact as an art object. The first consideration to take into account is that I will ignore all the antique historically defined concepts of art (modern and pre-modern), and only see it through the light of Postmodernity. As I have demonstrated in 3.2 (The Source of meaning), Art is a cultural concept that is defined in literature, but only takes form when present in individual culture. Hoping or searching for a validation, outside the individual's perspective upon it, is hoping or searching for a metaphysical validation of the art project.

This is an important idea to understand the number of definitions that have been created in literature to recognize an object from within or outside the Art concept. One should address to the (in)famous work of art from Marcel Duchamp, "Fontaine". The artist presented his ready-made object: a signed porcelain urinal. This act provoked a crisis on the definition of art, continuously studied by several authors, and brilliantly concretized by Arthur Danto (1998): "the status of an artifact as work of art results from the ideas a culture applies to it, rather than its inherent physical or perceptible qualities. Cultural interpretation (an art theory of some kind) is therefore constitutive of an object's arthood."

This means that the capacity of recognizing an object as art, does not obey to specific criteria defined in Literature: as an object that provides an aesthetical experience (close to modernist definitions), or an act to plastically create beauty (close to classicist definitions). But, rather, whether the author or the viewer considers it art or not.

I can hear from time to time, when presented with an exotic choice for an art work: “Should it be considered art?”, “I don’t consider this art!”, “For me this is not art!”. Again, I summon the idea of individual culture, stating that these questions are valid, for art only acquires meaning within the individual and the own concept of Art may vary. Cultural interpretation is the only vehicle for defining whether an object is art or not. We may try to imply on the definition of art our own aesthetical preferences, and our own political opinions. These are valid statements, within our own definition of art, but fruitless if we are trying to have a generalizing discussion about what society should consider or not art.

4.4 The nature of the artifact

I can then conclude that a piece of work may be recognized within the two Cultural Institutions, either Art or Science. These are two stratus of the fields of Human Activity that have built formal Language and codes, institutionalizing themselves into an unquestionable quasi-metaphysical value within society.

I claim that my creation could be recognized either as an artistic or scientific artifact. In order to do so, I would have to adapt it to both these languages and cultural codes, in order to have it recognized by both the cultural institutions. To do so, I would have to, either:

- Create a Research context that allows a formal recognition of the qualitative analysis of the results of the recollection, respecting the elements that validate the work discussed in 4.2 – Resulting in a Scientific Work.
- Create a Research context that discusses the formal artistic statement of the object, and present it within an art institution, finding a structure or an event where it is presented as an artistic project – Resulting in Art work.

In the execution of this work, I want to evaluate the world in the aesthetical structures and validity methodologies that Ethnography uses, for I recognize in them Ideological value to create a strong formal concept, to fulfill creative objectives, bringing to the act of creation the contributions of Post-modernist Thought and Ethnographic methods. Nevertheless, the product of this Practice Based Research project is an Artistic Installation, for which the creation of a formal Qualitative Analysis would not add anything.

I am interested in creating an Artistic Statement on the representation of a cultural identity, questioning the nature of the created artifact itself. I will take both the contributions of these paragraphs into the act of creation. In the next two chapters, I will discuss how I actually create a Plastic Artifact, how I materialize Theory into a concrete object.

5 PLASTIC MATERIALS: THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION

At this point, I have all the materials that I will extract from the concrete world, and the lenses, the materials through which I observe and interpret the phenomena that are the target of this study.

In this chapter, I aim to discuss and introduce the methods through which I aim to represent these concepts, the methods through which I aim to represent identity in a multimedia installation. This chapter will focus on the Representing itself, discussing which are the operations we execute while using media, and questioning which ways we can aim to represent something.

What concepts do we inscribe in the representation, so we make it accordingly faithful to our epistemological perspectives on reality? What are the technical tools that I will use to create such artifact? In what artistic fields may this project be inscribed? What is my Artistic Statement, what are the values that I want to inscribe in such artifact?

5.1 Video as Text

Our first step is to discuss a connection between the concept of identity itself and different notions of representation, aiming to be congruent to the specificities discussed in the previous chapter. In this chapter, we are presented escalating complexity, for at this moment I have to start drawing a connection line between the epistemological materials and an eventual concretization of the problem.

In the specter of this dissertation, and of the studies it inscribes in, I aim to create a moving image solution to our problem, presented in an artistic installation, a space allocated specifically to support the contact of a viewer and the content of the installation.

What we know about video has inherited a great number from the contributions of structuralism and semiotics, and it has evolved into the Postmodernist Semiotics, where I aim to contextualize this project. Therefore, I need to resort to a method to inscribe within the language of video, the specificities of both artistic structures and ethnography writing.

I can find a wide number of interesting ideas that I would like to adapt, about the nature and constructivist influences on the creation of academic and cultural text. These are ideas which are reflections on the nature of written and natural language. As I have summoned before, this work aims to resort to the video technology. The first questions I pose in this chapter are: What parallelisms can be established between video and text? Are the research ideas stipulated for written word transposable also for video?

In a brilliant reflection of the development of film studies, the book *New Vocabulary in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism and beyond* by Stam, R., Burgoyne, R. , and Flitterman-Lewis, S., presents a complex discussion introduced by the most relevant and important modern and postmodern authors on Film semiotics.

In fact, many authors, attracted by the developments of the linguistic model created by Saussure and the following contributors I have discussed in chapter 3, present the notion of Film Language, from an early moment of Film studies.

In a simplistic form, Boris Eikhenbaum, a Russian formalist defines cinema as “a particular system of figurative language, the stylistics of which would treat filmic syntax, the linkage of shots into phrases and sentences.” This notion culminates in the Work of Christian Metz “Language and Cinema”, where the author establishes cinema language as a Textual System, conceptualizing film-text in an intimate relationship with written text, permissive the application of the poststructuralist concepts one might approach both film text and written text with. “Semioticians preferred to speak not of films but of texts. The concept of text (etymologically “tissue,” “weave”) tended to emphasize the film not as an imitation of reality but rather as an artifact, a construct.” (Stam et al 1992)

Therefore, I may conclude that theoretical notions from the disciplines of semiotics, and Structuralist/Poststructuralist analysis can be transposed from the written and natural languages to the moving image, to the language of video.

5.2 Ethnography & Fiction | Documentary & Feature

In “Writing Culture” (Clifford & Marcus 1986), the authors propose a conceptual idea where Anthropology should adopt a radical reflexive methodology, applying the same principles of deconstruction to the reading of their own texts.

What the authors propose is that, text cannot be mask under objectivity in the intent to mask its subjectivity. Those language artifacts aim to hide the true subjective nature of the written text, aiming to present themselves as truth, in a positivist aesthetic. The authors propose that a clear constant statement of subjectivity in written ethnographic text is the method to be adopted, for it will clearly present the unavoidable political and ideological inferences of the author under an objectivist discourse. In this work, I want to explore this concept the other way around, building a parallel between what has been done in Ethnographical text and Documentary video, and how I can hope to informally counterbalance these notions, attending to the specificities of video language.

Clifford & Marcus present that Ethnography Writing can be, at some level interrelated, to Fiction Writing. In the way that the author, involuntarily, builds a fictional structured narrative, resorts to stylistic figures and hides behind cultural mechanisms commonly found on the Literature fiction texts, even when not adopting Reflexivity aesthetics on his texts. The built narrative summons the own culturally mediated perspectives of the text, embedded with his own political and ideological visions, conscious or unconsciously.

This might appear as mere provocation to the value of scientific work, but by reflecting it radically, with the tools Poststructuralism has given us, we may find a strong conceptual side to it.

If transposed to video, one may say that documentary is interrelated to Feature Film. They both build up a narrative; they use the same Semiotic elements (shot, dialog, cut, etc.); they are both struggling for a meaning, for them both mean to communicate. And is there at any point a univocal relation to reality? Can there ever be avoided the

own personal lens of the author? Can the moments the director chose to shoot be the most defining of the nature of the studied object?

This notion can be stressed when transposed to the Photography field. The photographer finds the perfect moment to describe his own intention for the photography. He might even take twenty pictures of the same object, but he will chose the one that will enhance his concept, his intention for that Photography. But is that instant any truer than the other 19 photographs taken? Does the photograph even put into perspective any part of the context surrounding the moment where the action has happened?

Every documentary work reflects the structural decisions of the director (and editor, and scriptwriter, and director of photography, and soundtrack composer and more?), his (their) own perspective on the subject. To create a documentary is to make an abstract extraction from the intangible concrete world, putting it into a structure that assumes people who see it will have a similar interpretation to the director's view on the world. The structures are embedded with semantic elements, structured to privilege one point of view over the others. They tend to create mediating structures to feed discourse on the subject, charging it with meaning, preventing a truthful interpretation from the perspective of the viewer upon the unstructured reality (that has been mediated by several media up to this point). The values and ideals that are privileged in the story are filled with the individual culture of the video creators, achieving one narrowing perspective on reality, self-justified as they deliberated to perceive it.

How can this reflection be minimized? Can the conscious choice of editing ever pay a role to minimize this? Can unstructured representation ever be fully achieved?

And besides, how can I represent the organic complexity of definitions that contribute to the ambivalent and dynamic formulation of the collective culture *Identity*? How can I represent something unstructured? And how can this representation remain faithful (to some level) to the unattainable unstructured reality?

It is not the objective of this work to actually answer these questions in an univocal way, mainly due to the inexistence of such answer, but also due to an

exploratory nature of this work. I launched this idea and concept and attempt to create a methodology, an experimental concept to approach the problem in a different manner.

All Ethnography work has some art on its own, it builds an emotional response, demanding the attention of the spectator/reader to understand the underlying meaning, the supporting structure that the artist claims for his artwork, the meaning the researcher attributes to his science.

The discourse, message and text, are built in order to structure meaning into unstructured concrete reality. Intention is media on its own. The structuring angle, the creator and the scientist aims for, is the thesis for his result, despite of the need for any type of validation in his product. All further explanation on his intentions may be seen as storytelling, as the act of structuring his ambivalent perspective, narrowing life and reality to a tangible instance.

This affirmation is to some order similar to Theodoro Adorno's: "there is nothing in the world that is not mediated". Mind and culture mediate our contact with the external world, therefore, we build subjective meaning, stories, values to any surrounding sign, independently of the conscience we have on this. To a conceptual level, I may indulge the idea that there is no significant difference between Mind/Culture (as media), and the other media. Media creations are mere extrapolations of thought. Can any idea represented in Mind be translated to other Media? Do we represent reality in the Mind, the same way we represent them in media?

Following this principle I may assert that a structured representation of reality will always be culturally mediated. Therefore any struggle for meaning is from its origin a fabricated political construction, a story, with values self-justified by our own speech. When we draw ourselves into poststructuralist ideas, into searching through another validity method, we are also making a political statement, defying common-sense structuring, stating that reality is more complex than it seems and that are several perspectives over the same problem.

The only realistic representation that could be achieved was if we could recreate, recall unstructured reality. The unstructured reality is absent of possible validation, only

through cultural interpretation it acquires meaning. The aim of representation would be to represent the system free of judgment and any narrowing of any sort, leaving any attribution of value and meaning to the observer, just as we do as researchers while studying one specific culture, one specific identity. That is, in fact, impossible, for just pointing a camera at an object is, already, structuring reality. But I may attempt one method to contradict to some level conscious attribution of meaning.

This artistic project will attempt to simulate the casuistic observation that mind mediation undergoes. I cannot accept it as definite and lacking of error, for it may be criticized from a number of different perspectives; still, this methodology may achieve the results I enunciate in the objectives. I will create a structure to represent something that is unstructured, for the methodology must create a meaning to the substance it works with. The objective of remaining faithful to reality can never be achieved, I can only attempt to create a structure that makes an explicit statement of its unfaithfulness, making the spectator aware of the faults of any attempt to represent something that has multiple interpretations.

5.3 From concept to a method in audiovisual expression

In this point, I am going to attempt to rationalize a method for reducing the role of the author in the presentation of a text, in order to leave the role of structuring to the viewer of the installation. At this point, our objective is to understand what are the elements that inscribe a video work within a deliberate structure and rationalize a method to destroy those structures. I will start by attempting to reduce these elements theoretically, so I can later build a practical method through it.

If I consider ethnographic work as storytelling, I may cross principles of Narratology to Ethnographical work, the principles of the semiotics of Narrative. I may say that any deliberate attempt to build a meaning to my audiovisual product, will resolve into a narrative. So what do we know about narrative analysis and how can we apply it to my work? What are the Theoretical tools that I can use for an analysis of Narrative?

One method of analysis of narrative is through the isolation of Semantics, which deals with “the relation of the signs and messages produced by narrative to the larger cultural system which gives it meaning”; and Syntax, “the study of the syntagmatic ordering of plot events as a kind of armature of narrative progress and development” (Stam et al 1992). These two concepts are in fact interrelated. Syntax builds semantics, and Semantics structure Syntax. Another important concept, that I will need to understand to work within this methodology, is function. Function is an analytical structure that evaluates the value of a determined element within a narrative structure and its role within the story (Stam et al 1992).

These three concepts Semantics, Syntax and Function will help us approach the narrative structure, what makes sense of different isolated shots, images and frames and how they are built in a way that creates a structure, a story upon it. The objective of this chapter is to find a methodology to destroy and nullify a conscious choice of syntax, in order to also destroy deliberate semantics and function of the elements within the structure, evaluate what will we get in its place, and consequently achieve to some point close to an unstructured representation of reality.

How can we then destroy syntax? In text, to destroy syntax, we can simply organize the minimal structural elements of the language into an order where they lose their meaning. On written text, the minimal structural elements are words. To understand how to destroy syntax in the context of written text, we can recall the famous Dada poem “*To Make A Dadist Poem*” from Tristan Tzara:

“Take a newspaper.

Take some scissors.

Choose from this paper an article the length you want to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Next carefully cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them all in a bag.

Shake gently.

Next take out each cutting one after the other.

Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.

The poem will resemble you.

And there you are--an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.”

How then to make a Dada video? The minimal element of video is the frame, but if we consider in this experience the frame as the minimal unit, we will lose relevant elements within the language (such as sound or camera movement). Therefore, for this work, I will convention that the minimal element of video language is the shot.

We might achieve the destruction of Syntax by placing the minimal syntactical elements (shots) in a random syntactical structure (random editing), providing that they will not represent one single structured idea, one univocal deliberated ideological meaning, but one wide number of different possible representations.

The achieved structure may present one unstructured dimension, similar to a representation of a casual observation of reality. The experience of watching it may be described as a struggle of culture to attribute meaning to the observation, of finding a structuring principle to it. The syntax builds a casual structure, a valueless possible representation of culture. This struggle for meaning might simulate the observation of reality mediated by only mind. In this way, control over the idea is lost in what respects

the syntax, shots lose their deliberate function, they are not part of something bigger predetermined by the author. The act of editing a video/film, builds the story from unrelated shots. By doing this editing in a random manner, we may attempt to build a multiple interpretations of reality, even though no one of them is necessarily really or faithful.

In a different perspective, one might see this solution as an odd application of the "Infinite monkey theorem". Emile Borel (1913) presented this Theorem in his article "Mécanique Statistique et Irréversibilité". He formulated that: if we have a monkey inserting in a typewriter random characters for an infinite amount of time, he would eventually type the complete works of Shakespeare. I do not mean that through the random displaying of shots we will achieve the editing of the real representation of reality, but only to play with the notion that the unexpected may be achieved through randomness.

But are not the chosen cultural elements already a statement of choice, of narrowed structure, therefore charged with semantic value? Is not the shot already infused with ideological meaning and values? Can it really play a role in inducing unstructured narrative? How can this semantic value be nullified, ignored, reduced or simply changed?

These questions cannot be answered properly, for these are representational problems I cannot avoid. Nevertheless, I can rationalize the mechanics of our solution to understand how the apparent choices of isolated shots are nulled, with a new meaning built upon them, the moment we place them next to each other.

This semantic value might be destroyed through Syntactic construction. If we take into consideration Kuleshov's rule for movie editing, we can illustrate this idea. Kuleshov has demonstrated that editing can be used to attribute meaning to apparently ambivalent signs. (Stam et al 1992)

In his experience, he has displayed a shot of a man, then following it with a shot of a plate of soup. The audience would come to the conclusion that the man would be hungry. Afterwards, he repeated the experience, following the same shot of a man with a

shot of a girl in a coffin. The audience would apprehend that the man was feeling sad. The culture of each individual on the audience was struggling to attribute meaning to what they were watching, just as individuals do in the presence of any sign. Through Syntax building (the cut to another shot), the first shot acquired a new value, a new cultural interpretation, forcing the culture to make sense on it, even though the two shots were in fact independent.

In fact, if we address again the “infinite monkey theorem”, we might see how our solution strongly differs from a case of joining random written characters. By putting a series of six characters next to each other we may not achieve any meaning at all, just a meaningless sequence of sounds. Our brain may actually try to turn those sounds into sense, into similar words that the characters string is similar to. But most likely we would accept that the string of characters does not make any sense. But when we join six shots together, would we obtain something meaningless?

Understanding these mechanisms, we can then discuss upon the technical aspects through which I can build the installation. I will destroy the deliberation choice of syntax and consequently we create a new semantic formulation for the audiovisual piece, giving new functions the elements that compose the structure.

We do not, for any moment, achieve an unstructured representation of reality. Instead I emulate a virtual direct representation of reality, for the structuring of meaning is less dependent on the author, and increasingly dependent on the mediation of the viewer. When presented with a number of random shots in a sequence, the viewer will recall his own culture to make sense of what he is seeing, simulating the process he would undergo if he were in fact facing those culture aspects *in loco*.

This is a methodology and a presentation concept, and obviously, its’ defining concepts and criticizable. This methods aim to experiment and rethink the static theoretical and technical concepts of the moving image. I do not fully expect an implementation that would return in a practical success. Probably, the viewer will not even understand the mind processes happening, the difference between this and conventional form of cinema. And there might be even a chance that this concept does not materialize into the conceptual work of art it aims to be, but instead meaningless

sequence of shots, just another product among the times of postmodern excess. Nevertheless, it is worth giving it a try.

6 Plastic Materials: From concept to artifact, defining a Work methodology

In this moment of the dissertation, I have explored all the theoretical and academic concepts that our project was based upon.

I have reached an intricate network of concepts and the materialization of a single project under them might appear complex and difficult to define, at this point. The objective of this chapter is to transform the concepts and ideas explored in the previous chapters into clear lines of action, materialized into processes and practices.

6.1 An approach method

The work methodology will be divided into three phases: Ethnographical recollection; Creation of the installation and the development of the software solution. The last phase would be the Presentation of the Installation, a process to be executed *a posteriori*, is not going to be discussed in this document, for its study is not relevant for the context of this dissertation. Defining the project as a work of art, I infer that the evaluation of whether the installation is working properly and the concept is functional, is irrelevant, for what is privileged are the artistic concept and the material thinking that underlie such concept.

The first phase will occur on the locations to be studied, Rovaniemi, Finland. The principles will be to collect the greatest amount of video, still image and sound data possible on the locations.

A great amount of data will be collected, to supply general information on the cultural space, events, weather conditions and other several aspects. The principles regarding this collection are to get the biggest amount of data possible, in order to illustrate the biggest number of contextual elements possible. The informality of this collection is an important consideration. We cannot cover all the cultural elements, nevertheless, if focusing on guided elements of culture, some relevant invisible aspects of culture may be left out. By searching indiscriminately for elements, we may find an interesting number of elements to work with.

The most important ethnographical collection of data is related to interviews, spoken statements on identity and culture. These will be collected according to four principles supported by the theoretical framework:

- **Identity is an individual propriety** - This is the primary idea that underlies this project: The negation that there is such thing as a collective identity, a metaphysical beacon where all individual identities converge to. There are only stereotypical images that are built upon tags, and individuals do not respond to them, they are mere unsupported simplifications of the complex nature of individual culture.

- **Cultural Collective identities have artifacts they build on their own** - Related to the statement above, the political/geographical spaces have created, through culture and socialization, stereotypical artifacts that are inscribed within the individual perspectives on identity. If we ask an individual about one of these collective identities, he will return to us these politicized images, either defending or attacking the political unity they inscribe. These signs do not respond to reality, no individual that speaks of them lives through it. It is just embed in the discourse of the populations, and only one small part of the population live through them.
- The way we position ourselves towards a collective identity does not obey a binary opposition, of weather we recognize ourselves within or outside the identity - Individuals inscribe themselves on some particularities of collective culture, but not so commonly recognize themselves as integrating them. This idea of binary opposition is a simplification used by the structuralism to describe how culture signs act inside a System through opposing ideas (good versus bad, holy versus unholy, man versus woman). This idea is criticized by Derrida, for the simplicity it operates on the phenomena. In truth, there is no black and white positioning of an individual towards his identity. He always makes a qualitative statement about it.
- **Cultural signs can only be perceived when they are destroyed** - The identity cultural sign of an individual can only be perceived when they are destroyed. Therefore, for an individual to truly attain what his identity is about, he must be confronted to a different identity achieving a conscious conflict. The opposite statement might also be valid. If an external individual is confronted with the culture, he will be able to recognize what is truthfully genuine about that new space (through contrast with his own reality).

These four concepts can generalized into a series of principles regarding the conduct of the interviews and the selection of the individuals to be interviewed:

- The content should be about individual identity and its relation to the collective generalizing identities. And, not a search about the defining elements of the Collective Identities.
- The artifacts of culture that may appear in the discourse of the interviewed should be considered in order to compare their own identity with the one they describe as the studied identity.
- We should try to find how individuals operate their own identity against the collective identities, and how they define and position themselves. What tags do they associate with their cultural space? What elements do they refuse and what elements do they accept from their accepted identity space?

- The most relevant individuals to be interviewed are those who had been confronted to other identities and had their ideas about their own identity destroyed, therefore revealed and rationalized. So, the privileged individuals to interview would be: Individuals from the collective identity who have been living abroad, and individuals external from the studied identity who have been living in the same political space. On one hand, individuals from the studied political identity who have been living abroad; on the other hand, immigrants living in the political space we are studying.

These concepts are materialized into a semi-guided interview structure written in the point 6.2.

The second phase, Creation of the installation and the development of the software solution, is where I will create a structure, both physical and computational, in order to materialize the recollected material into a work of art.

In the theoretical framework, I have explained the role of Syntax in building Semantics. I am aiming to represent unstructured data, stripping it (as far as possible) of center of structure. I aim to achieve it by creating randomness in the selection of shots and images, creating a real time experience of editing. This installation will select the content automatically, based on a mathematical algorithm. The technological support will be the ProcessingTM language, and its video libraries. The software will dispose of a series of files that will play randomly, infinitely, working as a never ending documentary, creating one big never unrepeated sequence of media. The idea is to create a non-sequential documentary, creating new semantic value to the images, every single instant.

The third phase will be of Presentation of the Multimedia Art Installation. It will consider of setting up the artistic project in one space so it may be presented to the public.

6.2 Structuring a semi-guided Interview

In this point, we present a guide for the semi-guided interviews that will take place.

Theme	Question	Objectives
1. On the self		Evaluate the reflexive image the subject has on himself, which are the collective identities he accepts upon himself.
	What identities do you recognize for yourself?	Identify which identities the individual accepts on himself, why and what are the spectrum of such identities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National • Regional • Professional/Activity wise • Interpersonal Relationships • Social Functions
2. On the other		Evaluate the perceptions of the individual on the other, specifically on the present collective identities that surround him (the collective identities in study: Finish, Lappish). If a foreigner, this focus on what the individual clearly opposes his identity to, the other. If a local, in the complex reality, these questions will follow the

		objectives of point 3.
	Defining aspects of local culture.	Identify the defining aspects of the surrounding culture, Reveal the reasons why these were chosen as the most defining traits; Identify the oppositions and similarities that the interview articulates with the own impressions of his own identity.
	How do you see the local culture?	Reveal a statement, a value judgment upon the collective culture.
3. The self within the other		Reveal the relational oppositions that the individual establishes between the self and the other.
	Relationship towards own identity	Identify the cultural relationship and operations that the individual establishes between himself and his own accepted collective identities.
	Relationship towards the local identity	Identify the cultural relationship and operations that the individual establishes between himself and the local collective identities.

6.3 Content Capture

In this point, I will discuss briefly how the process of capturing data was executed. As mentioned before, I have divided the content into two types of material: Interview material and interlude material. In the first I group the interviews, and in the second the rest of the material informally captured to fill in the content.

In the first category I include the interviews I have conducted specifically for this project. In the second category, I insert a more complex and wide range of content.

In this category, there will be some interlude content, captured for this project, but also a wide range of other materials I have filmed for many different projects, that somehow can be related to the identity objectives. The finality of such choice is to achieve a wide range of informality in the creation of the project, and widen the possibilities of whatever I may achieve with the concept of this project. This works closely with the concept, that culture is informal.

To capture the content, I have resorted to conventional technology for cinema and video. The equipment for capturing the interlude videos may vary, depending on the equipment available for such project, but, the equipment to capture the interview videos is the same. Since this is a low budget project, I will resort to low budget production solutions, namely DSLR (Digital Single Lens Reflex) Cinematography techniques and equipment.

The authors of the website "<http://www.nofilmschool.com/>" are an important resource for filmmakers, by presenting us with many resources for the use of DSLR technologies. Recently, they have launched the book "DSLR Cinematography Guide".

This book talks about a wide number of the equipment solutions for this "revolutionary, democratizing, disruptive moviemaking technology, as important as the invention of color film, 16mm, or HDTV."

This book describes how I can build a DSLR production kit, and through them, I can establish a functional working kit. The equipment I have used was:

- Camera Canon™ 60d – “A Cinema-sized APS-C sensor size with lots of recording options: at 1080p, 24p/25p/30p at 720p, 50p/60p (great for slow-mo work)”;
- A Kit of lenses - Canon™ Prime 50mm 1.8; Canon™ 17-85mm 4:5,6;
- A simple photography tripod;
- Zoom™ H4n recorder, which records at 24-bit/96kHz on SD or SDHC cards. It offers 2 XLR inputs, a built-in stereo microphone, and offers 4 tracks of simultaneous recording;
- A Schneiser™ Boom Microphone;
- Eventually, a 300 W light kit.

6.4 Exhibition technology

To materialize the concept of random Syntax, we have to provide ourselves with the technical tools to do so. What are the solutions that we have in our grasp?

- Make one conventional edit - edit the material chaotically, somehow making the choices for the length and the order of the shots.
- Create a software solution to make an edit in real-time – Create a device that chooses and displays shots randomly.

After considering these two solutions, I have chosen to follow the second, creating a software solution that would simulate a real time editing of the video. If we choose to make a conventional editing we will not be able to create a “infinite monkey theorem” solution. For in this situation, the monkey imprisoned in the never ending task of typing, would me in the editing process.

A conventional editing would present one single solution, that would have a certain defined length (as long as the editing effort would take me) that would be repeated for several moments. With a real time editing system, we achieve a solution that will be presented differently for much a longer time. The installation will generate new video sequences, constantly new and different. Only in the “ideal infinite monkey” scenario it will eventually repeat itself. Also, the system to choose the shots randomly would be rather complicated, attempting to achieve a random display of shots, which would mathematically put all the shots in the same probability of occurring. Trusting a computer do so, is a much safer solution.

The cons of this option, is that we have to resort to a complex technical solution that exits the field of conventional cinema. How can we, then, implement this system?

These possibilities of experience are presented by contemporary multimedia systems that allow the creation of art in real time, uniting multimedia elements into one integrated experience.

The technological resources that exist today make it possible to build self-structuring multimedia art piece, building itself through a mathematical algorithm, allowing randomness as one syntactical element. Also, the technological devices classically used in audiovisual expression do not make it possible for the user to interact with the content. With the recent appearance of inexpensive multimedia devices (computers, ArduinoTM, datashows, KinecticTM) it became possible to model interactivity and integrate it within the media work.

With this framework it is possible to break the causality of Syntax and experiment with random computer generated syntax, therefore achieving the result we intend with this work.

We want to create an application that permits us to Project video and sound in a multimedia installation, creating a real time editing of the video, selecting a random duration of a random shot and displaying it.

Therefore, the equipment I need is:

- Common Sound Speakers;
- Video Projector (the power of the projector will depend on the location of the installation);
- A computer to process the information;
- A customized software solution to process the information;
- A series of files from which the application can read. We will convention these files to be in .mp4 H264 CBR 10 codec format, in resolution of 1280x720 (16:9) or in 1280x548 (21:9). I will export the files individually from Adobe PremiereTM to this respective format.

Except the software solution, all these materials are easily obtainable and need minimal consideration or enough configurations so that we need to dedicate a space in this dissertation to it.

In the rest of point 6.4, we will discuss the details on the creation of the customized software solution I have created.

6.4.1 Choosing a development technology

The first challenge is to discover a Visual Programming software that would allow us to fulfill our objectives, something that allows us to process video in Real Time, while using some other programming functions.

From all the considerable Visual programming languages, the one to be chosen must unite all the following conditions:

- Permits the implementation of an extendible database access (preferably MySQL™ Solutions)
- Permits real time processing of Video;
- Leaves freedom of the user to extend functions that might initially not be planned.
- Works easily in multiplatform (due to the fact that my personal computer is a PC™, and if we present it in an exhibition, it would still be possible to present it in an Apple™ or Linux™ system).
- Is free to use.
- With a small learning curve, considering my current programming skills (I have developed skills in traditional programming, and find difficult to adapt to visual and schematic programming solutions).

In my work life, I had learned/worked (even if briefly) with three different Visual Programming languages: Max/MSP/Jitter™, Quartz composer™ and Processing™ Language.

Besides these three, exist many different solutions, but, unfortunately, they do not claim a different variety of functions as these three technologies do. We might find solutions for real time video processing, like VJing softwares, but they lack high level programming functions, that allow us to connect them to a database.

From these three programming solution, I have chosen to resort to Processing™, for:

- It is a wrapper to the Java™ Language and Java™ platform, and so I can easily upgrade my software solution to incorporate high level programming function.
- It works in multiplatform, as opposed to Quartz Composer™, which works only on Apple products.
- It is free, contrarily to Max/MSP/Jitter™.
- There are a great number of resources online which can help to solve problems easily.
- It is a traditional programming language, opposite to Max/MSP/Jitter™ and Quartz Composer™, which are Visual Development Technologies.
- Processing can be integrate in an Integrated Development Environment (like Eclipse™ or Netbeans™), which can boost up the productivity while working on the technology.

6.4.2 Processing™ Language: Getting acquainted and configuring the development environment

At this point, we have established the language we want to work with, it is time to define all the variables and technologies we want to import and configure, to get our software working properly.

But, before starting, what is exactly this Processing™ Language? There are two authors who give us some interesting perspectives on the language. Joshua Noble, in *Programming Interactivity*, states that *“you can do everything from reading and writing data on the Internet; working with images, videos, and sound; drawing two- and three-dimensionally; creating artificial intelligence; simulating physics; and much more. If you can do it, there’s a very good chance you can do it using Processing.”* From this text we can understand how rich the application is, but also we can take into account how this software works from this quote of Casey Reas and Ben Fry, the creators of Processing™, in *“Getting Started with the Processing Language”*, *“Processing is for writing software to make images, animations, and interactions. The idea is to write a single line of code, and have a circle show up on the screen. Add a few more lines of code, and the circle follows the mouse. Another line of code, and the circle changes color when the mouse is pressed. We call this*

sketching with code. You write one line, then add another, then another, and so on. The result is a program created one piece at a time.”

From both these authors’ contributions, we can understand how Processing™ is a rich language for drawing with code.

One of the problems of developing with Processing™, is that it requires a lot of experimentation until the point where you get it absolutely functional, with all the plugins that you need and a correct environment for working. The steps taken towards these configurations were:

- Integrating processing in **Eclipse™ IDE**, to solve the problems and deficiencies of the Processing™ IDE, hard to work with in a solution with the level of complexity of this one.
- Solving problems to integrate video playback functions that do not work properly when integrating Processing™ in Eclipse™. These problems were solved by importing the GSvideo™ library into the project. Also this video library is the best for processing H264 compressed files, both on .mov and .mp4 extensions, processing HD and Full HD relatively good.
- Finding a solution to integrate a MySQL™ database into the Processing. This solution was found by creating a PHP™ generated XML file, to be read afterwards by processing.

6.4.3 Developing a Technological Solution

At this moment, we have developed all the necessary tests and we dispose of the full technological solutions to implement our solution.

Conceptually, we aim to build a real time device, that loads a series of shots (different video files) and orders them in a random way, which nobody but the software can pre-establish. We can define the steps to take as:

- Create a database of files, that can be read by the application;

- Create a Processing™ Sketch to load the videos and control the installation;
- Create a structure to connect the database to the processing sketch;

The structure of the application is illustrated in the next image:

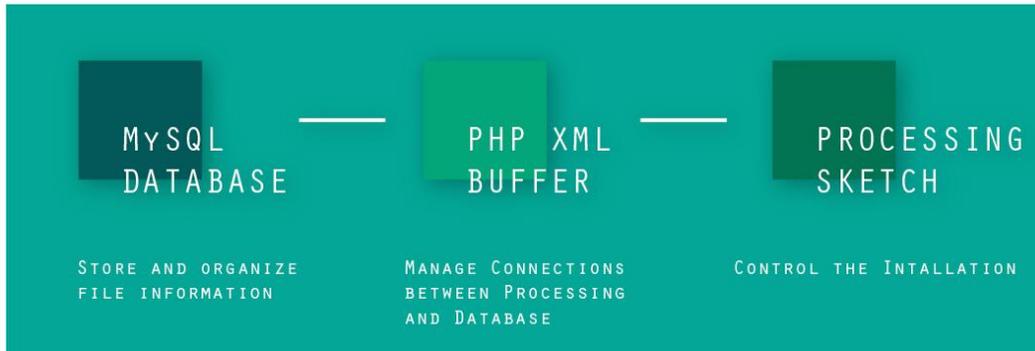


Figure 1 – Functional Model of the Application

To create the application, we will need to establish a local webserver, that will feed our application with data. The solution consists of creating a MySQL™ DataBase, lodged in a local web server. Also in this web server, there will be a PHP™ file generating dynamically a XML file.

So, we shall first attend to the creation of the database. For the application, we have two structural needs:

- Lodge the Name and location of the files;
- Identify which files belong to Interviews, and which files are interlude files.

Therefore, our Database structure will have the following tables, we can see in Figure 1. One table to store the video data, and one another to store information about the categories the videos belong to.

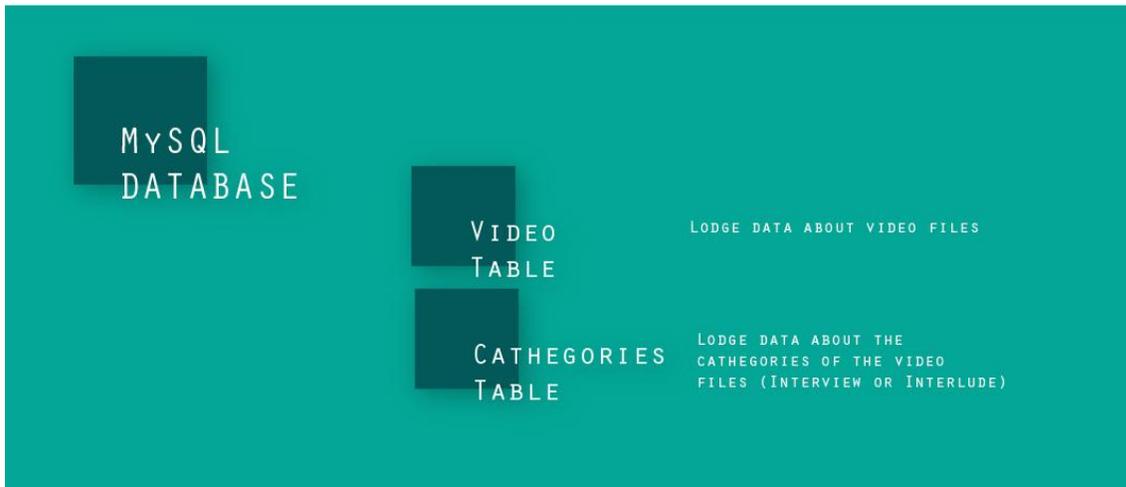


Figure 2 – Functional model for the database

A SQL solution can be seen in Figure 3:

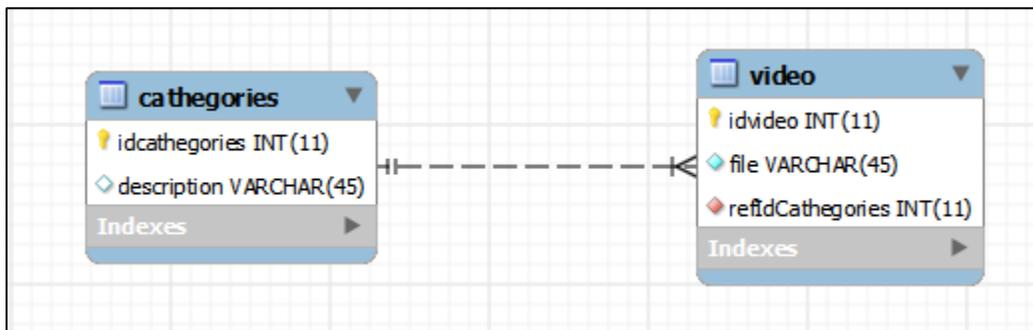


Figure 3 – MySQL Workbench database model

We create on table video, and another one categories, and connect them through a Foreign Reference, in a connection One to Many. This means that one video can have only one category, but a category can have several videos. We created this database with the aid of MySQL™ Workbench, a simple technological solution for creating Data Base models and importing them to MySQL™ database servers.

Each table will then have a simple string parameter. On video table is the path to the video file, and on the categories is the description of the category (interview/interlude). In the Appendix, the reader can find the code to generate this database. This code was generate automatically by the software MySQL™ Workbench.

Next, we define the PHP™/XML buffer that communicates with Processing™. One alternative to this solution would be to create a direct connection to the database to the Processing™ Application. Strange as it may seem, it is more demanding to make a direct connection to the database, since we would have to rely on Java technology, instead of Processing™ Libraries, that have a simple XML parser.

For the PHP™ file, we create a simple Database connection that communicates with the database through the following MySQL™ query:

```
SELECT * FROM video where refIdCategories= X.ORDER BY RAND() LIMIT 1
```

This query instruction, selects the top entry from table video belonging to category X, when ordered in a random way. X is given to the PHP™ file, through a parameter GET. In the Appendix, the reader can find the code for the PHP™ file.

On the processing side, we will create two files (two classes), as shown in the following scheme:



Figura 4

The main file instantiates the sketch canvas and loads the files onto it, while the Data Handler file is responsible for the communication with the Database, through the XML file.

Most of the implementation solutions are quite simple, relying only on the technology. They can be implemented through simple research on the web. Only a few details have sufficient complexity, worthy to explain in detail.

These points I will explain are the methods through which we can:

- Display one interview file for every four other shots displayed.
- Make a file/shot last a random amount of time, starting at a random position and finishing in another random position.
- Create a cut between two shots, given a specific moment in time.

The first solution can easily be achieved by inserting a simple counter on the Data handler class:

```
if (counter >= 3) {
    counter = -1;
    return getInterview();
} else {
    counter++;
    return getInterlude();
}
```

Every time a new Interlude video is displayed the counter increases. The moment the counter reaches 3, an Interview video is displayed, reinitiating the counter.

The second point is more complicated. We have to resort to the methods `movie.duration()` and `movie.jumps()`, we can find in the GSVideo Library. The first method returns the full length of the video while the other one jumps in the video to specific moment of its length.

What is apparently a simple solution is in fact a somehow complex. It would appear that we can load a video and, immediately after, jump to a defined moment of its length. But, after the actual load instruction, the video takes a few instances to load, continuing its processing. If we call the method `duration()` immediately after loading, it will return a fake value, 0, incapacitating us make the calculus or to jump to another moment in the video.

The video process works through an event timer. Every time it has to load a frame it calls the method draw, which actually draws the frame on the screen. So we have to wait until the first frame is ready to be written. We can easily find the moment where the video is ready calling the duration() method and verifying whether it has a length bigger than 0 seconds.

To make this jump correctly, we have to active a flag variable, in this case the boolean jump. Therefore, the solution is to create an if-statement as so:

```
if (jump && (movie.duration() > 0)) {
```

When all the conditions have been met for the calculations to be executed, we make the calculus for the moment where to jump. To aid us we use the Class Random (instantiated in the object jumper, in this function) and its method nextFloat(). This method returns a random fraction value between 0 and 1. When multiplied by the video duration, it returns a random value between 0 and the full length of the video. We guaranty that the video is not too short, and that it is played for at least ten seconds, in the following if-statement. Next, we jump to the time we have calculated.

```
t = jumper.nextFloat() * (movie.duration());
System.out.println(movie.duration() + " " + t);

if (t > (movie.duration() - 10))
    t = movie.duration() - 10;

//It jumps to the position
movie.jump(t);
```

Also, we turn off the flags variables, so we do not keep on jumping in the movie.

```
jump = false;
loading = false;
```

And we calculate another random instance for the video to stop, through the following formula:

```

        //It defines the length of the video
        jumpTime = jumper.nextFloat() * (movie.duration() - t) + t;
    }

```

The jumpTime (time where it jumps to another video) is calculated by the multiplication of a rand float value between 0 and 1, multiplied by the movie duration minus the point where the video is starting. This will result in a random float number somewhere within the number of seconds between this moment and the end of the video. When we sum the moment where the video is starting, we reach the exact moment in seconds when our video is going to end, and we will jump to another video, creating a cut, between the shots.

In the same draw method, we add another if-statement that establishes the moment of cutting. This if-statement recognizes the moment where the video has played beyond the time to cut to another shot:

```

        if ( movie.time() >= jumpTime) {

```

Then, it activates the jump flag variable (that was introduced before), deletes the current video and instantiates the new movie object, loading its location from the data handler object that establishes the connection with MySQL database. Afterwards, it plays the video, with the loop function.

```

            jump = true;
            movie.delete();

            movie = new GSMovie(this, dH.getVideo());
            movie.loop();
        }

```

6.5 Contextualizing the aesthetics of the art work

At this moment, we have reached a hypothesis that answers to “How can we represent Collective Identity, through multimedia art?”.

In this point, I will inscribe the material result of this project within an aesthetical family, stating the main conceptual points and how they relate and integrate in a wider family of artistic work. This point discusses the definition of Multimedia Art, and how it establishes itself within this project.

In “*Information Arts: Intersections of Art, Science and Technology*”, S. Wilson (2012) makes an interesting discussion about how Technology is giving artists the tools to rethink their creation and taking it into different spheres of creation, due to the new possibilities they are offered, and, also the historical period we are living in: Postmodernity.

He examines how artists are nowadays turning their creation into meta-art works, that question, through Derrida’s poststructuralist and deconstructionist technics, the nature of the own art works, in material, textual and conceptual level. These aesthetics aim either to “examine and expose and examine the texts, narratives and representations that underlie contemporary life”; or even “reflexively examine the processes of representation itself within art”. Through these affirmations, we can understand how this art-project inscribes itself in both the spheres.

For once, we are clearly aiming to deconstruct and expose the narratives and cultural discourse that we can find in the representations of identity on both mind and media. This work aims to turn the perspectives of identity into an individual stance, questioning the narrative of the political culture, of the nation, bred by the modernist state and still dominant in the contemporary period.

On the other hand, it actually questions the process of representation, reflecting on the own nature of the object, and the formal dimensions of the creation, the nature of the art

form. In this chapter, we have questioned the nature of representation within the cinematic arts, demanding a new methodology on how to deconstruct the own nature of structured narrative. The own definition of cinematic arts is destroyed, for several of its conventional dimensions are subverted. There are a few elements that are not respected within our art work:

- Editing phase works towards the construction of a formal narrative and is established before the presentation of the art work – In this project, the editing is executed at the same time it is presented to the viewer, creating a non-formal narrative;
- The length of the art work is pre-established – The art-work last as long as the installation is active, ideally it could run for an infinite amount of time;
- The art-work is presented in the context of a cinema theatre, where the audience assists for the whole length of the art-work – This art-work is presented in an installation space, where the viewer is free to come and go as he is pleased.

For these reasons, we cannot define this work as cinema. We will adopt a general name for it, as Multimedia Art Installation, whose aims are to extend and expand some of the structural concepts of the moving image. There are other fields where we could inscribe this art-work, compare and contrast them, but that should be the content for another research work.

7 Conclusions

Poststructuralist theories have changed and reshaped the mechanisms and methods applied by most of the academic work. In order to achieve a representation of a complex system, such as identity, one must resort to complex solutions, establishing and interconnecting concepts so they fit together in one theoretically sound resolution.

In the first moment of the execution of this project, I have posed the finality of representing a cultural identity through a multimedia art installation. I have been passionate about Ethnography and Anthropology, since my early studies, and it has been my desire to explore such field. Through this initial desires and options, I have established my research question: “How can we represent Collective Identity, through multimedia art?”.

In an initial moment, I was presented with a challenge: defining all the structural elements for integrating an art creation into my thesis research work. I was lost, aiming to understand how to build a methodology for such a creation.

After some exploratory readings it was presented to me. I have, then, established the methodological sphere that this research belongs to: An art practice based research, focused on Material Thinking, discussing the materials for a creation of a work of art. But the next question was presented to me. What kind of materials was I to explore? How could I establish the research goals of such work? At an initial moment, I was drawn into the

definition of identity, searching for its own definition and the methodology to represent it. This has led me to establish the materials on three levels: Ontological, Epistemological and Plastic.

The ontological materials defined as unattainable materials existent in the concrete world, which are the raw materials that we want to represent in our work; the Epistemological materials defined as the conceptual lens through which we observe and represent the Ontological materials, the thick theoretical framework, through which we observe the world; and the plastic materials, the materials with which we turn the concepts, observations and ideas into a representation concept and, at last, into the installation.

Initially, I have defined an epistemological lens to work upon the ontological materials, concretizing the cultural definitions we appropriate for our work. I have established a theoretical framework, establishing contributions from Structuralism and other influences from linguistics, and how they culminate in Poststructuralist authors, such as Derrida. I have appropriated his theoretical notions and applied them to the definition of identity, stating them as cultural definitions that may be shared by individuals, but that do not define the individuals' own identity.

In this chapter, I have launched the key theoretical concepts that support this work and have structured principles to achieve an experimental representation of identity. Related to the definition of identity, I drew three conclusions:

- Identity is an individual propriety.
- Collective Identities are metaphysical definitions inscribed within culture through socialization.
- The way we position ourselves towards a collective identity does not obey a binary opposition, of whether we recognize ourselves within or outside the identity.

Then, I kept working aiming to define the nature of the artifact created in this work, whether establishing it as a scientific work or an art work, and discussing this border between the two disciplines, the consequences of such cultural borders, and how both the

cultural areas validate artifacts within themselves. Through this exploration, I have defined my work as a product of art, relying on the contributions of science to acquire ethnographical validity to define an exploratory methodology and a conscience of valid researching.

At last, I explored the plastic materials, defining a presentation methodology, based on an aesthetic of deconstruction, building a random syntax to represent something in a closer relationship to reality, in order to break the problem of privileging the inferences committed by media and simulating a real world observation. In this chapter, I have also discussed the nature of video, how it materializes and behaves as Text, and how we can apply the same theoretical mechanisms to study and rethink our practices. We have established a work that aims to be bigger than cinema and video, rethinking itself, questioning some unquestioned dimensions of cinema.

Relating to the Representation, we may assert that through experimental multimedia art we may experience semantic level to a different level, emulating the process mind undergoes while contacting with unstructured reality, in a struggle to make culture draw sense of what is apparently senseless, to structure what is apparently unstructured.

In the last chapter, I have defined a strategy to implement our concepts, defining practical ways of action, on which I approach the problems and create solutions to solve them. I finalize my work, by contextualizing my creation as mechanism of deconstruction towards the own language of video and politics of identity, and, establishing the practical tools to achieve such results.

At the end of this work, I have achieved a daring hypothesis for representing identity, generated through rational mechanisms, culminating in a well-formed artistic statement, built through combining a wide number of disciplines, authors and visions.

This work has represented to me a major intellectual growth, for my perspectives on Culture, Academics, Art and reality have radically shifted through its execution. When I have started this project, I was looking for an objective realistic representation of cultural

spaces. In this moment, when I ended it, I contrast the questions I have posed and the problems I have raised to that initial question. I cannot but say that my identity has changed with this work.

7.1 Study limitations and perspectives for future work

This study has strong limitations, for it represents my trip as an author, shifting my vision on the world from a Positivist view-point, to a Post-modernist way. To define an effective methodology, one has to read a wide number of authors from a huge number of fields, thus creating the thick theoretical framework that we have in this work. Only by understanding how all dimensions and aspects of cultural life fall into this way of thinking, a true cognitive shift can be achieved. Unfortunately, I felt there was always one more author to read, one more artist to study, one more idea to find. I kept struggling with the discovery of such ideas and how to apply them to new concepts, and sometimes lost myself in such aesthetics and games of words. Due to such things, some radicalism is stressed at some points of the study, a product of such cognitive shift.

At the end of formulating some of the ideas of this work, I have found authors who defended similar concepts, leading me to believe I have reinvented the wheel on some of the points explored in this study. These are not necessarily limitations, for they represent the greater part of the creation of this work, achieving maturity as a researcher, a thinker and a citizen of the postmodernist world.

One of the limitations is the absence of study of similar art-works, on the same field, to discuss and contrast my solution to theirs is at fault on the whole text. Nevertheless, the obtained result is quite interesting, and on future studies and research that I create, I will attend to these solutions.

It is my intention to continue such research in the future, continuing to experiment with the borders of the cinema art, questioning what we think immutable in the seventh art.

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9 APPENDIX

9.1 Processing code files:

```
main.java

package data;

import java.util.Random;

// Main Class that implements the Processing Applet - This class implements all the visual
functions of the Installation

public class main extends PApplet {

    GSMovie movie;
    dataHandler dH;
    boolean jump = false;
    boolean loading = true;
    float jumpTime = -1;

    public void setup() {

        // Initializes the canvas
        size(1280, 720);
        background(0);

        // Instantiator of wrapper to the loader that communicates with database
        try {
            dH = new dataHandler(this);
        } catch (Exception e) {
            // TODO Auto-generated catch block
            e.printStackTrace();
        }

        // Loads the video, based on the instruction got from the wrapper
        movie = new GSMovie(this, dH.getVideo());
        jump = true;
        // Initiates a loop for the video
        movie.loop();

    }

    // Function that reads the next frame for the active video
    public void movieEvent(GSMovie movie) {

        movie.read();

    }

    //Function that draws data on the canvas
    public void draw() {

        float t;

        Random jumper = new Random();

        image(movie, 0, 0);

        // This if statement defines a lenght for the first video to be loaded
        if (jumpTime == -1)
            jumpTime = jumper.nextFloat() * (movie.duration());

        // This if statement establishes wether a new video as been loaded and if it
        //has it defines the first frame of the video and the actual length based on
        //random values
    }
}
```

main.java

```
if (jump && (movie.duration() > 0)) {
    //Calculates and initial frame for the video to start from
    t = jumper.nextFloat() * (movie.duration());
    System.out.println(movie.duration() + " " + t);

    //In case the jump is made to a point shorter than 10 seconds it jumps to the last
    // 10 seconds marker

    if (t > (movie.duration() - 10))
        t = movie.duration() - 10;

    //It jumps to the position
    movie.jump(t);

    jump = false;
    loading = false;

    //It defines the length of the video
    jumpTime = jumper.nextFloat() * (movie.duration() - t) + t;
}

//In case the video length is longer than the pre-established
//it loads the next video
//It loads one interview for each four videos
if (!loading && (movie.time() >= jumpTime)) {

    jump = true;
    loading=true;

    movie.delete();

    // Load and play the video in a loop
    movie = new GSMovie(this, dH.getVideo());
    movie.loop();
    System.out.println(movie.getFilename());

}

//prints playback information on console
System.out.println(movie.time() + " " + jumpTime + " "
    + movie.duration() + " " + jump + " " + loading);
}

public static void main(String args[]) {
    PApplet.main(new String[] { main.class.getName() });
}
}
```

dataHandler.java

```
package data;
import processing.xml.XMLElement;
public class dataHandler {
    private main app;
    private int counter = -1;
    public dataHandler(main app) throws Exception {
        this.app = app;
    }
    // Loads an interview, returning the name of the file, through an XML connection
    public String getInterview() {
        XMLElement xmlMother = new XMLElement(app,
            "http://localhost/intallation/index.php?choice=2&rand=1");
        return xmlMother.getContent();
    }
    // Loads an interlude shot, returning the name of the file, through an XML connection
    public String getInterlude() {
        XMLElement xmlMother = new XMLElement(app,
            "http://localhost/intallation/index.php?choice=1&rand=1");
        return xmlMother.getContent();
    }
    // Loads an interlude shot, returning the name of the file, through an XML connection
    public String getVideo() {
        System.out.println(counter);
        if (counter >= 3) {
            counter = -1;
            return getInterview();
        } else {
            counter++;
            return getInterlude();
        }
    }
}
```

9.2 XML PHP code file:

```
<?php
//XML and HTML headers
header("Content-Type: text/html; charset=ISO-8859-1", true);
$xml = "<?xml version='1.0' encoding='UTF-16BE'?>";

//Connection establishment
mysql_connect("localhost", "root", "") or die(mysql_error());
mysql_select_db("installation") or die(mysql_error());

$xml .= "\n";

//Query processing
$result = mysql_query("SELECT * FROM video where refIdCategories=" .
    $_GET["choice"] . " ORDER BY RAND() LIMIT 1")
    or die("Query error !" + mysql_error());

$row = mysql_fetch_array($result);

//Writing XML
$xml .= "<file>" . $row['file'] . "</file>\n";

echo $xml;
?>
```

9.3 Database generation code:

```
SET @OLD_UNIQUE_CHECKS=@@UNIQUE_CHECKS, UNIQUE_CHECKS=0;
SET @OLD_FOREIGN_KEY_CHECKS=@@FOREIGN_KEY_CHECKS, FOREIGN_KEY_CHECKS=0;
SET @OLD_SQL_MODE=@@SQL_MODE, SQL_MODE='TRADITIONAL';
CREATE SCHEMA IF NOT EXISTS `installation` DEFAULT CHARACTER SET latin1 ;
USE `installation` ;
```

```
-----
-- Table `installation`.`categories`
-----
CREATE TABLE IF NOT EXISTS `installation`.`categories` (
  `idcategories` INT(11) NOT NULL AUTO_INCREMENT ,
  `description` VARCHAR(45) NULL DEFAULT NULL ,
  PRIMARY KEY (`idcategories`))
ENGINE = InnoDB
AUTO_INCREMENT = 3
DEFAULT CHARACTER SET = latin1;
```

```
-----
-- Table `installation`.`video`
-----
CREATE TABLE IF NOT EXISTS `installation`.`video` (
  `idvideo` INT(11) NOT NULL AUTO_INCREMENT ,
  `file` VARCHAR(45) NOT NULL ,
  `refIdCategories` INT(11) NOT NULL ,
  PRIMARY KEY (`idvideo`),
INDEX `fk_video_categories` (`refIdCategories` ASC),
CONSTRAINT `fk_video_categories`
  FOREIGN KEY (`refIdCategories`)
  REFERENCES `installation`.`categories` (`idcategories`)
  ON DELETE NO ACTION
  ON UPDATE NO ACTION)
ENGINE = InnoDB
AUTO_INCREMENT = 4
DEFAULT CHARACTER SET = latin1;
```

```
SET SQL_MODE=@OLD_SQL_MODE;
SET FOREIGN_KEY_CHECKS=@OLD_FOREIGN_KEY_CHECKS;
SET UNIQUE_CHECKS=@OLD_UNIQUE_CHECKS;
```

Representing cultural identity in art: Material Thinking through post-structuralist approaches

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26.ABSTRACT

“Je est un autre” is an interactive installation, aiming to represent ethnographical elements of cultural identity through multimedia art.

This project is defined by the simplest question it raises: How can we represent identity? The present article raises the key theoretical concepts that sustain this artistic creation, discussing the definition of identity, and how this identity may be translated into artistic creation.

Taking into account poststructuralist theory, identity has its source on the individual alone, therefore can a collective identity ever be truly attained both in mind and art?

I explore the concept, defining Identity as the material to work in this art piece.

The only source of abstract interpretation of reality lies within the individual and so do collective generalizing concepts (society, national culture, sexuality, and any other body metaphysical representation). All abstract interpretation and attribution of meaning rests within the individual and everything lying outside him and his grasp is unstructured, therefore meaningless. By grasping them, the individual turns them into structure, narrowing the complexity of concrete reality into a simplifying reductive perspective (or perspectives).

This article presents a conceptual proto-methodological solution for representing collective identity, through a reflection of individual, establishing its dimensions to take part in a work of art. It takes into account the different actors who take part in the representation process and the relationship between language and reality, through the contributions of Derrida and Semiotics.

27.Author Keywords

Representation, Ethnography, Poststructuralism, identity, multimedia, structure, art, Audiovisual.

28.INTRODUCTION

This article presents the initial theoretical concepts that base the creation of the art piece “Je est un autre”, an interactive installation, aiming to represent ethnographical elements of cultural identity through multimedia art.

This artistic project was born from a simple exploration of contrasting and comparing two different cultural identities, laying within the territorial space of Finland and Portugal, the two tips of the European continent, one bordering the East, Russia, and the other bordering the “New World” through the Atlantic Ocean.

The first exploration methodological concepts selected for this project were based on modernist concepts and structures, claiming that culture could be somehow represented by Text, by a subjective look that crystalized culture through the artist’s/researcher’s eye, claiming itself objective and faithful. Through reading and research, this method has collapsed, giving way for a whole new conceptual and exploratory insight. The new methodology takes into account not only content and message, but also an attempt to structurally articulate with the abstract operations the mind undergoes while interpreting reality itself. The new art-work aims to be a metacognitive process, simulating the mediation of the world by mind, culture and abstraction in a multimedia installation. The project aims to work upon the consciousness of the user, stimulating his perspective on the interpretation of reality, on its complexity and on the impossibility to fully grasp it.

The artistic project is named “Je est une autre”, a quote extracted from a letter of the poet Arthur Rimbaud. This artistic project aims to explore the relationship between the

self and the other, the individual and the collective, the search for the identity and its source. It works on the relation between the individual identity and the collective and how they structure and interrelate themselves. To what point is the individual identity extended into becoming one other, one collective identity? “Is I one other”? What is this extension of other, how far and multiple are collective identities? This is the artistic question, the artistic statement inscribed in the installation. On the other hand, this project dissects on the validity of these questions, on the foundational ideas that allow us to raise them.

This article presents the theoretical framework that sustains the creative process and that formulate the principles of structuring both the installation, and, the conceptual methodology to collect data and materials to be used upon the work itself.

This project is aiming to research a methodology to represent visually aspects of identity and culture, within a population. It approaches the problem in a poststructuralist theoretical framework, aiming to apply to image some of the principles Derrida used in his deconstructive reading.

This dual relationship between defining identity and finding a mean to represent it, underlie the foundations of this work. On one side, the ethnographic work, collecting materials, studying culture and finding a mean to grasp it through media. On the other, Multimedia art, a way to represent the elements into a structure that acts accordingly to the poststructuralist approach, resulting in a work, an experimental piece supported by the theoretical concepts.

The significance of this artistic project resides in two different ideas. First, that a complex system cannot be simplified and this project does not pretend to do so, aiming to represent the ambivalence through which a system can be read and, the unstructured fragmented aspects through which it is built (still bearing in mind that representing always means structure). A related statement would be that *Identity* does not reside in artifacts or elements that can be studied separately, but in the whole unattainable *Context* itself, in the whole network of *Signifiers* that individuals define abstractly to interpret reality.

Second, the idea that perspective and interpretation are the mechanisms through which individuals define their collective *Identity*. Also, that collective *Identity* is only defined through the perspective of a sole individual, as a reflection of his own individual *Identity*, not by a collective metaphysical entity (such as society, sex, race, nation). It does not exist outside mind and individual culture, in a metaphysical beacon of logic, a cultural collective structure. Therefore, active control of the interpretation should not reside in one actor of this project, but, instead, the system should be modeled to allow multiple interpretations.

The significance of this project resides in its artistic conceptual value: the exercise of modeling reality, *context*

and culture; in the creation of this “machine” that carries culture inside itself, in an attempt to distantly recreate *Identity*, its multiple interpretations, allowing it to be seen, rationalized and questioned through the eyes of the spectator. It may still be far away from reality itself, but eventually be one step closer than conventional documentary or text.

To attempt to create the directive lines of this kind of work, we must return to the question underlying this whole project: “How can we represent identity?”

29. MATERIAL THINKING

As I have introduced before, this article results from an artistic based practice research. The research methodology has been working around the material and epistemological concepts that surround our study. The stress of the research was to question and reflect upon the materials used in the artistic piece.

We shall, then, consider the concept of Material Thinking. As put in the editorial of the journal “Studies in Material Thinking” this “term is awkward, defeats an agreeable definition and is conditioned by the different author’s preoccupations”. We may connect several perspectives to inscribe my work within this research nature. One earlier definition may present, Material thinking as thinking about the material of creativity, not only on the physical materials through which we execute our work, but, also, the network of values and concepts through which we involve the creative process. From the idea to the execution, this transition phase, from the exploration of the idea, through the materialization into work, and until the generation of a new idea in the viewer/spectator/user of the product. In a poetic form, we can simply say: “Material thinking is performed in making – making thinking, thinking making...”.

I integrate this concept in my work, by stating clearly the materials I am working with, they are Material/Cultural, Epistemological/Scientific and Plastic Materials, and they all play a role in the definition of the problem.

On one side, Material/Cultural materials, we define it as the main material we work with; inscribing in this group the people in the study; the common cultural elements that they define, the structures from which this research is born; what we rationalize upon; the own material of this study: **identity**, as it exists in the Universe despite of the several cultural meanings we attribute upon it, unstructured, *a priori* to the inscription of cultural network of meanings. The use of the term Material Materials, relates to Engels’ definition of Materiality, what exists, what is. On these reside the axiological values in study, the whole ideological and cultural elements that we aim to study. We do not approach these materials directly, for that is impossible, we can create statements and theoretical structures upon them, but only grasp them and work on them through the Epistemological Materials.

The Epistemological/Scientific Materials relate to the theoretical framework I use to process and rationalize the Material/Cultural Materials. These are the ideas we study through the biography to attribute sense and value to the unstructured materials, the observational and rational structures we use to interpret and grasp reality. In these materials, reside the axiological, ideological and cultural network of concepts that allow us to transform immaterial unattainable elements, into structures of meaning, even if still immaterial.

At last, the Plastic Materials are the materials through which we turn the immaterial concepts into plastic reality, into a work of art, that others can interact with. These are the means through which we capture the Material/Cultural ideas, through the lens of Epistemological/Scientific materials into an object, a creation.

Material thinking reflects at all these levels, as we can see by the questions we raise in our project:

Material/Cultural: How can we approach identity in order to grasp it into an art creation? How does identity manifest in the world? Who are relevant actors to involve in the art project?

Epistemological/Scientific: How can a representation of identity be valid in the eyes of the academic sphere? How do we define identity? How can we apply Derrida's post-structuralism to the concept of identity? What theoretical knowledge can use to define and solve our problem?

Plastic Materials: What are the technical devices through which we can capture the data to represent? How can we materialize an art installation, disposing it in the space? What computer software should we use to make our project happen?

This article reflects solely on the way we integrate the cultural and the epistemological materials.

1.EPISTEMOLOGICAL MATERIALS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Defining culture and identity

The Representation of *Identity* has continuously been discussed by the greatest scientific, philosophical, romantic and artistic minds of the modern age, from Marco Polo to Malinowski, from Marx to Rimbaud. Even though they differ on perspective, aim and conclusions, *Identity* has been present as a key concept on their research, as well as the structural models through which they aimed to represent their ideas.

First of all, we should attempt to clarify the concepts of *Culture* and *Identity*, to be considered in this project. This theoretical framework is based on the work of poststructuralist authors. Therefore, we make a statement of the indissociable relation between language and abstract

interpretation of reality, building up our framework through it.

Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) has created a unique view that changed Human perspective on culture and the way individuals interpret the surrounding reality. He has proclaimed that language is not a mere way of communication, but the means through which we perceive and interpret reality. He introduced the concept of *Signifier*, defining it as a linguistic element, a word, an abstract concept which stands for an element of the concrete world (*signified*).

For example, the word pear is as an abstract concept that stands for an unspecific fruit, belonging to a family of fruits which have some traits in common. It stands for a different number of different fruits (even different species of fruits) we can find in the world, not for a specific pear, but a generalizing concept. He concluded that language is the mechanism through which we create these abstract operations, the devices for attributing meaning to the unattainable concrete world. This perspective, and respective development, broke with the classical humanistic views, proclaiming culture and socialization as the processes through which the individuals attribute meaning to the surrounding reality. Based on Saussure's Structuralism, Levi Strauss has defined *culture* as a shared attribution of meaning to the *Signifiers* within a specific population. This theory, and related developments, is known to the world as *Structuralism*.

Taking further the contributions of Saussure, Derrida in his life work has presented ideas that were made known to the world as *Post-Structuralism* and later, with the developments from other authors and respective applications in other fields of knowledge, as *Postmodernism*. He ruptures with *Structuralism*, stating that we only perceive reality through language, that every *Signifier* is perceived, by an individual, due to the relations it has to other *Signifiers*. For example, we can only perceive the meaning of the word marriage for we are able to relate it to the meaning of couple, ritual, commitment, and these words are themselves related to other *Signifiers*, spreading infinitely through a complex network of definitions. So, without the network of knowledge, we cannot perceive a word, a *Signifier* as one, without relating it to other *Signifiers*. Therefore, Derrida concludes that there is no relation between the *Signifiers* and the signified, but, instead, a relation between *Signifier* and other *Signifiers*, attributing to each *Signifier* a cultural subjective interpretation. Each *Signifier* has an intrinsic relationship to an infinite number of *Signifiers*, without which the word would lose its meaning, standing solely as mere sound, mere ink in paper, mere abstract shape in the frame. This polemical statement works the other way around, stating that we cannot perceive reality directly, for we could not attribute to signs any abstract meaning. We only interpret

them through language and its respective infinite network of *Signifiers*.

Derrida exchanges the definition of *Signifier* with the definition of *Trace*, for he considers that no *Signifier* can be considered alone, but only in the infinite network of meaning.

Every *Signifier* works throughout an infinite and redundant network of concepts, which cannot be objectively represented or even interpreted. The related elements one *Signifier* allocates define a *Context*, a specific attribution of meaning that varies depending on the specific condition in which communication occurs (watching a film, reading a book, etc.). Every element, every human action takes part in a specific *Context*, and, without the respective *Contextual* knowledge, one cannot perceive its cultural meaning. To attain a cultural idea of the action itself, one must not only represent the action, but its *Context* alike, creating a thick description of the action (Geertz 1973). Still, as the network of meanings gets thicker, we realize that *Context* is too vague, too big to be perceived or represented. We can only get to a specific distance, leaving out some *Contextual* concepts misrepresented, misinterpreted, simplified by our personal interpretations, represented, interpreted, by our own cultural *Context*.

So, in the context of this work we define culture as a mesh of interdependent, interrelated concepts that individuals retain during their socialization.

Another important idea is to find the source of meaning. What element does create meaning and where does meaning exist?

2.The source of meaning

These attributions of meaning occur when to an individual is presented a *Signifier* he must interpret, and he will do so, relying on the *Context* and his own individual culture. We can, then, state that meaning only exists within the individual, and his related *Contextual* interpretations. If we say that the definitions exist within society, we are in fact claiming that definitions have a metaphysical existence, and they exist within a non-corporal abstract system (Society).

Saying that there is an objective form of shared meaning is either: making a metaphysical statement, or, making an interpretative generalization of collective *Contextual* interpretation, through a reflection of our own *culture*, our own perspective.

Another important notion that Derrida has introduced to us is the use of structure attributing meaning to the surrounding reality. Reality, distanced from human individual perception, is unstructured, it has no necessary meaning upon itself, is concrete and ambivalent. Only through abstract operations the individual attributes meaning to it, summoning context, individual culture, ideology and values. Putting the complex unstructured reality within the confinement of a structure, of a meaning,

is a simplifying operation that reduces the signified into a narrow context, resulting several times in contrasting opinions and interpretations over the same phenomena that cannot be nullified, validated or invalidated. This is a product of the Modernist way of thinking that conceives that there is an objective truth. This notion is repudiated by some of the most radical authors, stating that there is no such thing as objective truth and that the search for it is a mistake.

On the other end, Derrida presents an apparently less radical perspective on the subject, that does not repudiate the notion of truth, but claiming only that truth cannot be attained, due to its complex nature. He introduces the notion of center of the structure, the fixed origin, the point of presence of it. All the elements of the structure are fixed around it, and the *freeplay* characteristics of the unstructured reality. He expresses should be thought of as a flexible element, that transforms and changes, putting into play a series of sign-substitutions that attribute meaning to the unstructured concrete reality.

Merging the two ideas together, we may say that there is no such thing as structured meaning independent of the individual, that abstract meaning is achieved through mediating the unstructured reality by individual culture.

We may make a radical statement saying that, in fact, there is no such thing as a shared cultural meaning. Or, putting it in a paradox: Meaning is relative in an absolute manner.

This is an important conceptual rupture with modernity, creating an idea that all definitions and attributions of meaning are subjective, for they lay within the individual and his respective cultural background. Every attribution of meaning depends on the individual and his individual culture, every attribution of meaning is a personal interpretation. The socialization process is crucial to define these personal interpretations. Individuals may experience similar personal interpretations on reality, but socialization is not a deterministic, behaviorist process and the respective results are always different. We may assert that there are not two people psychologically alike in the world and, therefore, there are not two equal interpretations of the world. We may assert that there not two processes of Socialization completely alike in the world and, therefore, there are not two equal interpretations of the world. We may say that, independently of the specific *Context* of the action or communication, individuals carry an individual *Context* that lodges the interminable network of *Synchronic* relationships they summon upon each interpretation (trace).

3.Meaning, Culture and identity

If the only source of cultural meaning is the individual and all generalizations are metaphysical, we may say that identity is also an individual propriety.

Following this concept and taking it further, we cannot define *Identity* as something that exists outside the

individual, outside his *Context*, for it would also be a metaphysical statement. We can only define *Identity* as a personal subjective representation that each individual has in its own conception, a personal “choice” he delivers to the representation of himself, the personal interpretation of his own *Context*, through his own *trace*. This is the definition presented by *Social Identity Theory*, a contribute from social-psychology. Here we apply Derrida’s work to Materialist concepts, distancing them from the abstract formulations of everything to apply to individual perspective on individuality, collectivity and the self within the collective.

A Collective Cultural *Identity* may only be defined by a third element interpretation on the personal interpretations of multiple individuals. This means that Collective Cultural *Identity* are generalizations created within individuals to perceive and interpret reality. They do not exist in absolute and they do not define reality. They are mere interpretations defined by individuals to describe a reflection of themselves individually within a social group. Putting in other words, Collective Culture and related statements are interpretations that only find validation within the individual who claims them. These generalizing cultural concepts (eg. Portuguese People, People from Lapland, Catholics, Lutherans, Women, Homosexuals) are tags, that only exist within the individual who describes them. They are abstract simplifying definitions through which man processes reality, and establishes insight on the Universe. Many individuals may share a definition, a sign, but the meaning they allocate to them is divergent. Another question that is raised is: How, through which operations, do we interpret and establish our individual identity against/within collective identities?

It is important that we present the definition of *Reflexivity*, discussed by Anthropology since the discovery of Malinowsky infamous journals, this notion of reflecting our own *Identity* into the other, thus interpreting other through our own *Context*. Western thought simplifies this reflexive interpretation, by establishing binary oppositions in order to simplify the complexity of *Identity*, resuming it to belonging/not belonging, absence/presence.

What is national *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group? What is sexual *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group? What is *Identity* if not a reflection of the self-interpretation in a specific social group?

Cultural *Identity* is defined in the ambit of this article as a generalizing idea of all the cultural elements that any individual accepts for himself. Not formed by different superposition of multiple unrelated identities, but by all the surrounding elements that define him as a being. Individuals might use cultural artifacts to describe themselves, resorting to describe their collective identity into a stereotypical image, accepting some elements of this

identity, but never necessarily living up to it. These artifacts are fake, living within the discourse of the collective cultures for political and ideological reasons. True identity is individual and impossible to generalize. It might be common to find a Finnish person arguing that Finnish People are cold, and, at the same time, be much warmer than he describes his culture (himself).

In my perspective, based on the poststructuralist theory, *Identity* is an element that reflects from the inside to the outside, from the individual to the culture. The *Culture* of the individual overlaps with the collective *cultures*, not the other way around. The being is socialized and reflects apparent common traits to the involving society, but acquires distinctive perception of them, developing a different individual *culture*, interpreting the involving culture and *Identity* in a personal distinct (even if apparently not) perspective. Gender, Nationality, Sexual Orientation, Race are definitions created differently by any individuals and shared with different (even if apparently not) meanings. The overlapping definitions of the different perspectives of a number of different people living in the Finnish political territory may result in one of the many possible interpretations of the Finnish Culture.

By accepting or considering these key concepts, we find ourselves without the tools to attempt any univocal or objective method to represent *Identity*, traveling from the rigid, structured claims of modern science to the ambiguous, axiological power of postmodern art, shifting from the demands of answers to the ability to raise new questions, accepting the subjectivity of the individual, perspective, values and ideology as the substances to work with.

4.CONCLUSIONS

I, therefore, define a theoretical framework, a conceptual material to resort to in my work of art. I can draw from the theoretical exploration done in this article the key principles to be used when collecting information to be used in the art work.

The four principles supported by the theoretical framework:

Identity is an individual propriety - This is the primary idea that underlies this project: The negation that there is such thing as a collective identity, a metaphysical beacon where all individual identities converge to. There are only stereotypical images that are built upon tags, and individuals do not respond to them, they are mere unsupported simplifications of the complex nature of individual culture.

Cultural Collective identities have artifacts they build on their own - Related to the statement above, the political/geographical spaces (such as Finland or Portugal) have created, through culture and socialization, stereotypical artifacts that are inscribed within the individual perspectives on identity. If we ask an

individual about one of these collective identities, he will return to us these politicized images, either defending or attacking the political unity they inscribe. These signs do not respond to reality, no individual that speaks of them lives through it. It is just embed in the discourse of the populations, and only one small part of the population live through them.

The way we position ourselves towards a collective identity does not obey a binary opposition, of weather we recognize ourselves within or outside the identity - Individuals inscribe themselves on some particularities of collective culture, but not so commonly recognize themselves as integrating them. This idea of binary opposition is a simplification used by the structuralism to describe how culture signs act inside a System through opposing ideas (good versus bad, holy versus unholy, man versus woman). This idea is criticized by Derrida, for the simplicity it operates on the phenomena. In truth, there is no black and white positioning of an individual towards his identity. He always makes a qualitative statement about it.

Cultural signs can only be perceived when they are destroyed - The identity cultural sign of an individual can only be perceived when they are destroyed. Therefore, for an individual to truly attain what his identity is about, he must be confronted to a different identity achieving a conscious conflict. The opposite statement might also be valid. If an external individual is confronted with the culture, he will be able to recognize what is truthfully genuine about that new space (through contrast with his own reality).

In order to achieve a representation of a complex system, such as identity, one must resort to complex solutions, work the concepts so it all fits together in one theoretically sound resolution. Through this article I have launched the key theoretical concepts that support this work and have structured principles to achieve an experimental representation of identity. With these initial concepts, I have defined precise material to use on my art creation.

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