

THE ARTIST'S WEBSITE. DISCOURSE FEATURES OF ONLINE IDENTITY AND BRAND

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ABSTRACT. *The Artist's Website. Discourse Features of Online Identity and Brand.*² The present study aims to reveal those discourse particularities displayed by the artist's home page/website (used interchangeably for our current purposes³) as a device to create an artist's online identity. Specific methods (and steps) throughout the process of creating an online identity overlap with the advertising strategies of branding. Our interest concerns the discourse strategies involved in the two activities in the context of online communication. The particularities of the artist's home page have been studied from a genre analysis perspective. The aim is to demonstrate that the genre features of the home page (as a cyber genre) determine or at least influence the site's content. The present research also aims to determine how the content is negotiated within the website's structure to serve the communicative goals of establishing an online identity and an artist's brand. The findings reveal several discourse strategies at play to reach the final purpose and that they belong to advertising and e-commerce, on the one hand, and the specialized field of the visual arts, on the other.

Keywords. *Internet communication, WWW, digital genres, discourse features, artist identity and branding*

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² The present study continues a previous one (2013), by the same author, regarding the discourse particularities of the artist's blog.

³ While it is generally understood that a home page is a kind of front cover of a website, the present approach considers the two aspects as a whole, for an in-dept analysis of the structure and content of this genre, as well as of its specific rhetoric.

REZUMAT. Website-ul artistului. Trăsături discursive ale identității sale virtuale și brandului său. Prezentul studiu are ca scop decelarea particularităților discursului ce caracterizează website-ul artistului/pagina web (termeni folosiți aici interschimbabil) văzut/ă ca instrument pentru crearea unei identități artistice virtuale. Metodele specifice (și unii pași) ale procesului de creare a unei identități artistice virtuale se suprapun peste strategiile publicitare ale *brandingului*. Ne interesează aici strategiile discursive implicate în cele două activități, în contextul comunicării virtuale. Particularitățile paginii web a artistului sunt studiate din perspectiva analizei genurilor. Scopul este de a demonstra că trăsăturile generice ale paginii web a artistului (ca gen virtual) determină, sau cel puțin influențează, conținutul site-ului. Prezentul studiu urmărește de asemenea să afle cum este negociat conținutul în interiorul structurii site-ului, pentru a servi scopurilor comunicaționale de a crea identitatea virtuală a artistului și brandul său. Rezultatele prezentei cercetări disting diverse strategii discursive ce conlucrează pentru acest scop și faptul că ele aparțin atât sferei publicitare și a comerțului online, cât și domeniului artelor vizuale.

Cuvinte-cheie. *Comunicare virtuală, WWW, genuri virtuale, particularități ale discursului, identitate și brand ale artistului*

1. Introduction

The birth of the Web (World Wide Web) in 1991 and its availability for everyday use (starting from 1993-4) made a New Age of Information possible. In the beginning, there were a few websites⁴ for general interest. Still, soon their number increased exponentially, spreading information worldwide using computers connected to the Internet⁵. Today there are almost two billion websites in cyberspace, and their number plummets with every second⁶. The quantity of information shared by them is hard to imagine. The types of information may hardly be defined since data can be about anything. Therefore, a simple classification of the websites seems to raise an unlimited number of questions. There have been many attempts to classify them, but apparently, all of them refer to the most common types. Some have distinguished 11 types (blog, business, brochure, crowdfunding, educational, e-commerce, media or entertainment, non-profit, personal, portal, portfolio) (Whitfield 2021). Some

⁴ The first website was created in August 1991 by Tim Berners-Lee at CERN.

⁵ The Internet is two decades older than the Web

⁶ 1,933,428,700, on July 27, 2022, 10:30, according to <https://www.internetlivestats.com/total-number-of-websites/#:~:text=Sources%20and%20References%20There%20are%20over%201.5%20billion,Of%20these%2C%20less%20than%20200%20million%20are%20active.>

have added more types, like the niche websites, which deal with specific topics such as non-profit, magazine and news, forums, Wiki, and membership websites (McKinnon 2022). However, it is generally agreed that the first genuinely digital genre was the home page (including personal and corporate types⁷).

Each of the above types has its purposes for whose achievement the most efficient strategies are put to work. They include designing a functional structure, filling that structure with the most appropriate content, making it functional, and adding any valuable media (images, videos, podcasts).

Probably one of the essential purposes a website may have is to offer its audience an online identity of its owner and, in many cases, build a brand identity. Establishing communication with the intended audiences is also crucial for each website.

It is generally believed that nowadays if you are not on the Internet, you do not exist (in the eyes of possible and desired audiences). The last two pandemic years made that presence an almost mandatory one. Not just businesses, research, communication among and within organizations, education, etc., moved online. Culture, art included, did that as well.

It is also undeniable that artists could benefit from the generosity of the Web to display their work(s) and enlarge their public and number of customers. A typical device to achieve the goal is building an artist's website. Some may list it under the portfolio type, which aims to showcase the owner's work(s) and business products. However, it does more than just this, which makes it a more complex genre than the portfolio type.

2. Theoretical Background

A website (or site) can be defined as a collection of web pages that may include resources such as images, video files, text (multimedia), and code. The start web page is known as the home page, displaying the different constituents of the site and redirecting to those. The visitor can navigate through the site as per design. One needs a browser to reach a certain website; a search engine is used to search for something specific. The places one reaches this way are allotted web addresses (or URL-s). Examples of some pages included on a business website may include "products page", "services page", "about us", "contact us", "privacy policy", "career page", "FAQ-s", and sometimes even a blog page. The designer gives it a specific appearance, a kind of "look-and-feel," adds scripts that make it functional, and different resources (like images, sounds, videos). All these may be true for

⁷ There are, however, many opinions according to which these two types have to be considered as separate genres, due to their different arrays of functions.

established genres, but virtual reality changes at such a speedy pace that new genres appear, emergent genres that may or may not have the established structures or audiences. Therefore, it may be a difficult task to catalog such new realities.

Web (or Internet) genres may be defined along such coordinates as content, form, and functionality. In analyzing a web genre, the same attention should be paid to the generic features as for the paper genres. Not surprisingly, the communicative purpose is the most reliable coordinate for establishing genres. Crowston and Miller (1997, 9-10) argue the importance of the purpose when defining a web genre since forms are so diverse and audiences may be unpredictable. Although genres are meant to address specific discourse communities, the Web makes everything available to everyone. A random visitor of a home page (or a web page, for that matter) may relate to its content if the purpose is recognizable. The form may be utterly new to them.

There is an inevitable confusion in the Web genres research. Sometimes the different web pages are considered genres or sub-genres (e.g., the “about us” section, the “FAQ-s” section). An explanation could be that the creator of a website has almost absolute control over its form, content, and functionality. It may also be that a web page could be perceived as belonging to different genres. We shall consider the artist’s website as the actual genre and its various web pages as belonging to its structure. Each such page may indeed have its own communicative purpose, but that is subscribed to the website’s general purpose/s.

In their research, Andrew Dillon and Barbara Gushrowski (2000) studied over 100 personal home pages to determine whether or not they constitute a genre. Despite the expected idiosyncrasy the “personal touch” is supposed to bring, they discovered that their corpus shared common features such as title, email address, update date, table of contents, short bio, images, etc. They concluded that this genre has not derived from paper genres, being “the first uniquely digital genre.” (Dillon & Gushrowski 2000, 202)

Genres have evolved and changed over the last decades. When, in 1990, Swales spoke about them, all were conceived as paper-based. With time, some moved online and changed a lot or received new functionalities. The classical paper-based newspaper met a long evolution. Initially, the paper-based newspaper was simply put (uploaded) on the Web, replicating the original, with some navigation links. Then the number of columns increased, and sections were added. Today it offers personalized news according to the user’s interests. Research articles also changed to specific editing requirements, starting with research sources. If up to a point, the blog may be considered the online translation of the personal journal, the website is an entirely new genre born due to the vast potential the Web offers. Therefore, an artist’s website has to be seen as a completely new cyber (sub)genre, although it comprises several other former paper-based genres as web pages.

Besides a particular structure, Internet genres also employ language. Susan Herring defines the language used on the Internet as “the human(-like) language produced and displayed through computer-mediated communication (CMC) systems”; some synonyms she suggests are *computer-mediated language*, *computer-mediated discourse*, *online discourse*, and *electronic discourse* (Herring 2008, 1, accessed March 9 2022). She distinguishes two approaches to the respective discourse: a prescriptivist one and a descriptivist one. The former expresses some concerns regarding the danger of this non-standard type of language’s influence on the quality of standard language. On the contrary, the latter appreciates this discourse’s creativity, playfulness, and functionality (1-2). Herring suggests that no matter how researchers of this type of discourse deal with it, it is safe to look at it like the new generations of Internet users do: by treating it like any plain language. However, the study of language and digital media will be relevant for years to come. (4)

Studies of the Internet discourse are also interested in “e-grammar” (including typography, orthography, morpho-syntax), multilingualism (e.g., language mixing, language alternation, English as a *lingua franca*, translations), Web 2.0 (an approach converging text, images, videos, voice, emotes, avatars, sharing devices, etc.⁸), or methodological approaches (using large corpora, transcribing them, etc.). Any new methods of research and approaches to the field of CMD⁹ should adapt to the extreme dynamism of the field. (Herring 2011)

However complex the CMD, due to its extensive use of different media, activities, applications, groups/communities, etc., there is one thing not lost through time: its recourse to language. The approaches dedicated to Internet language use (in context) may reveal certain peculiarities, developments, alterations, etc. Herring names this approach computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA), “a methodological toolkit and a set of theoretical lenses through which to make observations and interpret the results of empirical analysis” (Herring 2004, 4). Such an analysis may concern the microlevel of this kind of discourse or/and the macrolevel (revealing aspects connected to community, identity, coherence, gender, etc.) when dealing with corpora of computer-mediated texts. She considers that any CMDA should address the four levels: 1) structure (e.g., word-formation, sentence structure); 2) meaning (of words, utterances—speech acts, larger macrosegments; 3) interaction (turn-taking, topic development, different interacting exchanges); and 4) social behavior (language revealing such relations as, conflict, power, group membership) (3).

⁸ Facebook is a best example of this type of Internet discourse, combining text, different activities and applications, offering “private Inbox messages, private chat, semi public ‘notes’ that resemble blog entries, and several types of semi-public ‘wall’ communication: status updates, posting of links, videos, and images, posts on others’ walls, and comments on all of the above.” (Herring, 2011, 3)

⁹ Computer-mediated discourse

The theoretical backgrounds of CMDA rest on such assumptions as 1. the fact that discourse exhibits recurrent patterns; 2. it involves participants' choices; 3. it may be influenced or shaped by the CMC¹⁰ systems. The linguistic content of CMD may be analyzed from qualitative and/or quantitative points of view. (4) A fundamental concept of CMDA refers to the virtual community. The very term "virtual community" has been questioned by many researchers of Web communication, from considering that all participants on the Web form a virtual community to denying it at all. Some believe the term is difficult to define because of "the fluid membership, reduced social accountability, and lack of shared geographical space that characterize most groups on the Internet" (Herring 2004, 6). Susan Herring proposes a list of six criteria that shape a virtual community, which should display the following traits:

- 1) active, self-sustaining participation; a core of regular participants
- 2) shared history, purpose, culture, norms, and values
- 3) solidarity, support, reciprocity
- 4) criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution
- 5) self-awareness of the group as an entity distinct from other groups
- 6) emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals (Herring 2004, 14)

Research grounded in real-life (and virtual life, for that matter) is based on corpora. As Lynne Flowerdew noted, "Corpus-based methodologies have been informed by genre principles of text analysis, while at the same time it has been shown that genre theories can profit from corpus-based methodologies" (Flowerdew 2005, 329-30).

Marià José Luzón Marco (from the University of Zaragoza) analyses the prototypical characteristics of corporate home pages as a dominant Internet genre (Luzón Marco 2002, 42-56). Her corpus comprises 72 corporate home pages belonging to the specific field of computing companies. She is interested in how the interplay of purpose, functionality, content, and form generates those features of the corporate home page that are perceived as genre-specific. Those characteristics are grouped into four types, according to the functions they are assigned in the economy of the home page. She distinguishes the following functions: a) creating a positive image of the company; b) introducing and offering products; c) strengthening the relationship with the customer; d) asking and giving information about the page itself. She concludes that the corporate home page is a genre with multiple purposes and shares some features with promotional genres while incorporating many extra interactive and connectivity features.

¹⁰ Computer-mediated communication

3. Method and Corpus

The research questions to be answered were:

- a) May the artist's website be considered a different (sub)genre?
- b) If so, which are the typical features of the artist's website that may account for its generic status?

A corpus of artists' websites was considered to answer these questions. The analysis of the selected corpus was done through a combination of applied genre analysis (following the guidelines offered by Swales, 1990 and Bhatia, 1993) and corpus-based CMDA. An ESP approach to the selected texts has also been adopted to distinguish the specificity of the art discourse used by the websites under scrutiny. The working thesis maintains that there are certain particularities, both at micro- and macro-levels of CMD, specific patterns that shape the artist's website/home page, differentiating it from other websites/home pages. To reveal those possible particularities, the web content analysis paradigm suggested by Herring (2010) is adopted as well, primarily due to the expected multimodal aspect of an artist's website. The content analysis considers images, themes, features, links, exchanges, and language (Herring 2010, 12). The home page is a cover page that lists the website's contents. However, since the two cannot be separated, we shall look at them as a whole. Any element on the home page needs to be further viewed through the page(s) dedicated to it.

Since any genre analysis also deals with a discourse community, a question arises: is there a virtual community of artists, art institutions, and the art public? While it is true that the artist's website is a genre belonging to the artistic discourse community, it is also true that its audience goes beyond a specialized one. This feature is also shared with other genres of this discourse community (e.g., the art review, the artist's blog, the artist's statement). For the current purposes, we shall consider that we can speak about a virtual art community comprising an undefined number of people (art creators and art consumers) and institutions that are connected in different ways to art and displaying most of the characteristics mentioned by Herring. This virtual art community should necessarily share a common specific discourse, respectively specific genres, like the artist's website.

To distinguish the specificity of the discourse used by the artist's website, the corpus of 42 websites was selected from a list of "45 Examples of Stunning Artist Websites" made up by Steve Benjamins, the founder of Site Builder Report ("the best-known, most trusted name in website builder reviews") (Benjamins, 2022, accessed March 16, 2022). The art galleries' websites were excluded from the list. The artist websites were in existence at the beginning of the current year and were created using different site builders.

The analysis focused on the communicative purpose/s, the move structure (adapted to the web designs), and rhetorical strategies involved in the content creation of the respective websites. More specifically, they were analyzed along the following coordinates: the purpose/s (declared or implied by the content); the macrostructure (the content organization as displayed by the home page—in direct relation with the chosen software/site builder—, navigation options/buttons, user's position); the microstructure (the content of the different pages: visual and verbal elements, hyperlinks); the elements shaping the artist's creative identity/"brand": the display of artist's identity (as creator and business person), the display of works (portfolio), business features (shop), other online presence (hyperlinks to other personal social media accounts); communication tools (contact, newsletter/mail lists); discourse particularities (other involved genres, register, rhetorical devices, multimodality).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Purpose/s of the artist's website

Of the 42 websites, only 3 were group websites; the others were individual; although many art groups share a common artistic identity, artists often see themselves as individual creators. Just like a company, the artist clearly defines their goals: to offer their audience a positive image, to present their creations (both for visual enjoyment and, most often, for sale), to provide the kind and amount of information the art public may need, and to keep and strengthen the relationship with the audience.

As expected, the common purpose of the 42 websites was to showcase the artists' creations as part of their creative identity. A goal for which artists build the websites is that, especially in this digital era, artists understand art as a kind of personal business and prefer to develop their own (like a small company) and directly sell their creations without necessarily involving galleries in the process. In fact, the website functions as a personal virtual gallery. There are also cases of studio services (usually in photography and film/video production). In some cases, the services are educational: studio classes in different branches are offered as part of the business, besides selling works – 6 instances. In one case, the website also hosted the artist's foundation, the workshop ("laboratory"), and some charitable events (suggesting the complexity of his endeavors).

Even if the artist does not directly sell the creation on the website (9 cases), they suggest asking about such details using the contact form; some images in the gallery are marked "sold," or there may be suggestions of the services the artist can provide, prompting the possible customers to inquire for

a quote directly. In just a few cases, some hyperlinks and/or contact details of the representing galleries are provided, suggesting the way to purchase the works- 3 cases.

Therefore, although one might expect that the artist's website is just meant to display the artist's creations, apparently, it has become a reliable medium for building up a real art business, the artist's private-owned company. In this context, we can see the artist's website as an instrument used to shape the artist's brand, not just an artistic identity, and promote their "small company." Thus, besides just showcasing creation, the artist's website does more: it reaches potential customers while also displaying credentials and expertise; it informs; it educates; it is used for self-advertising and promoting the products of creation and art events. These make the artist's website a multi-purpose genre, sharing features with promotional genres, corporate, academic, and personal websites.

4.2. The macrostructure

The moves of the artist's website highly correspond to the home page header buttons: identifying the website, indicating content structure, identifying the artist, displaying credentials and expertise, displaying creations, selling creations, and establishing relations with the public/customers.

The software site builders the artists used for their sites were as follows: 28% *Squarespace* (payable; one can use pre-built website templates and drag-and-drop elements to create and modify webpages.); 26% *Format* (portfolio-based), 21% - *Wix* (free, allowing plug-ins for social media, e-commerce, online marketing, contact forms, email marketing, and community forums); the rest were GoDaddy, Shopify, and Weebly.

The role of any home page is to function as a cover page by offering visitors an overview of the website and as an official gateway to the website's content through the navigation menu. The title gives the very first information provided by the home page. In 40 cases, the title contained the name of the artist (or of the group - "The Tokyoiter"); the other two metaphorically or rhetorically suggested the content ("Almost Real" displaying photography by eleven artists; "Creature Creature" owned by a duo creating mural "creatures"). In most cases, there was a subtitle indicating the type of art created by the owner of the website (paintings, photography, sculpture, etc.) and even the style ("American Hyper-Realist artist"; "Miss Aniela Surreal Fashion"). Some subtitles suggested the preferred theme/s of the artist: "for Beauty & Truth"; "a return to understanding as felt by the spirit", some eco militancy ("create more than you consume"), or even a welcoming message ("Welcome to Ben & Julia studio. Film, Art & Joy").

One can navigate the site by clicking on the buttons provided by the header (or tabs), which are intra-links to the different content pages. These buttons may be lexical (words) or images (suggestive symbols such as “search” or “cart”, or “log in”). Most often, there is a *menu* (a kind of table of contents) leading to the site’s pages, but there are many cases when the artist directly displays the content headers (tabs) on the home page.

The home pages also showcase samples of the artist’s work, using different layouts (grids of thumbnails, animations, vertical or horizontal slideshows/sliders). In two cases, the whole creation is displayed if one scrolls down.

The most typical structure of the websites included a menu, an “about” button, a “gallery” button, “contact & newsletter,” cart, hyperlinks (as icons) to the artist’s other web accounts/social media, or blog. In a few cases, at the bottom of the page, one could access the necessary legal buttons, as displayed by any corporate home page or e-commerce page, as well as some shopping tools (“Privacy Policy,” “Delivery & Returns,” “Terms & Conditions” + cart+ secure pay).

4.3. The microstructure. Content pages

One can access any constituent page by clicking on the respective button. The “About” button is meant to offer the visitors important information about the artist. Usually, this is provided by the typical résumé. This genre text includes details (the genre’s moves) about education, professional experience(s) (e.g., internships, residencies, participation in creation camps, contests, festivals, conferences, etc.), list of exhibitions (chronologically arranged or otherwise—solo, group, at home or abroad), “press” (an exhaustive selection of texts/articles, interviews, videos hosted by art magazines and other media, most often with links, or providing additional proofs), awards (establishing the credentials and expertise of the respective artist), collections (presence of the works in private or institutional collections, also adding to the artist’s credentials).

Sometimes, when pressing the “About” button, one can find a small or a more extended bio (a short or longer narrative text) and/or an artist statement (sometimes a recorded video). Less official than the résumé, they are meant to offer information about the artist while reducing social distance. In a few cases, both a résumé (even a downloadable C.V.) and a bio are provided (so that the necessary information finds its way to any recipient, private or institutional). In one case, each member of the artist group is introduced through an interview, and the visitor can access the necessary information by watching a short video of the respective interview. Another original way of providing information about the artist was, in one case, a FAQs section, where the artist imagined a set of questions a potential audience might ask and provided the necessary

answers. Under the same "About" button, one website displays, side by side with the bio and artist statement, several "kudos to the artist" from recent clients (e.g., "Your work is exquisite ... a mirror of you ... you're truly one of the most wonderful human beings ever to grace this planet", signed AMB, collector)

Together with the artist's visual identity, the information provided under this header, contained in different genre texts or video materials, is meant to shape a strong, solid artistic and professional identity, even to build a brand, which may influence potential customers.

Sometimes, the "press" information, the exhibition list, and even a list of clients may be accessed by clicking on separate links under the same "About" button if a complete résumé is not provided. There are a few cases (4) when the "About" button is replaced by "Info." Here visitors may get information about the services provided by the artist, the skills/expertise, location of the studio, and link to the shop/shops where they can purchase the works they like; in another 3 cases, one can get information about the artist through the dedicated "CV" or "Biography" buttons.

The most important page of the website is the one displaying the artist's works (under such headers as "Gallery," "Works," "Portfolio," and "Projects"). This page is also the richest in content. The works are showcased using different layouts: a grid of thumbnails, sliders (vertically or horizontally moving), thematically or chronologically grouped, or even displayed in a row, irrespective of any criteria. Most often, the visitor can click on an image and obtain a larger view of it and technical information (the technique, the dimensions). In some cases, an artist statement regarding the clicked work is provided, too, to facilitate a visitor's better understanding and appreciation of the piece. Suppose the art product was an installation, a fashion collection, or an on-place work (like a mural). In that case, photographs of the respective work or groups of works are provided and *glichiées*¹¹ after the pieces may be offered for sale; sometimes, slideshows and recorded videos of the performance may be accessed. In one case, attached to the work's image is a short video in which the artist explains the creation process. If the work is for sale, commercial information is provided, an "add to cart"/"buy" option, or a link to the shop. One may even find this announcement: "All paintings on this page are for sale. See Prices page for details".

Although one might expect that such a "gallery" page is meant just to showcase an artist's creations, in practice, the displayed works (presented as images/photographs) are most often to sell, whether directly from the gallery or through a link to the shop. The art practice is not just about exhibiting works but also about selling them. One website even displays a badge for an "accredited business."

¹¹ fine art digital prints made on inkjet printers

If the website does not include a shop and no other links to any exterior shops are provided (9 cases), the artist expects the possible clients to reach them via included contact tools. Sometimes this is stated in the contact form (suggesting direct sales, commissions, orders). There is a “shop” button (or link) in most cases. Visitors may access the works for sale via this button or directly from the gallery. When an image of the desired art object is clicked, one can get an enlarged version of it, details about the technique and the dimensions, and some options. One can opt between different sizes, techniques (e.g., painting or print), framings, and payment methods. Some other legal and commercial details may also be included: deliveries; refund policy; privacy policy; terms of service, similar to any online shop. There are three cases in which the artist sells the works through other specialized art-selling platforms (with links), and another two give links to the representing galleries.

When the artist also provides educational services (workshops of different types), these are not included under the “gallery” header but usually have a dedicated button where information about what is offered, schedules, and prices is provided, as well as testimonials and even some teaching materials. For other types of art services (e.g., post-production & Motion Design services), those interested need to contact the artist directly or click on a dedicated link.

Strengthening the relationship with the audience while building a loyal group of possible future customers is vital for any artist (similar to what a company might wish). The website may facilitate that relationship. One way to get in touch is the “Contact” button. Visitors will find an email address, sometimes a phone number, and even a physical address. They might be asked to fill out a contact form (for most of the researched websites), provide a name, and an email address, formulate a message and then send it. Another way is by a newsletter subscription form (or a mailing list), through which the artist’s fans can keep updated about what is new and get new offers. Almost all the websites also provide other instruments: links to the artist’s social media accounts (on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, or YouTube), some sharing tools, and even a “let’s chat” box. Sometimes, a blog button is integrated with the header bar. Since blogs are supposed to be frequently updated and keep a more familiar tone, the fans can find out the “latest news” about the artist’s practice¹².

4.4. Discourse features. A multimodal genre

The most relevant aspect of the artist’s website is its multimodality. As expected, an artist’s dominant mode of expression is visual. Therefore, that mode will dominate all the pages of the site. In one case, five images (selfies)

¹² For an analysis of the artist’s blog, also see Crețiu, 2013 a).

are placed under the “About” button, and no text is attached. Images may be still, or moving, arranged in different layouts; videos (even sets of videos) and podcasts are often integrated. Written texts (belonging to different genres) are also present (such as résumés, artist statements, bios, service descriptions, advertisements, etc.). Forms are part of the website, too, as are the different icons and links. Although the site builders somewhat prescribe the formats, there is a certain freedom to choose between layouts, colors, and fonts. An interesting observation about how creative artists can and should be when building their sites is made by the reviewer of the 42 websites:

A good artist website should showcase your art. Think of how art galleries are designed— they are functional and austere with plenty of whitespace on walls. They do this to get out of the way and showcase the art. Remember, people didn't come to your website to look at an artistic looking website— they came to look at art: paintings, sculptures or photos. Don't make the mistake of trying to make the website its own piece of art— that rarely goes well. (Benjamins, 2022, accessed July 21)

So, apparently, no matter how much art is displayed on the artist's website, the website itself should keep “less artistic.” All 42 websites seem to obey this guideline, although one cannot neglect the creativity the artists proved while playing with all the available tools. Another interesting feature of this type of website (probably a more recent one) is the commercial one. Artists learned and borrowed a lot from the CHP (corporate home page), the academic pages, and the online shop pages and adapted their discourse to serve their purposes.

One can notice a combination of formal and informal registers (even on the same website) in the written texts; this mixture reveals the preoccupation of the artist to look/sound professional (even “business-like”) while also trying to bring the audience closer, by reducing social distance. In a few cases, the degree of familiarity of the texts is a bit unnatural for this genre (probably due to confusion between genres or a wrong understanding of appropriate standards). However, most artists balanced a formal register with a less formal one. The formal register is standard for the résumé genre; the biographical texts and artist statements tend to be more familiar. The register also depends on the type of information the artist needs to share, whether personal, professional, or commercial.

While résumés are formatted as lists with several headings, narratives are to be found in biographies (some trying to sound “poetic”) and descriptions (narrative descriptions), in artist's statements, in process descriptions, in gallery labels. There are even some advertorial-type small texts and sales pitches when the artist wants to convince the possible buyers about the “good deal” they are offering when selling an artwork (even announcing 30% sales and offering

coupons). Imperatives like “don’t miss this opportunity” combine with such qualitative descriptors like “this awesome painting” to influence and prompt an expected action from the visitors (to buy the work).

Another interesting combination of discourse features refers to a mixture of 1st and 3rd person pronouns on the same website, in direct relationship with the degree of formality the artist tries to imply. Some biographies are written in the 3rd person, which indicates some objectivity (even if it is the same person speaking about themselves (!), see e.g.s. 1, 2, and 3 below); others use the 1st person to sound more natural and seem more honest as well as to reduce social distance and bring visitors closer (e.g.s. 4, 5 and 7 below). The latter rhetorical device is sometimes sprinkled with some interjections (“yey!”), some adverbs (“awesome!”, “cool!”), even one or two “smiley faces”; the use of the 2nd person (see e.g.s. 6 and 7 below) suggests more of a conversation-type of discourse.

e.g., 1 On the side of his Arctic endeavor, Benjamin has worked for over five years for the Icelandic outdoor clothing brand [...] (https://benjaminhardman.com/about_ accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 2. Mel Volkman is a fine artist based on the rustic coast of Maine. She is most known for her atmospheric perspective and nuanced approach to seemingly insignificant moments. Her work communicates depth and meaning beyond evident visuals. (<https://melvolkman.com/pages/about>, accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 3. In her current body of work of process-based hanging sculpture and installations, Andrea plays with color, paint, paper, plastics, and fiber to explore the ways we construct identity. Andrea is dedicated to building communities [...] (<http://www.andreamanningart.com/bio>, accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 4. Hello, Philippa Rice here. I’m an artist, cartoonist, author, animator, craft-maker??? I like making things! (<http://philippajrice.com/about>, accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 5. Hey there! My name is Alex Tran and I’m a Montreal based commercial and editorial photographer specializing in portraits and headshots. (<https://alextranphotography.com/info/>, accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 6. If you want to see the finished picture, it’s here <http://www.flickr.com/>[...] (<http://philippajrice.com/about>, accessed July 27, 2022)

e.g., 7. You’re currently on my commercial website. I also have a second website for my personal photography projects if you’re interested in checking it out. (<https://alextranphotography.com/info/>, accessed July 27, 2022)

For artist's statements, the use of the 1st person is standard ("I am in love with paint as a substance, in its viscous, muddy form and its dry, flexible skin. I build with paint and with color...") (<http://www.andreamanningart.com/bio>, accessed July 27, 2022)

Another discourse feature of the artist's website (although less present than in other genres of art criticism and theory) is the *Artspeak*¹³. It includes specialized vocabulary and typical rhetoric: "Sophie Kahn's work investigates the complexity, and the poetics, of capturing the female-identified body in the digital age" (<https://www.sophiekahnet.net/bio>, accessed July 27, 2022).

Three websites also offer partial bilingual texts (English and French) since the artists are Canadian, Belgian, or French.

5. Conclusions

The present research concludes that the artist's website is a complex, hybrid cyber genre.

The CHPs (Corporate Home Pages) have been considered to manifest what Fairclough refers to (in the context of intertextuality) as "hybrid information-and-publicity discourse (or telling and selling discourse)" (1992, 116), a new discourse type constituted through a mixture of existing types. In that case, we may also look at the artist's website as a manifestation of a hybrid discourse, especially considering its multimodal appearance. The artist's website displays features belonging to CHP as well as a portfolio type of website. On the one hand, the artists provide their "information"; they showcase their works (the "showing" part) while, on the other, also trying to sell their artistic production (a sort of "showing and selling"). Any successful CHP provides potential clients a list of previous (satisfied) other clients (sometimes as testimonials). The artist's website adds a list of exhibitions, a list of collectors (private and public), some relevant professional experiences, and prizes to increase the artist's credentials and their art business (but not dissimilar to academic home pages). The artist's website is, to a large extent, part of an art business these days, rather than just simply showcasing the artistic creation (portfolio), so some newer features of the online shop proved very helpful in this respect

Multimodality is adamant for this type of website with a stress on the visual mode. Both images (of different styles and arranged in various layouts) and texts, skilfully combined, are meant to build the story of the SELF, the artist's self, to proclaim their identity as a person, but most importantly, as a creator.

¹³ For more information about the *Artspeak*, also see Crețiu, 2013, b

When business features are brought in, all these elements contribute to constructing an artist's brand. If a suggestive logo represents a company's visual identity, an artist's visual identity is extremely vast: their whole portfolio. The website provides an online identity that integrates that portfolio within the genre frame. The artist's website, though, goes beyond a portfolio-type of a website because the purposes for which it is created reach beyond the simple showcasing of the works, testing the realm of e-commerce. This may undoubtedly be considered proof of the artists' adaptation to the new digital era and economic conditions.

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Selected corpus:

- <https://benjaminhardman.com/about>, accessed July 27, 2022
- <https://melvolkman.com/pages/about>, accessed July 27, 2022
- <http://www.andreamanningart.com/bio>, accessed July 27, 2022
- <http://philippajrice.com/about>, accessed July 27, 2022
- <https://alextranphotography.com/info/>, accessed July 27, 2022
- <https://www.sophiekah.net/bio>, accessed July 27, 2022

