CHAPTER ONE
Error: A Historical-Interdisciplinary Survey

Chapter One constitutes an interdisciplinary excursus following relevant theoretical contributions in order to establish whether and to what end the concept of error is found in philosophy, philosophy of science, psychoanalysis, political praxis, cybernetics, and Christian theology. The aim is to determine whether any disciplinary parameters to error can be evidenced, and if so, what these parameters are.

Section One (*1.1 From Plato to Philosophy of Science*) traces how the association of error with *errancy* (in the sense of deviating from the straight path of God) has carried significant weight in the philosophical arena. As shown, this connection begins with Descartes and links the philosophies of Jean de la Bruyère and John Locke, the French *post-illuministes*, and finally Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. Hegel is used to illustrate one of the rare attempts to shift perspective on error and move away from Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian logic. Defining error as a "necessary dynamic element of truth," and critiquing the idea that truth can be directly accessed by means of scientific methodology, Hegel paves the way for the philosophical reconsideration of error.

Section Two (*1.2 Hegel's Path*) analyzes how scientific practice has attempted to eliminate all traces of subjectivity and thereby expel error. This process reaches its apex with Karl Popper's fallibilism. Counter to such positions, other concepts of error have been proposed, such as that of Deborah Mayo, who, within the modern field of philosophy of science, has advanced a positive concept of error as the *foundation of knowledge*.

Section Three (*1.3 Psychoanalysis and the Fertility of Error*), turns to the psychoanalytic point of view, focusing on Lacan's ideas of the *foresight of error* (one of whose axioms is the impossibility of proceeding from a rational accumulation of knowledge that tends toward general laws) and the *fertility of error* (according to which knowledge is not necessarily such, and non-knowledge can lead to the truth). The argument notes the presence of a link between error and a certain type of

subjectivity (whose subject is similar to the Hegelian subject) and a conception of error as *truth in becoming* that is almost completely opposite to the scientific conception.

Section Four (*1.4 From Hegelian Psychoanalysis to Post-Revolutionary Error*) analyzes the revolutionary political scene (specifically in France and Russia). Building on a collection of theoretical contributions, it hypothesizes that the historical failure of these revolutions led to a negative shift in the concept of error, whereas French revolutionaries, Enlightenment thinkers, as well as Marx, had cultivated optimistic sentiments towards it. Post-revolutionary reflection tends to consider error as a negative element—a hitch or an obstacle—on a strategic path that leads only to success or defeat.

Finally, one of the realms in which error has always been associated with negativity is Christian theology. The final section of Chapter One (*1.5 Christian Religion, Cybernetics, and Noise*), examines the legacy of this thinking in Norbert Wiener's cybernetics, including his demonic references. While for humanists (as in Umberto Eco's *Open Work*) error is an intrinsic and foundational element of a system, in Wiener's cybernetics it is considered a diabolical element to be reduced to feedback or systematically eliminated. Further, with the birth of cybernetics, the conception of error, though remaining negative, is doubled: on the one hand, we have error acting as feedback, enabling the strengthening of the technological power of the system and its protection from additional errors; on the other, we have the unpredictable and intentional error of one or two bad actors. The cybernetic perspective reaches for an ideal truth considered to be attainable through systemic optimization, feedback mechanisms, and the systematic exclusion of error. This theoretical system is compared to the humanistic system, by establishing their theoretical limits and concluding with the affirmation that the opening and ambiguity caused by an error within any system are akin to manifestations of resistance to technological power, on the one hand, and poetic openness, on the other.

After having made the necessary distinctions, the chapter ends by concluding that, with the exception of very few authors like Maximilien de Robespierre, Ernst Mach, Gaston

Bachelard and the aforementioned Lacan, Hegel, Mayo, and Marx, historically error has never been considered in positive terms. Its second conclusion is that the specific function of error differs widely from one area to another and is always closely bound to its context.

CHAPTER THREE
New Perspectives on Technological Power

Chapter Three develops the topic of technological power, which is the fulcrum of contemporary network society and common background for various practices of new media art. The chapter demonstrates how power—which is constantly changing —systematizes error by eliminating its subversive charge, how this systematization is bound up with the phenomena of social control, and how at the same time technology offers possibilities for resistance, at times based on the creative use of error.

The first section (*3.1 Power, Potency, and Systematization of Error in Neoliberal Network Society*) explains that while error does not *in itself* have a subversive–revolutionary charge, is not a counter power, and has no intrinsic liberatory force, it carries out all of these functions due to the existence of a power that currently seeks to neutralize it and reduce it to feedback, in order to reduce and control its own economic losses; and by so doing, creates a discrepancy between its own potency and the potency of whatever opposes it.

Section Two (*3.2 Social Control and Technological Power*) focuses on social control by analyzing the transformation of our society into a big network devoted to constant technological optimization, where everything must be constantly monitored (especially remotely) through the systematization of error, and strategies for social control, whose *mechanisms of seduction* have definitively supplanted the *logic of sanctions*. Outlined are two opposite future perspectives within the contemporary theoretical horizon, though there is always room for positions in-between. On one side, we have the rank of Transhumanists and those who see technological power as an ally for pursuing deeply-rooted liberatory dreams (substituting the idyllic vision of *man/nature* with

man/technology); on the other, we have those who predict that technological power will be forcefully manipulative, and consequently develop *strategies of resistance*.

Section Three (*3.3 From Disciplinary Societies to Network Societies of Control*) discusses the relationship between man and technology (the concept of the human body as a data processing system) through various examples, and the role of technological power as a medium or a filter of information. The fourth section (*3.4 Digital Personae and Future Perspectives*) turns to the issue of the emergence of digital personae. A number of case studies based on error are used to investigate this relationship. The argument concludes that determining the type of relationship between the physical person and digital persona is indispensable for understanding how power exercises its influence on us through technology and how technology can be used to resist that power. Also shown is how today every physical body is associated with a series of multiple and widespread virtual alter egos born of the mediation between physical person and technological power.

Finally, Section Five (*3.5 Perspectives of Resistance*), introduces Elias Canetti's concept of "metamorphosis" through the description of man's social transformations in the face of technological power (whether computer-related, economic, or military). The section observes how the mutations triggered by new media, after having fractured the bijective body–identity relationship, are in the service of power, yet effectively lend themselves to the subversive strategies of new media artists. The argument concludes that the combination of identity and *metamorphosis*, and the gap between physical and virtual worlds, contain the potential for effective intellectual resistance.

CHAPTER FOUR
Metamorphosis

The fourth and final chapter concludes by returning to the issues discussed throughout the thesis, linked by the concept of metamorphosis (whose nomadic and interdisciplinary mode of thought indirectly guided the thesis's development).

In Section One (*4.1 Metamorphosis and Anti-metamorphosis*), the previously described functions of power are interpreted as mechanisms of anti-metamorphosis, which are used by power for its own survival.

The second section (*4.2 Metamorphosis in Network Society: From Charles Darwin to Pierre Lévy, Via Ernst Mach and Theodor Adorno*) traces the widespread yet fragmented *thinking on metamorphosis* and contextualizes the idea of metamorphosis in network society through fragments of the thinking of theorists who have approached this concept (including Antonio Caronia, Massimo Marramao, Youssef Ishaghpour, Darwin, Mach, and Adorno). The argument relies heavily on Pierre Lévy's conception of metamorphosis, which is rooted in the processes of virtualization described in Chapter Three.

Finally, the last section (*4.3 The Task of the Artist*) returns to the heart of the artistic issue, and in light of what is presented in the individual chapters of the thesis, outlines eight elements (*Visualization, Responsibility, Invention, Network, Openness, Nomadism, Online-Offline Relationship,* and *Metamorphosis*) that are central to practices of new media art aimed at creating strategies of resistance.