Change It or Kill Me

Stephen Sarrazin

Arts et électroniques
Numéro 63, automne 1995

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/46532ac

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)
Les Éditions Intervention

ISSN
0825-8708 (imprimé)
1923-2764 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article
STELARC's philosophies unknowingly confirm nates with technology encircling, assaulting and etrates a compatible host cell. In his writing, human body life cycle of viruses necessitates that a virus pen­ production cycle of viruses and technologies. The parasitic.' though it has no metabolism of its own. Instead... of viruses challenges the role and ultimate fate of the human species is relayed directly when he the human body is obsolete. His usage of The STELARC composed the word « evolution, illustrates this point with the example of man­ organic materials. Like viruses, technologies rep­ by the inert state of viruses during non-reproduc­ isms exhibit a mechanistic sort of behaviour'. The relationship between humans and the human instinct of tool-making drive... individuals and allows more genetically advan­ over other species is their ability to make tools. It is this « tool-making drive » that has allowed the human species to survive despite its physical mediocrities. This instinct may be interpreted as an internal virus whose DNA program dictates tool production. Norman WHITE's artistic philosophy confirms this assessment: « There has evolved into man's mental nature an opulent quirk which has caused him to become constantly restless, bored with accepted values, images, definitions and such... » One shares the growing belief that man's inventiveness has been the primary means by which he has achieved his own downfall. Our inventions have widely despoiled our world, and have led us into the most unhealthy, unfulfilling sorts of activity».

This conviction has motivated WHITE to create electronic art that often exposes the failings of technologies, opposing its highly esteemed reputation. One of the earliest electronic works exhibited in Canada, WHITE's State of the Art (1974), gained a name from this preoccupation. In this work WHITE wired electronic circuitry to flash one row of lights at a time, creating an undulating effect that coincides with the sounds emitted by nearby speakers. The work contradicts frequent promises of technology to provide a superior environment instead, it basks in its own usefulness and offers little aesthetic reward».

The use of technological materials in WHITE's work may imply a disappointment in the promises of technologies, challenging popular opinion that technologies are created to meet the supposed needs of society. Viewed collectively, the work of some electronic artists indicates that not only can technolo­gies be viewed as McLuhan-esque extensions of the body", but they also possess distinct species-like behaviours. In some ways, the similarities of the reproductive patterns of viruses to that of technolo­gies may indicate a threat to high-tech hu­man populations. On the other hand, the virus-like nature of technologies may not be external but integral to the human body, having its origins deep within the human instinct of « tool-making », gaining a character of its own. This instinct may indicate the eventual replacement of the human species by a more resilient, « techno-adapted » species. Are some electronic artists visionary in their ability to collectively, even unconsciously, warn us of this emerging techno-species ? If so, the future holds the an­ swer as to whether or not humans will live in peaceful co-existence with techno-beings or face their ultimate failure.«

2 TV Bra was presented by PAIK and cellist Charlie DORMAN on August 17, 1989 at the Howert Wise Gallery, New York. TV Bra was awarded a special prem­ ium by Stuart Craig WOOD on June 29, 1972 at the Kitchen, Mercer Arts Centre, New York.
7 STELARC and PAFFRATH, p. 74.
8 Contemporary vocabulary usage reveals that hu­mans already treat some technologies as though they were alive; in the same way that living organisms do, computers become infected by viruses « that endanger their health ».
9 Norman WHITE, « Description of Sixteen Selected Works », distributed to the author April, 1994.
12 Although the body's immune system can be argued to deal with foreign particles in a relatively fast, pseudo-evolutionary manner, at a macro level the hu­man morphology has not changed its physical shape for hundreds of years.
13 STELARC and PAFFRATH, Strategies and Trajec­tories, p. 45.
15 Norman WHITE, Norman White, Vancouver, The Vancouver Art Gallery, 1975, p. 5.
16 McLuhan stated: « Man appears as the repro­ductive organ of the technological world. » McLuhan, p. 112.
19 WHITE, p. 5.
20 WHITE, p. 5.
21 McLuhan, p. 71.

CHANGE IT OR KILL ME
Stephen SARRAZIN

Of the nearly five hundred channels that promise Cable TV in America, more than half of them will be showing « real » TV: archives, history, por­traits, tourism and travelogues, as well as home shopping, weather and direct theme channels, etc. Moreover, « channel surfing » already permits access to the image banks if one possesses the necessary hardware: in addition to PBS, we find The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel, The Life and Health Network, Arts & Entertain­ment, QVC-C-Span, which diffuse American Con­gressional hearings and assist in court trials. CNN and MTV still figure among the top channels on the global scale by inventing within the scope of their programs new forms of television produc­tion; hybrids issuing forth from their re­spective identities and from their numerical tech­nological capabilities. For example, at the begin­ning of 1995, CNN broadcast one part of the O. J. SIMPSON trial and the investiture of Newt GINGRICH, the new Speaker of the House of Re­presentatives, who from now on sits at the right side of Vice-President Al GORE. During the same week, CNN broadcast already programs called Talk Back Live, with GINGRICH or a representative for O. J. SIMPSON, in which the public interrogated the invited guest, in the studio on camera, by tele­phone, fax machine, or via the compulsory net­work.</p>
also represented communication technology in action, by transmitting these models of exchanges as pure content for the viewer. The operator, camera on the shoulder, could always find in the hall a young man with a Powerbook on his knees reading to us the questions being forwarded. With the captioning of the transmission of the information were, from the beginning, part of the imagemaking of CNN and has since been widely adopted elsewhere. At each pause, several seconds of credit titles are diffusion of information, what is at stake in the hall a young man with a Powerbook on his knees reading to us the questions being forwarded. With the captioning of the transmission of the information were, from the beginning, part of the imagemaking of CNN and has since been widely adopted elsewhere. At each pause, several seconds of credit titles are...
of the representation of the subject matter. He surrounds himself with a team of consultants-collaborators: » artists, critics, historians, journalists, philosophers, and theoreticians. He is equally active as a producer by ordering the works of other artists which will then be integrated into the documentary. Among his collaborators we find Paul VIRILIO, Dan GRAHAM and Jeff WALL, Chris DERCON, Jacques CHARLIER, Tony OUREST, Jean-Luc FOUILLON, Philippe GRANDIEUX and Thierry KUNTZEL. DECOSTERE draws his materials largely from history of images, of cinema and of television, art and photography. This approach seems to have as its origin a certain concern for archaeology (a constant return to archival strata). But the splicing of these appropriated images reveals a concern for the encyclopedic information. More and more in his work it is the subject itself that delivers this paradox: assurance, conviction, rage and the urgency of the form underlying the conviction in the treatment of the subject, all the while suggesting that this intention is not fixed in a self-assured truthfulness, but that it is unshakeable and unharmed. A recent major work, Déjà vu (1994), well illustrates this state. Last documentary in the series Travelogues, Déjà vu makes a stop at the virtual world that Japan created for those people who would like to be elsewhere without ever leaving the country. These pretend worlds are theme parks of a Europe preserved by its cultural signposts (Holland with her tulips and canals, the Austrian woods, the Japanese garden in Japan: a Samurai village, Tokyo's high-tech hotels, room for sado-masochists...). All these possibilities represent for the Japanese on one hand an eco-technological quest to be one with the future, on the other, the ethical part of this rapport with the real. We are confronted with the sense of body/self. It is the body's lack of definiteness, of its virtual world are valuable for the body lying beyond mere perception and visible completeness: the body-in-progress, the body which is in a state of becoming, the lived body: the simple notion of surface (as skin, as screen) must be expanded.

Our point of departure is then a body dressed up in cables, playing the game of interactive TV. How does this story, this fantasy, this image - produced for the audience avid for high-tech deployments. The body of dance is too demanding and complex for the actual state of technological development. High-tech's empty promises are made evident. The body of dance is not a gadget. It is organic and the synthetic which defies the idea that the machine devours the body, that the lived body disappears into the machine. A body in action extends itself into a multiplicity of prolongations, to provide it with the equally existential representations. The body of dance - lived, in flux - cannot be thought of as an alienated object and the organic/synthetic dichotomy is to be avoided. In any case, the exchange and amplification evolving around the body of action whose autonomy is confirmed. Thus, the lived body ought not to be thought of as something external to technology, nor as an extension of it, but intimately linked to the realm of the experience of the technological self.

The lived body is the center of the experience of the body. Once the body/dance dichotomy is overcome, a sense of agency is recovered by the performer. It is an individualized one, non-idealized, which is meaningful in multiple ways, not just an instrument for repetition and imitation. The performer as imitator ceases to be a creative agent and just perpetuates the transmission of a norm, and only becomes one when she/he is able to transform his/her concept and become a sense of self/body/skin. It is the body's lack of definition and the constant state of becoming which provides it with new significations. The body is in the making, thus it must be considered as an instrument as transparent medium to the body as an opaque site of production.

The lived body is the condition for the technological amplification, which becomes a site of representation and of knowledge. With this, the question of visibility emerges. We strive to know the body we see, and the body we know is there despite not seeing it. The gap between what we know and what we are able to know is, as the body is experienced through our visual apparatus. Our senses fail to successfully prove that what we sense is. The world cannot be equated to our experience of it, nor the notion of the body to the one we think we