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The Trace of the Casual or a Designer's Journey towards the Formulation of an Idea

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1 Introduction

“Because the form is introduced, composes and arranges the many parts that constitute the whole, and by coordinating them, creates the module, because the idea (that is the form) is one and because that which is formulating must be one, as much as the multiplicity of its parts allows it” Plotinus

The quest on a project of the processes that lead to its realization, basically aims at the attempt to comprehend its designing processes. There are actions recorded at the level of function, the material or the technical decisions, actions that are related to the history of the forms, or the aesthetics, actions that derive from the culture, the ethics, and the impression of the socioeconomical conditions.

In the core of this quest the central idea of the designing, that is, how an idea is brought forth from the intellect of the designer and ends up becoming the central theme of his intellectual work, is maybe the most unclear or random action of all. That does not mean that an idea could be detached from its dialectic relationship to culture, but that the question focuses on this early stage of the initial inspiration. To try investigating such a matter would be vanity, if someone aspired to give specific answers. So, the purpose of this study is not to provide answers to questions, but to present an examination on an admittedly inner process. Those matters will be discussed through a fiction, a game and some concessions and paradoxes that derive from chaos theory.

The classic work of Luis Carroll (Charles Dodgson), through the looking-glass, written on 1887, begins with a game of chess and a preface that refers to it, to a phenomenal unclear parathesis in an odd so to speak manner. This continuance of Alice in Wonderland, makes up a tale which maybe more than any other tales and stories, draws its content from imaginary situations. While in other tales, their structure directly connects to mysterious, magical or superstitious belief, the specific work balances thinly in between logic and fantasy without any tints of sprites, fear or terror, even without the basic principle of the struggle between good and evil, without the struggle in between entropy, that is the disorder, and cybernetics – that is the order. Maybe this is the first western fiction that approaches scientific concepts on space and time, with a pure fictional



content and describes a route of exploration of the fantastic, in a way that could be paralleled with the process of birth of a designing idea.

What Alice is looking for behind her looking-glass might be the same thing that a designer looks for during the designing process of a project: the reflection of reality and its description, not in an enslaving manner, but productively within the world of his imagination, the relationship between that reflection and its prototype, its ultimate idea.

2 The Mirror

In the beginning of the fiction, Alice wonders about the house she sees in the looking-glass of her living room, whether it has fire during winter. While she watches it and talks to her kitten, she imagines and that happens that she passes through the looking-glass, which has become as soft as linen and dissolves like a luminous silver mist, in the other side. Her fantasy room appears to be exactly the same as their living room only that all things are on reverse. When she passes through to the house on house on the other side, she comes to realize that *“that what could be seen from the old room was quite common and uninteresting, but that all the rest was as different as possible. For instance, the pictures on the wall next the fire seemed to be all alive, and the very clock on the chimney-piece (you know you can only see the back of it in the Looking-glass) had got the face of a little old man, and grinned at her.”* (Figure 1)

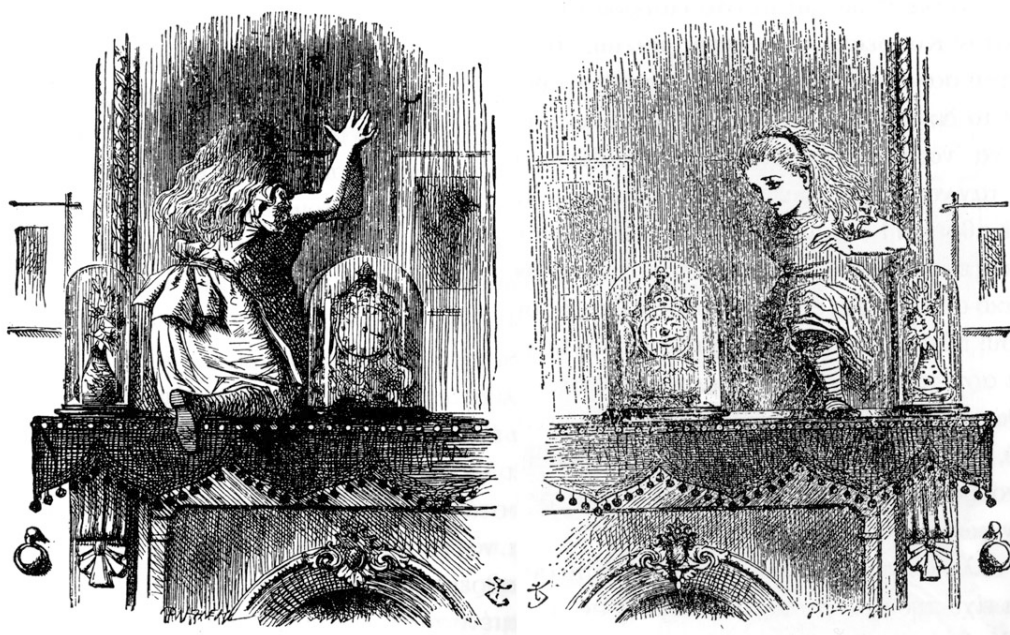


Figure 1: Alice through the looking glass, source original pictures in the book, by Sir John Tenniel

In the ancient world there have been thinkers who claimed that an artist's debt was to represent the nature through a looking-glass. But with this process they did not mean the enslaving mimesis of the forms that were reflected. The initial idea of the repetition of the reality image, which functions as an inverted reflection, when it crosses to the side of the imaginary world, has attributes and details that describe and picture a new



differentiated reality. That means that while the idea initiates inside natural reality itself, with the process of thinking, it acquires in the course different quality characteristics through its imaginary description.

Mimesis as a mental process comprises a large category of those called arts in the ancient sense as this is described in Aristotle's Poetics (W. Jaeger, Paideia II, 129-130). The general meaning of the word mimesis is described as "I do something that someone else has done, with shape, color or voice" (I. Bywater, 1909, *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry*, p.100). In his Sophist, Plato with the method of logical division, distinguishes mimesis as pictorial and imaginary, that is condemned by the philosopher. The specter or the reflection on the mirror, the exact mirror reflection that is placed on the level of the fictional figment, could be parallelized with the bidirectional reading, there, where the element of chance is deducted and the phrases are structured so as to be able to be read the same way, both ways. But this pictorial mimesis can not be trapped in the simple reflection of reality, but evolves to a new reality that is differentiated in regards of its factual existence. Indeed, the representation of reality lacks the reality itself, because if the reflection was to be perfect "representing by all means the whole of reality, then it would no longer be a reflection" Kratilus 432. So the reflection that is being produced is real and at the same time unreal, it has and it has not a substance.

In another part of the book, Alice is in the garden with of the Live Flowers (Figure 2)



Figure 2: Alice through the looking glass, source original pictures in the book, by Sir John Tenniel

'How is it you can all talk so nicely?' Alice said, hoping to get it into a better temper by a compliment. 'I've been in many gardens before, but none of the flowers could talk.'

'Put your hand down, and feel the ground,' said the Tiger-lily. 'Then you'll know why.'

Alice did so. 'It's very hard,' she said, 'but I don't see what that has to do with it.'

'In most gardens,' the Tiger-lily said, 'they make the beds too soft--so that the flowers are always asleep.'



The problem of the frame of the quest of a new idea, might be raised within the framework of the interpretation of the content of the design. The dogmatic determination of the content of the designing process on the one hand, could probably constrain the limits of a creation and lead to imitations, that either are unable to complement the misty shape of the first notion, or to reproduce and repeat a stereotyped or common form – an enslaved reflection, of ideas that have already been verbalized. On the other hand, the process of creation seems to be justified only through the creature and seems to be worthy of the novelty, when it reveals a certain side of the reality with a differentiated manner. Maybe that represents in the fiction the logical explanation as to why flowers are talking: the imaginary artefact of the other side – the new idea – creation, becomes the new reality that is based, however, in the logical causes of the existing world, interpreted and comprehended under a different angle. The new ideas are not necessarily ideas which do not have a precedent, but ideas that can be approached via the reconstruction of others, which already exist and may function in a stereotypical manner. All it takes is to be incorporated in a process where the designer judges and redefines an idea, interpreting it with a subversive or nouvelle manner, or even facing it with a non deterministic angle.

3. From Order to Chaos

In Alice's meeting with the red queen, the goddess of the ground that was divided to squares, makes Alice say *'I declare it's marked out just like a large chessboard!' Alice said at last. 'There ought to be some men moving about somewhere - and so there are!' ... 'It's a great huge game of chess that's being played -all over the world- if this IS the world at all, you know. Ob, what fun it is! How I WISH I was one of them! I wouldn't mind being a Pawn, if only I might join--though of course I should LIKE to be a Queen, best.'* (Figure 3)

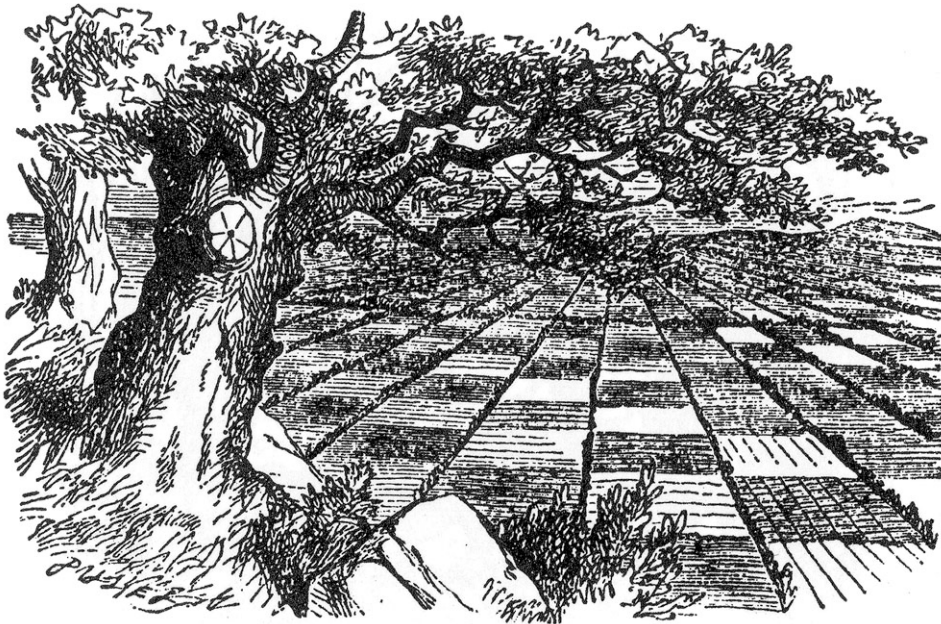


Figure 3: Alice through the looking glass, source original pictures in the book, by Sir John Tenniel



At this point the writer returns to his initial preface that was referring to a game of chess. A chess game was, and still is, a game of strategy and as it is, and it requires a total view of moves and maybe the sacrifice of some pawns in order to win a battle. Additionally, there are rules that define the game – a system of arrangements and alternative endings. Therefore, a second requirement is the assigning of our strategic goals, but also of the tactics that shall be followed. The interesting element in this description is Alice's detachment from the place itself, by considering herself as a member who does not belong to the world. She already seems to be in the place of the creator, if we remember A. Einstein's saying that in order for someone to be creative, he needs to be secluded. The chessboard in the writer's description has the dimensions of the whole world. The reading of the place where the game takes place assimilates the reading of a map with its different scales, the small, the big and the whole. The creator's detached viewing shows his disposition to realise his goals before he "disappears" in the field of the quest, or vice versa. The holistic view in designing (the constant transference from the place to the whole, and from the whole to the place) probably consists of a critical reading of ancient questions which link the forces of chaos and order in one harmonious co-existence.

The ideas are brought forth in a non regular manner, non predictable and complex, and this is a given fact. The reduction method can not be used in qualitative systems such as designing, and that is because this reasoning focuses on the way one side of the designing idea affects the composite result. On the contrary, the qualitative approach focuses on the designing as a whole. The attitude of a designer in regards to an idea and its visual representation resembles to the point that goes through from the one side of the mirror to the other – where the boundaries between order and chaos are defined, or as Steven Wallace points out where the biggest disorder is order and these two things are one. So, we can consecutively accept that the evolution of complex processes can not be analysed with a reasoning manner, because these specific processes are holistic.

Lets remain to the point where there is the description of Alice's effort to reach the garden where the chessboard is, and she supposes that the corkscrew path she sees, is leading there. *Well, THIS turn goes to the hill, I suppose -no, it doesn't!*

This goes straight back to the house! Well then, I'll try it the other way.'

And so she did: wandering up and down, and trying turn after turn, but always coming back to the house, do what she would.

Indeed, once, when she turned a corner rather more quickly than usual, she ran against it before she could stop herself.

'It's no use talking about it,' Alice said, looking up at the house and pretending it was arguing with her. 'I'm NOT going in again yet. I know I should have to get through the Looking-glass again -back into the old room -and there'd be an end of all my adventures!'

So, resolutely turning her back upon the house, she set out once more down the path, determined to keep straight on till she got to the hill. For a few minutes all went on well, and she was just saying, 'I really SHALL do it this time -' when the path gave a sudden twist and shook itself (as she described it afterwards), and the next moment she found herself actually walking in at the door. The creator Alice seeks the road to bring her to the core of the game – the world, the creation.

The truth is that the first stage of the elaboration of an idea includes a painful procedure during which, the idea is established in the mimesis of the image of reality and inhibits the designer to stray and wander in routes and landscapes that are not connected to his prototype. The realization that the "return" identifies with the reflection, with the mimesis (enslaving?) and the temporal end of the quest seems to be one of the practical effects of the bonds with the things that are around us. But the aesthetic relationship needs a distance from the



object of observation, so the quest of an idea seems to need a distance from the object or the images of its origin, in order to be able to move towards the capture of its new quality value.

Anaximenes was probably the first Greek philosopher to claim that different quality attributes of objects, derive from different quantities of their elements, and that is why he is considered as the father of science. But this admission is being brought down by the holistic approach. Everything affects everything, but the study of the member characteristics, of the variety and the complexity give us the chance to have a feeling of the qualitative characteristics in the evolution of an idea.

In Platonic thinking, where the idea of colours and shapes is of a primary position, their quantity has no meaning whatsoever for their aesthetic appreciation. The only criterion is qualitative: it is their clarity, their stay in their being, the total identification with their essence, or even the less possible deviation from the totality of the image they represent. (M. Ανδρόνικος, 1986, Ο Πλάτων και η Τέχνη, Νεφέλη, Αθήνα, σ. 45

In another point later, *she thought she would try the plan, this time, of walking in the opposite direction. It succeeded beautifully.* Once again it is proven the process of the quest with bidirectional routes. And the choice of a specific action, which in this case is in rupture with the common or the expected actions, seems to lead the designer to a new stage of approaching the idea. In this where from the abstract route of the quest begins to define the content and its characteristics and the misty reflection tends via thinking and envision transforming into a form, with the specific content.

4. And Back Again: From Chaos to Order

What is this that is formatted?

Let us consider a kaleidoscope. (Figures 4,5) The elements that are in it function as loose ideas which without the organ's intervention they could not be formed in to a total. The flat mirrors on its inside and the angles they are placed, are those that compose these chaotic elements into a total image – that of order and of symmetrical organization. The kaleidoscope makes up a concrete experience – in another scale, of the way in which a fractal is born, with the repetitive application of the generator in the sides of an initial shape. The random motion pushes the elements to other positions and leads them to other synthetic totals, within which interesting decorating motifs are appearing, based on the symmetrical configuration of repetition!

The use of this mirror symmetry, is familiar to us as a way of designing, In Plato's *Filivos*, we have Socrates, who evaluating the classes of the goods, places the beautiful in the first class, saying *"that is symmetrical and beautiful and that is perfect and satisfactory"*. Plotinos also accepts the beauty that the eye sees as *"the symmetry that all parts have among them and as a whole"*. Its familiarity and recognition relates to a sense of balance, that derives from that mirror reproduction -: the coexistence of the real image and its reflection in an one whole undivided designing form, that repeats with order and rhythm, with simple but also complex multidimensional ways.

But what we called as random in the kaleidoscope's function, could it be called random? Or perhaps it is not, but just comes from a process which we are unable to know? How, from this disorder of the kaleidoscope, which when we open it is characterized by a non normality and most of all an unpredictability – since the random moves could not possibly produce a motif that attracted us, can we pass to order and create a



controlled field of forms?ⁱⁱⁱ And should we ask ourselves if we can do that by controlling it? The insecurity that relates to the forms of these repetitions might be their most attractive element. Moreover, the ability to distinguish the uncertainty of our beliefs and choices, that is, the ability to follow bidirectional routes and self negate ourselves, is the basis of our creative force. The enslaving mimesis, let us not forget, is based in the funding and the acceptance of the certainty of the faithful representation.

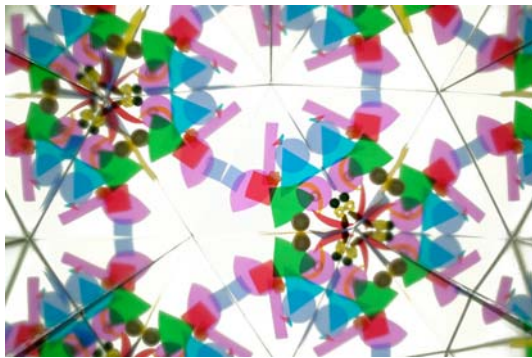


Figure 4 : Kaleidoscope, construction and photography by P. Ilias

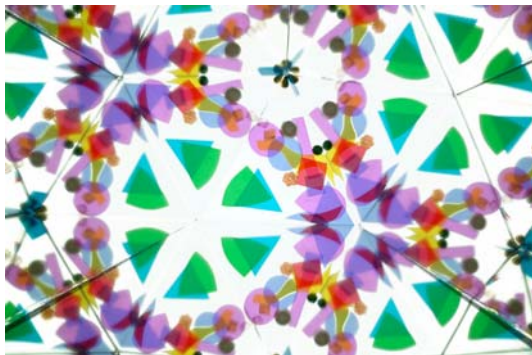


Figure 5: Kaleidoscope, construction and photography by P. Ilias

In the kaleidoscope, as in nature, the “random” transformation leads to morphogenesis and the charm of the game is immediate. We can easily assess that this repetition of the simplest elements that has been described, leads to complex geometrical compositions – a reflection of the infinite, which derives from this great simplicity. Peitgen and Richter (1986)ⁱⁱⁱ point out that the fractal images represent processes, which consist of simplified idealizations of reality. (Figure 6)

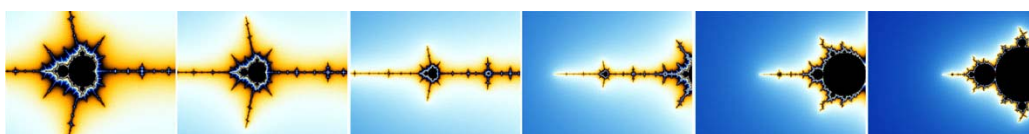


Figure 6: Fractal by software “Ultra Fractal” by F. Slijkerman



A second element that may derive from the “random” repetition morphogenesis in the kaleidoscope are the variations. The motifs reformulate with the movements, and the less intense they are, the positions are modified with morphogenesis that can be thought as variants of the initial theme – in color or in form. At this point we must point out again the uncertainty of these repetitions. According to Goodman, Elgin (1988) variants are considered new works that share with an already existing creation, some of its characteristics, like for example the theme, while they differentiate in other characteristics. It is also interesting to observe the relation of the notion of variation to that of mimesis as it has already been analyzed. (Figures 7,8)

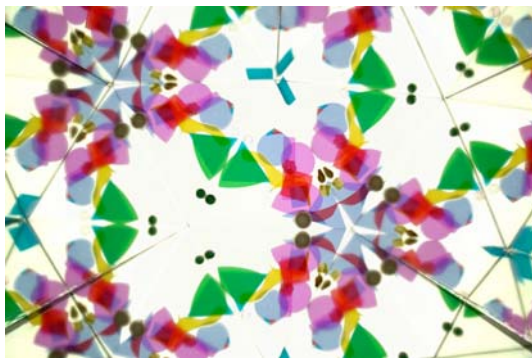


Figure 7: Kaleidoscope variations, construction and photography by P. Ilias

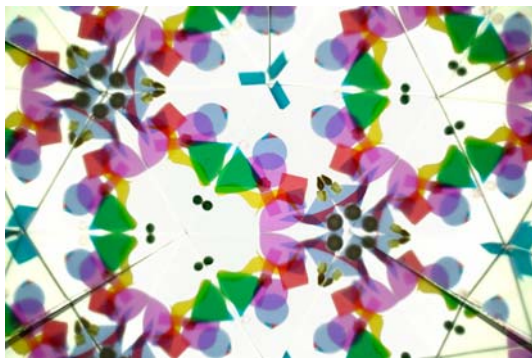


Figure 8: Kaleidoscope variations, construction and photography by P. Ilias

Many designers or artists have to show in their work, many variations of the same theme – in the level of the quest of the same idea, and none of the variations is of lower or insignificant value from the others. Maybe at this point we have to distinguish the variations to the same central idea, from the beginning of the composing process, which makes up the pro-representation of a work, in a manner that investigates the best possible representation of the specific idea. Others have varied in an obvious manner, by studying them, ideas that already exist and come from works of other artists. Likourioti (2003) referring to this process in relation to designing, suggests and investigates a case: *the variations in the work are at the same time a means to investigate, the interpretation the structure and the comprehension of an original theme and also a means to develop a language within a given agency.*



Accomplished artists have considered the study of important according to their opinion pieces of work, as a way to investigate the labyrinth of someone else's imagination, a place in which they must walk, to identify reference points, to escape and go back to their own labyrinths.

The return to the game of chess, has to add to this quest, the preparation of possible moves which allow to the Alice creator, to become a white queen – to move within the world in a manner that will secure her victory – the creation and to return to the real world with a formulated idea.

This process (analytic and later synthetic) must not be supposed that it is based in a cause and effect apprehension. It probably follows the evolving course of a complex designing process, without abstracting its holistic character. This course may remind you the symbolism in Alice, where she chooses the way to reach her goal and that choice is to return back. But what that “back” represents? Does it represent the time, her initial will, the predetermined goal?

5. The Desire and the Time

'That's the effect of living backwards,' the Queen said kindly: 'it always makes one a little giddy at first'... '-but there's one great advantage in it, that one's memory works both ways.'

A. Schopenhauer^{iv} observes that when someone reaches a certain age and looks back at his life, it may seem as it had order, as it was a part of a holistic plan, as it was composed by a storyteller. He claims then, which as in dreams that are formulated by a side of his self, which is ignored by the conscious, so his whole life is determined by his inner will. And Campbell notes: *Everything is connected to one another just like a big symphony and everything unconsciously composes all the rest, just like a big dream of only one dreamer, in which the dream characters are also dreaming.*

The way in which each creator realizes the other side of the mirror, even in fragments, wandering in the place of his own dream, where he draws his own notion of reality, his own idea, defines this totality, which we already pointed out, even if we place it within the conventional time^v as it represents the creator's wish to formulate his ideal concept, his own reflection of natural reality, at the specific time.

Schopenhauer working on the “Platonic idea” considers that it is a stable form, because it is located outside space and time. He also claims that the ideas are related with their fragmented prints “*as the prototypes with their copies*” (book III, p. 219). So he urges the creator to “*seek the where, the when, the way, and the which way, but to focus on what... To forget about his individuality and will and to continue existing as a pure subject, a clear mirror of the object, ...both of them (the preceptor and the perception) to become one, because the whole of the conscious is captured and is full from only one image. If in that way the object has surpassed every relationship with everything that is outside of it, so what is recognized is not the member object as a member object. But it is the idea, the eternal form, the immediate objectivity of the will in this point. Consequently, whoever lapses in this concept, is no longer an individual, because in this concept the individual is lost. But it is the pure, without will, painless and timeless subject of knowledge.* (Book I, p.231)

One of the concepts that derive from Schopenhauer's position, is primarily the focus on the new object, that makes up the idea which frees itself from the conscious, the place and time, even free from the direction, the



goal and its achievement. This level of freedom has a greatly complex creative force. The subjective reconstruction of the idea, corresponds to the complex map of intellect, its subjectization, which is no other than the formulization and the new movement towards reality and towards the designing rules.

The path of this return goes suddenly towards one direction and the event of its finding, just like in Alice, is nothing more than the cognitive idea to review our principles, in the light of the other side of the mirror.

And back again? Who can claim that the chaotic state of ideas is back in time and their arrangement is forward in time, after these? Has Alice traced the path of the return by the reversal of the transitional process, or is it the other way around?

The timeless idea of creation, the composition of the invisible shapes of the mental itinerancy to the non objective – but not with the meaning of non real, concept, seems to constitute a principle. *“Consciousness is much smaller part of our mental life, than we are conscious of, because we cannot be conscious of what we are not conscious of”* De Landa (2002).

So, the creative process can not but move through antitheses and repetitions, negations and balances, through symmetries and non symmetries. It seems to wander in a dual field, which is not known how it has been formulated. The field of this quest in the mirror, reminds us of Morianna the dual imaginary city of Calvino, with the order and chaos embodied in the same landscape. It is elusive like this one, the city that has no bulk and dimensions, but it is as thin as a piece of paper, it consists only of one straight and one back side, with one figure here and one figure there, that can not be separated nor look at one another. I, Calvino, *Invisible Cities* (2004), p. 132.

And so, we come back to where we begun from. The representation of random, can it be random? Is there the concept of random in creation? The construction, the form, the designing object, they have volume, they can be visible, they make up objects, and as such they are ephemera, finite, dated. But what about the invisible idea?

The colors and the shapes dynamically alter, chatter, sing, dance, and come to life. Such vivid forms spring from the unexpected dawn of a creator’s idea, with a jump from the other side of the mirror. Here, an idea’s construction as a perception is replaced by its reflection, as the formalization replaces the reflection in the funding unity of creation.

5. Synopsis

When a designer refers to the designing process, he usually describes it as an activity during which work is being produced – forms of specific user value content and aesthetic perception that will be constructed with specific material in the future. While the designing process is being described as an action that is connected to the means which will realize it, its starting point is less defined and not clear, maybe ideal with subversive, narrative and dramatic elements as we have seen. The comprehension of this first stage and the route of the



idea are related to the comprehension of the same idea of the creative quest, the way in which a new designing language is formulated.

As in fiction the idea of writing a book needs structure, narrative, prominence, solution, in the same way the designing process of a work needs in order to formulate to become the creator's wandering to another world where the chaotic structure of ideas and their arrangement are in perfect balance. To stand opposite his idea without the burden of certainty, with the lightness of self negation that clears up the gaze. To draw power from the wish to revive it, to unite with the eternal a-chronic or diachronic consciousness, to fill with aesthetic colors from the synthesis of its imaginary parts, to play with the reflection of its total in the mirror of creation. And then the creator shall stand for a while in front of it, like Carroll's Alice, before he pass through to the liquid other side, like the Yellow emperor of the Ancient Chinese Myth^{vi}, that is so felicitous mentioned by Briggs and Peat. By balancing in between one and the other side of the mirror, he will realize the beauty and the wholeness, of all these that had been mentioned long ago – from Plato, Aristotle, Plotino... And maybe the light that fades will make him re-evaluate them in the contemporary reality.



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ⁱ The repetition while it creates confusion in other technical systems, it seems to create a creative euphoria in the human mind. The philosophical repetition “the phenomenon of self-reference” has taken its position in philosophical systems as in Zen Buddhism, where it is believed that the teachers are in the position of stepping out of the mirror, confirming which of the self recycling assertions – choan is real. Briggs J., Peat F.D., 1989, *Turbulent Mirror*, Harper & Row, p. 69.

ⁱⁱ Ilya Prigogine, in his book *La fin des Certitudes*, refers to the sudden appearance of order within chaotic circumstances and claims that this process is the norm and not the exemption.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peitgen, H.O., Richter P.H., 1986, *The beauty of Fractals*, Springer- Verlag, Berlin

^{iv} A. Schopenhauer's philosophy is presented in his third book *Die Welt als Wile und Vorstellung* (1819, 1844), that is the World as will and idea. The whole concept is deployed based in the antithesis of the two views of the world, which is a sum of things.

^v The concept of time as a moving arrow has been for many years the basis of positive sciences, beginning from early philosophical quests. And here we can refer to the circular time of ancient times. However, Prigogine when referring to the reverse process points out “*No one has ever thought, and no teaching has ever considered, that the process of composition is equal to the reverse process of decomposition: that is, because a plant grows, blooms and dies, then it can be resurrected, revived, and return back to its original seed, or that, because humans mature and learn, then they can “de-learn” in reverse, to become a child, an embryo and a cell*” Prigogine I, Stengers I, 1988, *Entre le Temps et l' Eternite*, Fayard, Paris, p.26.

^{vi} The myth of the yellow emperor is about matters of order and chaos. In ancient times, the human beings and the beings of the mirror, where not separated but lived in harmony having only differences in color and form. One night the creatures of the mirror invaded the earth and created chaos, thus making the yellow emperor to put a spell on them to keep them behind the mirror and make them mechanically repeat people's movements. The myth ends up to the assumption that these spells will not last forever, but when fade they will allow to the enraged creatures to invade our world again.