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Dissertation

Dilettantism  
from Original Genius to Survival Techniques of the Netizen

by

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## 1. Introduction

Every visit of an exhibition generates discussion. Be it inspiring, shocking, puzzling or simply boring, the visitor always feels the urge to express his impressions. Even though the taxation of the quality of a piece of art or the whole oeuvre of an artist is a challenging subject, everybody attempts to tackle it. As frequently as the usual utterances on technical aspects, the invocation of genius and other declamations that silently intend to display one's connoisseurship, disapproving verdicts are brought in, that are questioning the very ability of the artist. Amateur and dilettante are among the hardest-hitting verbal batons used in this context, swung by critics and art lovers alike.

In fact, this has not always been the case. To begin with, the etymological meaning derives from Latin: *delectare*: to like.

Even though this indicates a positive connotation, the word bears a clearly negative scent in recent times. The Oxford Advanced Dictionary defines dilettante as: "someone who studies something, but not seriously and not with real understanding."

Two hundred years ago that definition would have read quite differently. The primary concern of this dissertation will be to examine the history and development of dilettantism that is taking place in-between those two dates. That cultural context will be laid out in order to describe the phenomenon of dilettantism, last but not least in order to extrapolate from these results to the present day.

## 2. Origin and Nature of historical Dilettantism

In accordance with Castiglione's educational ideal, *cortegiano*, from the 16th to 18th century, the members of the Italian courts called themselves *Dilettanti* referring to their occupation with the fine arts mainly with music, for their pleasure (*ital.*: *Diletto*). *Cortegiano* comprises musical and other artistic forms of expression, understanding the limitation of one's efforts on only one or two of them as a failure to aim at becoming a "complete human being".

Opposite to contemporary professional artists who were dependent on being paid those aristocratic gentlemen could focus on these subjects following their interest, or simply in pursuit of entertainment.

Therefore the title of a dilettante was also indicating a certain social status. Main fields of such diversions were music, painting and poetry. Parallel phenomena occurred in France under the name of Amateur.

In England the "Society of Dilettantes" was founded in 1734, as an association of art lovers, especially of Greek and Roman classical art, and in the beginning as a forum for information and discussion for those, wishing to visit these countries.

Later on, it developed into a funding society for archaeological projects in the Mediterranean. "Their interest was connoisseurship of the antique, but their service to archaeology was very real in that details of many structures subsequently destroyed were preserved".

The maxim of this society reveals, that the name dilettante has extended its meaning. A dilettante is not only one, who paints or plays for pleasure, but also the hobby-scientist rejoicing in his studies.

The name amateur appears in England at the end of the 18th century, similarly referring to a person, appreciating fine arts. As early as 1801, the expression makes a shift to sports, meaning the spectator.

From the very beginning the dilettante is a member of the elite. The freedom to pursue his interest uninhibited by the constraints of economical considerations pushes the dilettante to the brink of society, consequently a member of a distinguished minority.

### 3. The Definition in Perpetual Transition.

Until the middle of the 19th century no examination of the term had been made, since it was only in conjunction with distinct persons that it was used.

Henri Frederic Amiel's "Diaries" from 1869 was an early and widely recognised example for the contemporary understanding of dilettantism.

Also in 1869, Friedrich Nietzsche published the "Untimely Thoughts on Richard Wagner" (Orig.: "Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen über Richard Wagner").

It is only in 1883 that Paul Bourget attempted to define dilettantism in the first part of his "Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine" with sufficient precision. Still, in the beginning he writes that it is easier to understand the meaning of dilettantism, than to define it precisely. The dilettante, he writes in his chapter on dilettantism, has apprehended the ultimate helplessness of all schools and is of a too strong honesty to recognise any further claims of final truths.

Fifty years later, in 1933, Paul Lebeau treats the phenomenon with equal thoroughness in his work "Het Dilettantisme als Levensvehouding in de Literatuur". In the middle of our century Klaus Schröter describes dilettantism in his work "The early works of Heinrich Mann" (Orig.: "Die Anfänge Heinrich Manns") as an attitude of indecision, an at all times alert practice of critical self-control, strong enough to control the utterances of the will. He continues defining it as an intellectual and emotional attitude of weakness of willpower, lack of decision, nervousness, the dedication to ever-changing influences and the ready adaptation to the lifestyle of other people.

The aforementioned are only a few examples for the steady recognition of the phenomenon of dilettantism with different meanings. Further findings from random inquiries into literature of this and the past century include such diverse denominations as "ruins of life", "passive geniuses", "versified botchers", "bunglers", "cosmopolitical adventurers", "hysterical outsiders", as being "causeless and without purpose", a "Hamlet journaliste", even a "virtuoso" and a "tourist of feelings". It has also been said, that dilettantism is a "distinguished scepticism", a "science of intellectual and mental metamorphosis" and an "aristocratic disease".

Nevertheless a provisional definition in the course of this discussion can be derived from the already mentioned sources, as many of them are in synchronicity with their contemporaries. The dilettante, by these sources, is occupying a special position in society through his actions.

Despite or because of the numerous dwellings into the subjects over the centuries, the presumably most important result turns out to be that there can not possibly be one unambiguous definition, but only a conglomerate of various implications.

Therefore, it seems compelling to put the discussion in a context of history and society, which, in turn, leads to an accurate understanding of the Fin-de-Siècle, referred to as the "time without a core" by Paul Lebeau. Furthermore dilettantism is not only a matter of the arts, but a sign of an attitude towards life that has turned deeply insecure and ideologically helpless.

If the dilettante is primarily concerned about himself, then the evaluation has to concentrate on that sort of self and its psychological behaviour towards art, reducing reflections on the actual artefacts as of secondary relevance. It is essential to the dilettante to participate in the autonomy of art personally. He uses art and also science, self-observation and various stimuli as mediums for his potential self manifestation as an autonomous subject in unstable and pressing times.

This attempt of liberating the self from pestering demands and confinements and the instrumentalisation of art for egocentric reasons constituted the negative image of the dilettante. The transformation of society has brought about a strong disapproval of such an informal occupation with art as not fitting its solemnity and has deemed it nonconformist at best. Accordingly, the politically and socially altered circumstances have produced a different type of the dilettante which will be discussed in the following.

Differing from the courtly dilettante whose own will was dedicating him to the arts, the 19th-century dilettante is much more endangered by the phenomenon's downside, its immanent imperative limitations.

"The dilettante often loses himself during his quest, finds himself facing a dead-end or is forced to accept lengthy detours to reach his desired destination, he resigns and seeks distraction in adventure, gives way to compensatory hedonism, or even cynical scepticism. And still, his hope to overcome the boundaries of dilettantism, that he has once enjoyed, will never be entirely lost."

A basic simplified thesis could be to summarise dilettantism as the desire and quest for the "complete human being" along routes devious or even astray.

#### 4. The Environment of Dilettantism.

The gap between society and the dilettante makes him akin to equally suffering types, such as the aesthete, the dandy, or the *décadent*. Small wonder, that these labels have been frequently mingled. According to Paul Lebeau the "corelessness" of the Fin-de-Siècle is an explanation for the accumulation of such appearances. Dilettantism is thus also put in connection with a variety of behavioural patterns reaching from "an intensified cult of the form, to boundless cult of the self and the consummation of all stimuli up to total perversion".

Despite that connotation, a conclusion on equalling dilettantism with "corelessness" is consequently illogical, since, i.e., lack of will is an aspect of the *décadent*, but not of the dilettante.

The prototype of the dilettante is often identified in the character of Dorsenne from Paul Bourget's novel "Cosmopolis - Dandy des lettres". Rudolph Kassner writes wittily about the differences of the concepts:

"The dandy is an aesthetic eccentric from England, the country of sports, good materials and hypocrisy. The real dilettante is at home in Germany, the country of education and of surrogates. The German dandy mostly is a snob and simply embarrassing."

A dilettante can gradually change into a dandy if the disposition of dilettantism is overcome, a dandy again can degenerate into a dilettante, if he interferes with the boundaries of his membership of dandy-ism. A certain exhibitionism is crucial for both types, regardless of the fact that the dandy is consciously displaying it, while the dilettante is subject to it. Egotism and self reflection are very differently distributed among them. The dandy is often living literally in front of a mirror, celebrates calculated pleasure and wishes to be distinct without interruption. The dilettante again is curious, but insecure and subject to constant disappointment and surprise.

## 5. Phases of the Dilettante Mind

Srdan Bogosavlevic about Henri Frederic Amiel, stating the beginning of this disposition as follows:

"...like someone attached to christian values gradually loses the rigidity of his faith, as he feels surrounded by universal scepticism, like he, a thinker, feels forced to fight his own sceptical intelligence and is forced to retreat into the illusion, yet knowing, that this retreat has already become impossible."

While Soerensen thinks that overcoming the disposition of dilettantism can be achieved through "... the alignment of the self endangered by disintegration to a binding and rescuing community of a religious, social or even vitalistic-biologically fashioned ideology".

### 5.1. Disappointment and the Loss Naturalness

In the history of culture there seems to be the regularity that every epoch ends with a phase of mannerism and decadence. Likewise Hugo von Hoffmannsthal described Nero as the patron saint of dilettantism. He believes them (mannerism and decadence) to be the cultural breeding ground in times of weak insanity, positive teachings and the destruction of culture.

The Enlightenment, the Critical Idealism, and subsequent disappointment about reason are the milestones in the history of the mind and are leading to the loss of naturalness, which the dilettante tries to reproach with his insufficient means.

In 1842, Alexandr Iwanowitsch Herzen describes the historical setting as follows:

"We are living at the turning point of two consecutive worlds: that is what makes living for thinking human beings particularly depressing and complicated. Old beliefs, the whole of past ideologies are shaken, but still loved. Extrovert personalities devote themselves to the vanities of the day, contemplative men suffer: they seek reconciliation at any price, since internally torn without a cornerstone for a moral life man cannot exist."

During the reign of Napoleon - the epoch of romantic dilettantes- the revolutions of the consciousness of the time gained momentum and "boredom and emptiness, remorse and despair, deceived hopes, disappointments, hunger for faith and scepticism" had taken hold of hearts and minds.

Philosophical revolutions alone did not provide enough force to give birth to dilettantism, if one compares several cases on grounds of their childhood - and also later on developed - dreams, that were subsequently disillusioned. In any case, intense sensitivity is intertwined with the rise of the dilettante disposition.

Leonardi states in his theory in 1821:

"In our days a man can ... through extraordinary sensitivity exhaust life in a single instance. Afterwards he feels empty, deeply and permanently disappointed since he has lived though everything solemnly and alive. He did not stay on the surface and did not lower his probe slowly, perceived everything and rejected it as undignified and insubstantial."

This disappointment early on in life corresponds with Paul Bourget's description from 1889:

"With 25 years he (the dilettante) is finished with all his thoughts. His decomposing, early developed mind has seen through the latest results of most careful examination. Do not speak to him about lack of faith or materialism. He knows that the word "matter" has no distinct meaning and additionally he is a thinker of too precise sorts, not to concede that all religions had their justification at their time. But he has never and will never believe in one, apart from the funny game of the mind that he has turned into a perverted tool. Good and bad, beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice appear to him as objects to feed his curiosity of, nothing else. The human soul as a whole is an educated mechanism to him, the decomposition of which as an experimental subject, is his interest. Nothing is true to him, nothing wrong, nothing is moral, nothing immoral ... The religious life of humankind is nothing but the pretext for such emotions, like spiritual and emotional life. His corruptness is rooted like that of the barbaric hedonist, he is differently entangled and the fair name dilettantism with which he festoons it only covers the cold cruelty, the horrible draught."

Bourget considers three factors of dilettantism as significant: Education, environment and theory. Prematurely accustomed to aesthetic pleasures through easily accessible literature as well as an urban setting, an upbringing in a culture of reason leaves its imprints on young men and can cause this disposition. Through art, such a "threatened human" seeks nourishment and tries to find a meaning in life.

For these reasons, not for the status achieved through art, the dilettante dwells in the arts and for the very same reasons the aesthetic aspect is so dominant in the discussion of dilettantism. Admittedly, the dilettante finds not orientation or solidity, neither in social reality nor in a world of beauty, and, consequently, fails to escape his egocentric reflections. Certainly there is the possibility to escape through art, but one that all too obviously bears the marks of dilettante hands. The destructive analysis by the mind and, finally, the victory of socratism over the myth (of naturalness) is perceived as nourishment for the dilettante in his existential lack of moral fibre. The same groundlessness was called "transcendental homelessness" by Georg Lukacs and describes the hopes for restoring a sense of moral naturalness and the simultaneous doubts about that possibility.

Goethe and Schiller recognised this distressing state of the modern artist, his worries about a possible confusion of art in a vacuum of accepted art theory. Both did not so much fear "bad art", but wrong tendencies that are conducive to dilettante groundlessness, or lack of moral fibre. Goethe writes on this peril that art is only an adequate means of self-manifestation. A bourgeois who is accidentally lost in art is not only a dilettante in art, but also in life.

Dilettantism is a problem affecting not only art, but also a certain ideology. A society that experiences the same transformation (to live in a world without aim, or beliefs to rely on) is reacting all the more allergic to the dilettante who in turn reacts nonconformistically to these tendencies. This setting is imperative throughout the discussion of the phenomenon.

## 5.2. Desire and Quest for Orientation

Susanne Fliegner perceives dilettantism as the tip of the iceberg in her book "The Poet and the Dilettantes". Decadence and groundlessness in the 19th century is ubiquitous at all levels of society. Fliegner indicates to the cult on building memorials and preserving folk songs as examples for the cultural clinging to a seemingly intact past and escapism.

A "vague longing" is the guideline for the dilettante and his goal is his own centre. Striving for the "ideal human being" lets his own self vanish on the way and the dilettante leaves reference. The idea of a "complete human" stems from classical aesthetics in the teleological tradition: "In miniature (the work of art) is an imprint of the finest in the whole nature."

Accordingly, the dilettante struggles to reach that goal in order to achieve his becoming "complete", maladjusted, to overcome this misunderstanding by pursuing it, but not attempting to actually reach the ideal state. It seems just to also mention the therapeutic value of art.

Dilettantism in art is even valued positively by Schiller and Goethe, as long as it is pursued in terms of universal education, but that value vanishes where its exploits are displayed in public to test their effect.

The loss of naturalness and the gradual demystification of the world can make conversion to Catholicism seemingly rewarding, not as an act of faith, but as believing out of desperation.

## 5.3. Scepticism and the Inability to act

Devoid of orientation the dilettante attempts to be assured of himself. Thereby two version of dilettante self-reflection surface: the self-reflecting act of thinking and the self-sensing act of sensing. These self-reflections lead to the loss of immediate experiences.

Affluence of analytic activity as scepticism generates the deterioration of values and willpower. Hugo von Hoffmannsthal apprehends the very same process as a problem of his time:



"Today two things seem to be modern: the analysis of life and the flight from life. In short supply is the joy of action, of co-operation between outer and inner life forces, of Wilhelm-Meister-like learning to live and of the Shakespearean nature of the world. It's either studying the anatomy of the soul or dreaming. Reflection and fantasy, mirror image or dream image. Modern are old furniture and young nervousities. It's modern to think to have a psychological crystal ball and the babbling of a purely fantastic wonderworld."

The dilettante is searching for the intensity that he increasingly fails to find outside of his self. This idea is an alternative way to him towards the goal of human completeness. Acting is opening another road to the dilettante to add reality to his perceptions. Of course, they can play any role, with the exception of themselves.

The more the dilettante hopes to compensate for his unsatisfactory life through acting, the more reality and illusion converge and, finally, the more impenetrable that confusion between art, imagination and life is likely to become. In the bulletin of the union of theatres of greater Berlin, "Der Dilettant" it says in 1912: "Us dilettantes seek to make life more comfortable through acting".

At the turn of the century more than thousand of such societies of dilettantes existed in Germany.

The aiming for utopian universality is much to the disadvantage of a real, but finite individuality and concludes in loss of reality and the inability to succeed in life by direct action. Another effort of the dilettante in his quest for the self is travelling. Physical travels, like acting, serve to make one more complete and to transcend ones state. Being confronted with natives or insider the dilettante oscillates between admiration and repulsion. He both detests and envies the insider for his ideological security and longs for the naive and deeply rooted completeness of the native, for which he detests him too, because he knows that he is past that level and cannot return.

The character of the Marquis de Montafon in Bourget's novel "Cosmopolis" loathes "the uprooted", (the cosmopolites), and loathes that "none of them is in his place" and that "they all lack traditions and a home".

By that critique Bourget lumps them together (falsely, as Roma and Sinti have conserved their traditions especially well) with the Gypsies:

"The forms of existence of Dilettantes and Gypsies have their non-bourgeois, never-settling cosmopolitanism in common."

Jurek Becker, a German novelist wrote in 1996, shortly before his death: "Who can't find the world at home will never find a home in the world"

## 6. The Age of Romanticism and Contemporary Dilettantism

The analysis of dilettantism is usually connected to romanticism. The disappointment of contemporary utilitarianism as well as the reduction of man to his mental faculties results in a loss of orientation. The above set out reactions of dilettantism all spread again: conversion to Catholicism and even acting were frequent phenomena.

Schiller could have been a leader of the romantic movement, but recoiled and criticised their representative as dilettantes, because he considered their programme as lacking "beauty" in their experiences. Classical aesthetics, was what Schiller considered the legitimate fashion to put away with his own sentimentalist disposition.

On the contrary, Hoffmannsthal understood dilettantism in connection with the then widely held conviction in the theory of cultural fluctuation (between classical and romantic thought as opposites). He uses his findings to conclude on his own time, the Fin de Siècle. The thesis to be derived is that dilettantism is no isolated cultural phenomenon, but may be brought in conjunction with the sentimentalist-romantic consciousness in particular. Moreover there are common features of dilettantism throughout the 18th and 19th century to be added to those previously devised: The dilettante from these epochs believed in a feasible liberation from the confinements of dilettantism itself, by virtue of which the possibility of human completeness arises.

## 7. Dilettantism During the 20th Century

At the original rise of dilettantism the term was voluntarily used in order to distinguish from the common artists. The aristocrats were not competing with the artists and therefore were no opponents. It was only with the professionalisation, or a certification of social function, that the very structure of society turned against the dilettante, as a poacher in others' officially owned premises. The dilettante not ready, let alone willing, to limit himself to those fields of specialisation, which he was assigned to, was offending the public order.

Today that professionalisation has spread much further covering ever-more specialisation fostered by exponentially growing knowledge and change. It has become irresistible to confine the expert to constantly smaller spaces of the world in order to cope with the overwhelming speed, number and depths of the fissures in the growing balloon's skin. As far as that might be right for the professional perspective on acquiring and maintaining knowledge the citizen and the otherwise enquiring person cannot hope to live with such a design. It is here that a reevaluation of dilettantism is announcing itself. The professional world is additionally increasing its fluctuation as it is less likely than ever before that one profession will bear modern man from his educational cradle to the grave.

The shift of emphasis in the definition of dilettantism takes place in terms of a "method", a "virtual technique" behind the attitude, while the product is of less importance. The overcoming of dilettantism is no longer a subject, as the dilettante method has turned into a liberation from specialisation in itself. However, the common citizen will adhere to the middle of the road of specialisation in education and profession in order to be able to control the influx into his mind. The dilettante will let himself float intellectually and follows the currents to new horizons. He encounters limitations, but is precisely because of that in the favourable position to make use of synergetic effects between different fields of knowledge.

The remaining argument against his ancestors was "that they would never describe the object, but always their feelings about it."

The evaluation of the subjectivity will be given an interesting twist when thought in combination with the dilettante method, because subjectivity is exactly the factor which allows the dilettante to attach his experiences and his knowledge closely to his personality. The organising principle of the hereby acquired knowledge is association. The thus established system resembles very much the neurological patterns of our illocational

memory and has no parallel in a specialised society. And again, the dilettante finds himself outside of bourgeois sets of values. The core of that nature striving for completeness is that every action is valued only in connection with all other sorts of action. There is no set of objective standards by which to judge an action, but only the question for the individual gain.

To practice dilettantism in different fields, means to encounter various "truths" that do not necessarily extend their validity to a scientific level of truth/falsehood. Since the dilettante has chosen an individual and unbound facon d'être, he will always come in conflict with an existing order in the long run. It is obvious that the dilettante will not be able to be completely accepted by a society, which is composed of professionals and their specialised limitations.

"The old understanding of education as goal for the sake of its own, not for professional life but for the development of all powers of man to fashion his personality, remains a task of the philosophical faculty alongside those special faculties"

Goethe's demand from his time has kept its validity unto this day:

"Take heart to use your senses, do not be intimidated by the experts, free yourself from the seemingly iron laws of a division of labour that confines you to the one profession demanded by society. The specialisation of those idiot-experts might foster the advancement of each single subject, produce more and more accurate scientific knowledge of the detail, set higher standards for technological developments, multiply the production of goods, control nature ever more completely, prolong life through medical discoveries - but society as a whole and the individual as the microcosm of creation are getting ever more poorer. The first disintegrates into unconnected particulars and the latter becomes a stunted object of soul-less social systems, crippled of his possibilities."

## 8. The Modern Dilettante as Philosopher.

Already the very name of philosophy makes it a likely assumption that it is a matter of a hobby, that the philosopher is in fact a dilettante or an amateur. As Georg Kohler wrote in 1988:

"That's the annoying thing about philosophy: While all specialised sciences (...) can refer to a more or less voluminous stock of secured knowledge, philosophy always revolves around the same questions without ever producing any results that would be accepted by all or most of the experts - or is philosophy just a game?"

To much the same result P.M.S. Hacker wrote in his authoritative "Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy":

"If one had to choose one single fundamental insight from the whole corpus of Wittgenstein's later work, it might well be argued that it should be the insight that philosophy contributes not to human knowledge but to human understanding; that there is not, and cannot be, a body of established philosophical propositions, a corpus of

philosophical truths to which successive generations may add to a constitutive body of ever growing philosophical knowledge on the model of the empirical sciences."

Consequently, studying philosophy can be a useful, but not specific qualification for professions, which demand such abilities as writing, rhetoric skills and mediation. Flexibility and adaptability and the ability to apprehend new fields fast become important. In all these respects Gerd Mattenklott identifies the new current type of dilettantism.

"In philosophy after the "Weltbegriff" (Kant defines philosophy according to the "Weltbegriff" as the science of the relationship between all knowledge and the purposes of human reason

) there can be no experts and no teachers - here, teaching and learning is possible only in idealiter and thus equally close or distant to everyone - here everyone is a layman, an amateur."

Since this new form of dilettantism, the flexible universalist, is meeting an economical and social demand, philosophers have the chance to lead the charge against a professionalised society, which is unable to see the price it is paying, and thereby even making a living. Paul Feyerabend duly reminded us: "Even a philosopher needs an income to survive, else he is only in demand of his head, experience in life and a table."

#### 9. Current Implications for a Future Understanding of Dilettantism.

In our modern world of data-transfer via the Internet, a system that flexibly slices and distributes messages in small packages on different roads, whichever is least frequented, society is changing in many ways, some of them very similarly structured. A person using a method of random acquisition, associative storage, and flexible distribution of knowledge is in a privileged position in such a new form of society.

"The basic questions (motives and purposes) of philosophy are questions that are of relevance to everybody, even if differently stated and are best described by the term Philosophia perennis. The results and answers of philosophy permeate the public consciousness and the epochs science. They are not really time-less, above history, but turn obsolete over time and raise new problems that lead to the reformulation of those basic questions"

Astonishingly enough, the dilettante has come from the elitist art lover far from the repressions of having to make a living to the new economic professional finally questioning the relevance of mastership. He continues his journey to the position of a social ideal, a protagonist of the digital age.

That process, i.e. the sheer explosion of information is what will be sketched in the following, finally concluding that dilettantism is returning to another re-evaluated version of what it was in earlier centuries.

#### 10. The Dilettante Travelling on the Information-Superhighway.

These might be the most disconcerting time in terms of orientation and secure facts. The following findings are to illustrate the general direction of this attestation.

There is presumably a directional shift in paradigm, which has been building up for a considerable time. Feyerabend's meta-paradigm, anarchistically ending all paradigmata, "Anything Goes"

is significant for the social acceptance of meaning, be it scientifically justified, or socially generated. It does not mean that there is no meaning at all, but that it is a fact contingent and limited in multiple respects. Again orientation recedes with the vanishing of long-standing truths. The lack of perspective as finally manifested in the general loss of a common ethical denominator, is often publicly discussed and cried over, but still accepted as a downside of liberalism.

However the loss of substance or even of secured meaning, to such an extent ultimately prepares the ground for a multiple-layer reality with multiple and dynamic concepts of truth. In other words, the total division of reality by individuals as in the strictest sense of plurality is a deconstruction not only of truth but in the same instance of society as a cultural context itself.

This manufactured logical extreme indicates the problem compensated by the again increasingly consummated realities beyond the rational universe as vested in Foucault's *verité-ciel*. More poignantly, Ignacio Ramonet's recent "Spectrography of Our Fin-de-Siècle" again states that the fear of the unknown in a rational world leads to a retreat into mystical harbours of unchallenged rationality on all levels of social life. The parallel to Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's writings on romanticism and the Fin-de-Siècle is indeed striking.

This image Foucault used in his lectures, dividing the history of truth into two phases: the *verité-foudre* and the *verité-ciel*. He understands the first as the sort of truth that is declared or literally strikes the world in an instance at one place by one person such as the pope, the master artist, etc. The second phase begins with the Enlightenment and that sky-like truth has spread to the point where it is ubiquitous but individually incomprehensible.

Ramonet concludes that the spread *verité-ciel* has escaped the grasp of the individual, leaving it again wishing for lightning to strike it.

The Dilettante oddly seems to be the only well-equipped character to accept that challenge and float in a boundless and insecure world to come, instead of praying to be presented yet another yardstick that doubles as a lightning rod.

Ramonet, along with many others, argues that the inability to think in scales of probabilities leads to extreme positions as every strategy based on a binary logic will not lead to anything else, but inappropriate results in complex situations

The modern dilettante seems to play the role of a precursor of those times to come. Being able to feel comfortable and not lost in a world of data-abundance, he becomes the prototype of the Netizen. (The citizen of an Internet-society.) (Nicolas Negroponte)

As Bazon Brock redefines dilettantism in terms of a differently demanding reality (simply discarding the present meaning as a wide-spread and pitiful misuse of the term on the side) he hails it as a necessary virtue of modern man challenged by the information explosion. Thereby the famous teacher of aesthetic theory is putting on the emperor's new clothes by taking off his status-uniform as specialist. The difference again is like that of Goethe's and Schiller's verdict: the enterprise into the unknown is very much a positive effort, the display of its findings are not.

From escapism of the groundless bourgeois to the only possible intellectual state for those facing the sheer vastness of former niches spiralling off into black holes, the term is yet about to be revamped by the prophets of a new age, inadvertently continuing a rather old European tradition.

## 11. Connection of the Modern Dilettante with Art

The dilettante is once again becoming a lover of the arts. This time, he incorporates not necessarily the role of the artist only, but all three aspects of engagement in this subject. The range spans from an unprofessional visitor of an exhibition- a layman-, to an artist to a critic.

His voluntarily accepted subjectivity puts him into a position, from which he is able to enjoy a work of art without having to bother about its relevance, price or status. Once again, he refuses to participate in the acknowledged social game of connoisseur ship. The thesis of Beat Wyss, a Swiss art historian and philosopher could also read as a motto of modern dilettantism: "Art becomes art only when it is recognised and defined as such".

And finally John Cage, who concludes " art needs nothing, but a frame".

The following interview with John Warwicker, the founder of "Tomato", that took place in Munich last week should illustrate this new method of thinking:

"What we have been experiencing for some years, is the massive change of cultural patterns. There is no centre, no mainstream anymore, because the periphery has ceased to exist. This polarity has ceased to exist, a transformation that will have great influence on the future structure of societies and modes of thinking. That doesn't have to result into great new concepts, like globalisation, because concepts do not replace each other anymore, but exist simultaneously. The only secure thing is therefore, that there is complexity. You can't go on with dogmas under these circumstances."

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