This is Reality, Fundamentally shared

Moving ontology and morality beyond fiction

I met Yasemin Baydar and Birol Demir of mentalKLINIK on a café terrace next to their studio/project space in Istanbul, briefly before the start of the 2011 Biennale, where they would present a brand new, major work. Since 2008 they've been producing works and events as multisensory interfaces for sensory production. I asked myself: In what way and how does that make sense?

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According to those who fear the possibility of developments in technological and design know-how, our experience economy is often said to be a sphere of passive saturation. It might be such for those specialists who manage know-how are special: they enhance immaterial labour with material order. Not beyond the real, just into another reality.

People who supposedly don't 'know how' just live their lives on the streets, at work or at home. These people know damn well who they are and where they are. They are working to get their job done, to make a living in a less specific, less 'new' sphere of Fordist labour.

Within these living realities, we encounter a growing distrust of those who manage know-how from those who supposedly don't have it, and a disinterest toward those who cannot or do not have it from those who do. Very often this distrust is based on 'need'. Of course people with knowledge and managing skills can access luxury and thus permit themselves a reality with more gadgets, either functional or unfunctional. Many others, though, can't. Therefore the distrust of each other's realities is often formulated in terms of 'decent need' and 'luxurious bullshit'; respectively labelled 'real' and 'hyperreal'.

Quid pro quo

These ideas arose as a follow-up of decades of rapid technological changes within society: simply think of all the hardware that facilitates our new order and the software that enables us to use it for various forms of living and working: some more, some less specific. Communication and mobility have altered; chains of production are constantly moving around the world, managed via virtual connections, processed via new technologies. Within this changing environment, we could indeed argue that we lack the sensibility for 'real' exchange. We could even go further and proclaim, in line with many postmodern ideas, that our real perception has been taken over by fantasy. We can recall, or might have heard of, Arnie Schwarzenegger playing the character Doug Quid, who is propelled from projected reality into reality, never certain of his identity; a proven and all-too-often used, yet fun example of this tension we are supposedly facing.

Besides the moral issue of whether we can 'cope with the optional fiction in our life', there's the more ontological issue of existence, of whether we can 'control a changing world'. This question, raised through the abstract and

Birol Demir and Yasemin Baydar
of mentalKLINIK
Photo © Mustafa **Nurdoğdu**

Moët, 2011
Alluminium
80cm x 56cm x77cmH
Photo © Reha Arcan

WHIFF, 2010 (below)
Video still, single channel video,
colour, silent; 3'04" loop

Untitled, 2011 (bottom, both
images) Wool+wool, handwoven
carpet, high polished bronze;
170cm x 236cm

Fact or fiction

Why do I come up with all these 'so 90s' ideas? Well,

technological advancements of specialists, has proposed some 'totally 90s' ideas that have stimulated positive thought and negative fear. For instance, the notion of technological determinism, which, in its most hardcore variant, argues that technology dictates our changes.

exactly. We are not crazy: none of us are. We can regret the fact that we can't afford to buy a new game controller though, and that we might want to steal it from a shop, as otherwise we will never be able to enjoy the fruits of contemporary well-being, as some folks in London recently figured. We can even disrespect those who produce things that seem to be 'immaterial' and 'hyperreal', and vice-versa: those who produce it can disrespect those who cannot live with these 'products of society'. As such, all these big issues deal with inclusion or exclusion.

'Know-how' and 'know how' are closely related. The first is specific, a verb designating the required technological possibilities and design skills that supply these 'products of society'. The second is practical, more consumerist and turnover oriented. Either way, 'know how' always comes second.

Production remains a matter of public interest; an ontological case reflects public rules and regulations on how to produce and what to produce, as exemplified in the case of weapons or instruments of chemical warfare. The moral aspect, nonetheless, is trickier, for no
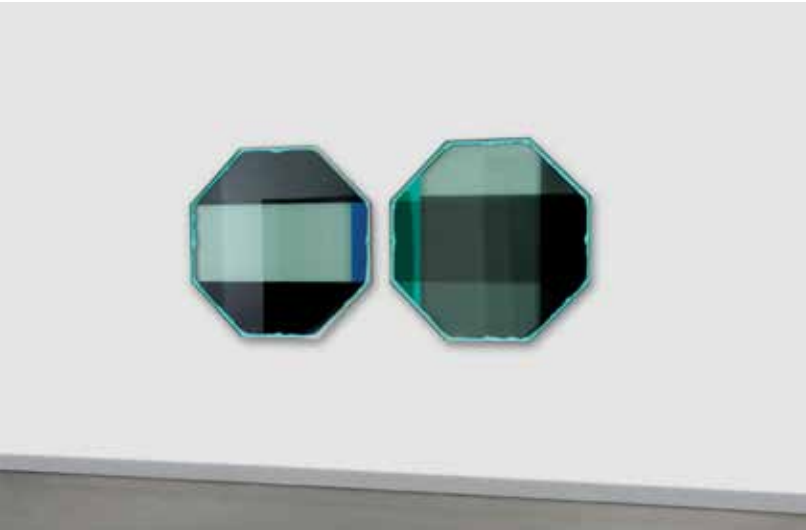
communicators and sensory receivers. We need to train ourselves to be open to new forms of behaviour and to the effect this mutual conduct might have.

It's this momentum of trial and error, in-between a 'know how' within the fields of our sensory levels, that creates our reality, and it's the quality of 'know-how' within our specialist fields that processes this endeavour: an act of designing in-between life and science. Often these two areas, the sensory and the specific, collide best within the expressive parameters of art: abstract, still, demanding and alluring.

From top to bottom, left to right:
Double Cherry (Jet Black)
Aluminium cast, high gloss paint
spray finish; 117cm x 72cm x
170cmH; piece unique
3D Image © Cihan Kirişgiloğlu /
Merve Duma

Liar (INCOMPLETE), 2011
Glass, micro-layered polyester film,
anodized aluminium, liquid polymer
resin; 73.5cm x 123 cm;
piece unique

Liar (DUO), 2011
Glass, micro-layered polyester film,
anodized aluminium, liquid polymer
resin; (123cm x 123cm) x 2;
piece unique

Faker, 2011
Glass, micro-layered polyester
film, anodized aluminium, liquid
polymer resin; 103cm x 203cm;
piece unique

Cheater, 2011
Glass, micro-layered polyester film,
anodized aluminium, liquid polymer
resin; 123cm x 123cm

one is able to outsource his responsibilities. The level of fiction played-out or perceived/experienced has to be taken into personal account. Effectively, the author has to decide what he wants to offer, in-between sensory reality and fantasy, as well as in-between functional and fictional reality. This authorship essentially deals with choices at the level of interaction. It's a matter of designing an interface: not about what design can do, but about what design can do with and for the world.

One step beyond

We, as individuals in whatever reality, have to face up to these accounts and open our registers, being authors/

mentalKLINIK's work and practice acts precisely within these powerful fields, playing upon the responsibilities of authorship: as careful designers, aware of both their reality and that of others, combining the rigor of specialisation with the fruits of sensory experience. It's in this domain that an art legacy is taken to the next level, through the quality of design: beyond fiction with a lure of the hyper. #

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