Markers of Somatic Experiences and their Hybrid Approaches

Philomène Longpré

Corps hybrides
Hybrid Bodies
Numéro 109, automne 2016

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/83882ac

Citer cet article
Markers of Somatic Experiences
and Their Hybrid Approaches
As matrices of sensation or transmitters of somatic experiences, some artworks plunge viewers into unforgettable, multisensory encounters. Often described as visceral, coming from bodily responses, either emotional or corporal in nature, these phenomena imply “not just the process of thinking bodily but how the body informs the logic of thinking about art” in the setting of an exhibition. These artworks emphasize the individual’s experiential role, as well as the physical engagement evoked by materiality and sensoriality. All the details of an artwork chart the road to perception by capturing reality and the essence of the sensible itself, as demonstrated by the anthropologist François Laplantine. Thus, contemporary artists have developed countless strategies to derive this responsiveness, and some of them have found ways to bring it to new levels of complexity. This is the case for the four artists I invited to be part of this feature section, Bill Vorn (Montreal), Byeong Sam Jeon (Seoul), Félicie d’Estienne d’Orves (Paris), and Hung Keung (Hong Kong).

I first experienced La Cour des Miracles, the spectacular robotic art installation created by Bill Vorn and Louis-Philippe Demers, at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal in 1997. I will always remember the deep pity and sorrow triggered in visitors by the incredible, ponderous, metallic, and noisy machine-creatures. Since then, Vorn has never failed to surprise us with innovative and provocative robot universes, which have always been engaging and, somehow, disturbing. His sculptures, composed of cold aluminum bars, roughly cut and assembled with nuts and bolts, engage with visitors’ emotions. People associate themselves with everything they resemble and respond to anything that mirrors their reactions. From the legend of the golem to Leonardo da Vinci’s mechanical knight, the human figure has long been used to facilitate communication. In art, the representation of the human body eases the expression of emotions, often bringing viewers closer to their perceptions of themselves. However, with Vorn’s machines, spectators project themselves onto the meticulously programmed behaviour of his sculptures. As Vorn writes, “the automaton [is] a mirror that fascinates us and makes us see ourselves differently.”

While using a different approach, Byeong Sam Jeon also creates catalysts of sensation. In a recent study of brain scans at Carnegie Mellon University, researchers confirmed: “Each medium creates a different sensory and somatic experience and finds a rare moment of intimacy with these artists, in which the details of their artistic practices are unveiled, and in their own way.

Philomène Longpré is a media artist whose research encompasses robotic art, interactive video, and performance. Since 1999, she has developed fifteen responsive art systems that translate body language while exploring the interaction between the physical and virtual worlds. She holds an MFA in Art and Technology Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a PhD in the Study and Practice of Digital Arts from the INDI Program at Concordia University, where she carried out research on matrix of sensations. (www.philox.net)