Art in Progress

Elvira Nadin

Abstract Aesthetic purpose is anticipatory by its nature. In their concrete action—painting, composing, writing, filming, dancing, etc.—individuals involved in aesthetic activities are driven by a goal (obviously projected into the future) that will eventually become an artifact or a performance. The experiment, "Inside Out—A Performance" (Anticipation and Art) took place in the context of a conference that examined anticipation across disciplines. Through the nature of the experiment, aesthetics became a test-bed for ideas pertaining to the expression of anticipation in action.

1 Preliminaries

All creative work, all inventive work, is anticipatory. The artist or inventor creates, generates—gives birth to, in a way—something that never existed before. She (or he) has a vision—a "seeing" into the future—of what might be or can be. He/she is *goal-driven*, (cf. Rosen's definition: An anticipatory system is a system whose current state is determined by a future state [1, 2]. Yet the goal, no matter how clearly defined in the creator's mind, is open to choices from a large space of possibilities. In the process of pursuing the end work, the creator continuously adjusts to circumstances of all kind: materials used, means of expression, his/her state of mind, and the environment. These are some of the variables that, consciously or less than consciously, inform the artist's decisions. While aesthetic concerns dominate, practical considerations play an unavoidable role.

E. Nadin (✉)
antÉ—Institute for Research in Anticipatory Systems, University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX, USA
e-mail: elvira.nadin@utdallas.edu

On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that an anticipatory system is a "system whose current state depends not only on a past state or states, but also" [and here I add by way of emphasizing] *especially* "on future possible states," [2, p. xxxiv]. The past is embodied in skills, culture, education, influences, materials, techniques, available technologies, and the like. The possible future states are not material in nature, but rather informational, as generated by the artist, or by what informs his/her choices (the latter is usually called "inspiration"). These possible future states pertain to intentionality: the meaning of the work in the artist's mind, its interpretation, and, possibly, to its reception. The public, professional critics, art historians, etc., are part of the interpretation process. Should their interpretations be a matter of concern to the artist, he/she will try to control any possible equivocation about his/her goal.

2   The Interrogation Moment

Some obvious questions arise. One question is of primary concern: To what extent does an artist create something that truly never existed, or even whether art starts from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*)? It goes almost without saying that the work is always, and irremediably, an expression that includes past states. Like everything born, the work entails a narration, without ever being reducible to it. The role played by the current state of the entity that integrates artist, work-in-progress, environment, etc. is not easy to describe. States succeeding each other are easy to distinguish and account for. But states that represent the aggregate of parallel streams of events emerge as simultaneous, although not always distinguishable. In a theatrical performance, or in a film, this is relevant. However, when the making of an aesthetic artifact is itself a performance, simultaneity cannot be ignored. In awareness of these general considerations, let's sketch a context for understanding how aesthetic expression implies anticipation.

The question of inspiration, already mentioned, comes to mind in regard to how the future is embodied. Let us recall some artists whose work influenced the public to view art in a new light, to view creation in art as singular as it is in life: Seurat and Signac, whose pointillist style, reflecting knowledge of how color is perceived, was way ahead of our knowledge of pixels; Malevich, Lissitzky, and Russian Suprematists suggested that we can view the world through geometry (Mondrian has is own perspective in this regard); post-Revolution Constructivism in Russia exercised its influence on design, architecture, theater, film, dance, breaking the conventions of realism; the Bauhaus "school" of architecture and design built upon the expressive power of syncretism; Picasso, whose Cubism attempted to represent three dimensions and the underlying time component on a support (i.e., a canvas) allowing for only two; the art of "objets trouvés"/"found objects", which suggests that any ordinary object can be seen as art (from Picasso and Duchamp to Nevelson and Koons); Calder's mobiles, which gave a dynamic dimension to sculpture (overcoming the understanding of the genre as static); Jenny Holzer's *word art*

(as I would call it since, despite the media she employs—paper, marble, projections, electronic displays, LED, whether static or in motion—her object is the word, with a small *w*); Christo's *art of expropriation* (a fitting name for his practice of taking over objects large and small and decorating them according to his inspiration, or wrapping them as though he were presenting them back to the public as a gift). Such examples (a selection kept at a cultural minimum) might prompt a conclusion that does not necessarily endorse the anticipatory perspective. This is because no matter how original—one could say "anticipatory"—the work of art is, how novel the perspective of the various creators, in creating something new, they do in fact proceed in reaction to past forms of creative expression. In such cases, the past is rejected as having lost the creative impetus. They also explore and promote new means of expression. I recall the "revolution" of electronic art (Laurie Anderson, Nam June Paik). As new means become available, some artists take up the challenge of exploring the artistic means of expression that new technologies offer—especially in the realm of the digital. Manfred Mohr, for example, with his algorithmic art, was one among several pioneers in "computer" art. (Frieder Nake, less celebrated as an artist and more as a computer scientist, could be included among these pioneers.)

After all is weighed in the balance, in effect, an artist, no matter how inspired (or how unoriginal), always creates something that never existed before. By virtue of the uniqueness of each object (painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.) or experience (in music, dance, video, etc.), the aesthetic expression qualifies as the "fingerprint" of its maker. At the same time, the artist escapes the limitations intrinsic in reaction by exploring the possible futures associated with the making of the work. These broad-stroke considerations are more or less the framework for placing the experiment "Inside Out" in the context of the conference *Anticipation Across Disciplines*.

3 Interactive Art

3.1 Engaged Art

Lada Nakonechna belongs to the "School of Engaged Art" (http://chtodelat.org/) in Kiev, Ukraine. "A central component of our school," she states, "is the idea of collective practice. We want to develop a range of models for collective art production while of course continuing to discuss personal projects." The group does not shy away from the descriptor "political," in the sense that its members are in a state of revolt against comfortable art, against art approved by those holding power, in the market as well as in government. Nakonechna wholeheartedly adheres to the group's principle of "involved art." That is, they hold that the object of the artwork, as well as anyone viewing the work in progress, be allowed to take—even be encouraged to take—an active role in the unfolding of the work. No more the romantic image of the artist in the ivory tower, seeking inspiration in isolation;

rather the attempt to engage others, to interact. This choice changes the nature of aesthetic activity. Interaction infuses the process with many more choices, and thus expands the space of possibilities.

Nakonechna is a successful artist. Her exhibitions (works in photography, performance, and drawing) in Europe and in the USA (New York) were well received exactly because of her aesthetic premise. The Hanse Institute for Advanced Study, known for promoting interactions between artists and scientists, discovered her via an exhibit at EIGEN+Art in Berlin [3]. A fellowship at the Hanse Institute gave her the opportunity to create art while in residence. During her tenure at the Institute, she concentrated on drawing, as she has done for the past few years. The experiment associated with the conference on *Anticipation Across Disciplines* is a continuation of the dialog with researchers in various scientific fields. It should be noted that during the previous conference, *Anticipation—Learning from the Past. A Legacy from Soviet/Russian Scientists*, she was already engaged in her experiments. It is probably mere coincidence that a conference on scientists of the early Soviet era (who were pioneers in anticipation and motoric activity) and the fellowship of an artist from modern-day Ukraine took place simultaneously. Lada Nakonechna was able to attend some of the presentations and post-presentation discussions. She became interested in the work in anticipation that was carried out in the early years of the Soviet Union, and could relate to the revolutionary thinking manifested in many fields, the arts included.

3.2 Art in Progress

The performance *Inside Out* (see *Announcement*, Fig. 1) that engaged the group of researchers in anticipation resulted in a category of drawings that qualify as the

Fig. 1 Invitation to interaction. Artist's studio at the Hanse Institute

integration of an aesthetic goal, spontaneity (in choosing subjects from the video stream), randomness (nobody "organized" the interest of the persons captured through the video camera as they walked, talked to each other, or watched the artist in her living studio). Something that never existed and, due to Nakonechna's method, will never exist again emerged.

As a matter of fact, each expression of anticipation is irrepeatable. Recalling one of the most daring ideas of Nikolai Bernstein [4] in describing human expression through motion, it is "repetition without repetition." Given the philosophy of art that Nakonechna adheres to, she emphasizes interaction. "Instead of simply trying to activate the viewers to think about the figures in the work [...] he gets involved in the work by becoming part of it and directly affects its outcome," [3, p. 3]. But to what extent is interaction anticipatory? We have to focus on what were the possible future states that affected the interactive process of executing her art project. An artist who deals with a static subject (tangible or envisioned) feeds back only to herself in choosing among the possibilities that arise while planning and executing a work. Such an artist has almost complete control over the current state of execution. An artist given over to interaction seems confined to reacting to her interlocutor. Obviously, there is the possibility of simply accepting or rejecting the subject's contribution.

Since Nakonechna became familiar with the concept of anticipation and internalized it, her own work reflected this perspective. Her project gained "a new dimension" as she submitted her choices to selections guided by future possible expressions. She did not film or videotape, she rather integrated the "living" into the drawings. "Art has no borders. It breaks borders," is part of her aesthetic credo. With awareness of anticipation, she comes to the realization that "Art is process, questioning, discovery." The artist sees herself in the subject and as subject. Art is a discussion that begins in the self. It is never her goal to preach or describe. She ascertains equality and wants to create a situation of equality between artist and viewer, to lead both viewer and artist to think, to debate. The anticipation is, of course, implicit.

The aim of Nakonechna's project at the Hanse Institute was to deal with "movable, changeable" subjects. The most obvious expression of anticipation was her plan for carrying out the project. She designed a new kind of studio—an open studio that made interactions possible. Its one wall of glass, separating the studio from the outside world, faced the Institute's grounds, and had more than a physical influence on execution of the project. (See Fig. 2, on which the window frames are projected onto the paper and integrated in the artist's work.) The video camera was set up to capture what would go on outside, on the other side of the glass wall. A modern (and much smaller) version of the *camera oscura*, it projected not an upside-down image that a *camera oscura* would yield, but a mirror image on the opposite wall. Here the artist had installed a large roll of drawing paper—about 80 cm high and several meters long—on which she penciled in the images projected. The rate of change of scenery determined the speed and effect of the act of drawing. That is, if there was no change, she worked more slowly and penciled in

Fig. 2 "Inside". The artist at work on the image projected by the video camera. Far left: part of a completed panel

finer detail; if there was much change and movement, she penciled in broad, vertical strokes of an outline, to be filled with detail at a later time.

The action that took place outside the studio could have been videotaped or filmed, for later reproduction at her discretion. But her medium of expression is the opposite of the "cold" media. It is drawing, probably the most ancient of aesthetic expression, of ritual quality. This is the anticipatory dimension that she does not want to trade in for the perfection of "mechanical" recording. The aura of drawing gives her work the uniqueness that an artist desires to attain. Thus she would have an artistic rendering of what transpires on the Institute's grounds. That was one goal of her project. The main goal, as mentioned above, was to deal with "movable" objects, that is, the living entities circulating the grounds—mainly humans, but also animals (pets and wild). Moreover, her hope was to attract people to see her at work and to "engage" them in artistic production, even if only by watching (see Fig. 3). This interactivity depended on many contingencies. The dialog envisaged was not one of words exchanged, but of co-presence.

4 Contingency

Contingency seemed to be a major factor in executing her project. The day she started, it showered in the morning. By 1:00PM, the rain had stopped and the conference participants, who had been encouraged to view her working, proceeded

Fig. 3 Outside. An observer becomes an object of art

en masse (25 individuals) to the studio. This was in fact a bit overwhelming. The viewers acted naturally: they milled around the grounds, some small discussion groups formed; most of them eventually approached the window and peered into see the artist at work. Obviously, the rush of subjects was overpowering, and she had to choose which to include on the large paper before her. These are selections that give life to the image. She had already penciled in the background. Now she had to hurriedly pencil in the subjects. She used broad strokes of the pencil to form a sketch of each subject. Later on, she filled in details; that is, she used penciled in darker lines, smaller lines to produce what would look almost like a black-and-white photograph of the area she was reproducing. Figure 4 reproduces one of the images resulting from a busy day in the studio.

This short record of details from the event is meant to suggest what transpired and how anticipation figures in the creative process. New artistic processes make new demands on the artist; but some seem constant. In discussing the computer animation that was succeeding animation based on hand drawings, Lasseter [5] presents some ideas that seem applicable to interactive art:

> To stage an idea clearly, the audience's eye must be led to exactly where it needs to be at the right moment, so that they will not miss the idea […] Staging, anticipation and timing are all integral to directing the eye. A well-timed anticipation will be wasted if it is not staged clearly.

How much control the artist has over each of her interactive works is not different from the question of how much control we have over our lives. In general, she "knows" how she wants a project's structure to unfold, but she had less control over

Fig. 4 Outside In. One result of an experiment in interactive art

the unfolding than does an artist dealing in isolation and with a static subject. Weather and light were factors she could not control, but which solved themselves. At the Hanse Institute, she found a "safe" place to work. But how does such a structure (and structure in general) influence her work? In a closed environment, protecting her from interference, she cannot influence outsiders. Thus a conflict arose: working in a safe environment vs. need to be "seen," to be not only observed, but especially interacted with. In her artistic process, she anticipates a "critical" interaction with the public. Yet, when people managed to enter the workshop, she did not open a dialog, but "tried to guess the viewer's thoughts." Anticipating "double exposure"—viewers who would stand where there was already a drawing —she planned for positioning herself in order to influence where the viewer stands. During the times no one showed up, she manipulated to some degree the images she had already captured.

Was the artist Lada Nakonechna happy with outcome? "It is easy to say 'happy' or 'successful'." The project was not out of what she ordinarily does. It was an experience: good, but not great. In the end, she felt she could not meet her main goal, but attained many small goals. One was to construct a situation in which the artist is placed appropriately. Another goal was communication:

$$\text{artist} \leftrightarrow \text{viewer} \leftrightarrow \text{artist as viewer}$$

"to view as a stranger in order to see something differently," to get people to recognize the artistic process as art in its own right. Very important to Lada Nakonechna is that "the viewer should ask what the artist is doing. The process

should open a line of communication." She is not sure if viewer/subjects asked such questions of themselves.

Allow me to end by inviting the reader to think about art and the artistic process, and his/her role in the life of a work. And to ask: To which extent is a work of art— and art in general— the expression of anticipation?

References

1. Rosen, R.: Anticipatory Systems. Philosophical, Mathematical, and Methodological Foundations. New York, Pergamon Press (1985)
2. Nadin, M.: What Speaks in Favor of an Inquiry into Anticipatory Processes? Prolegomena to Anticipatory Systems. Philosophical, Mathematical, and Methodological Foundations, 2nd edn. Springer, New York (2011)
3. Pfenning, L.: Entfremdungseffekt, catalog for exhibit of Lada Nakonechna's works. Galerie EIGEN+ART, Leipzig (2012)
4. Bernstein, N.A.: The Coordination and Regulation of Movements. Pergamon Press, Elmsford (1967)
5. Lasseter, J.: Principles of traditional animation applied to 3D computer animation. In: SIGGRAPH '87 Proceedings of the 14th Annual Conference on Computer graphics and interactive techniques. ACM, New York, pp. 35–44 (1987); and ACM SIGGRAPH Computer Graphics, vol. 21, issue 4, pp. 35–44. http://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?id=37407 (1987). Accessed 31 Dec 2014