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Imaginative Research in a Changing World

Posthumanity: Merger & Embodiment

Edited by

Adam W. Ruch & Ewan Kirkland

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The Cyber Hub
'*Visions of Humanity*'

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Merger and Embodiment

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Introduction

Adam W. Ruch & Ewan Kirkland

The chapters in this volume reflect the debates that progressed during the 4th Global Conference on *Visions of Humanity in Cyberculture, Cyberspace and Science Fiction*, held as a part of Cyber Hub activity in the frames of the ID.net *Critical Issues* research in Oxford, United Kingdom in July 2009. The edited draft chapters make up a snapshot for the actual publishing.

The central question of this *Visions of Humanity* conference was precisely 'what is humanity in a technological world?' This is not a new question: science fiction authors have been considering the relationship between man and machine for decades. It often seems as though the fictional worlds created by writers of science fiction and fantasy increasingly reflect our own, as reality becomes more and more mediated by digital technologies, transgressing previously sacred boundaries between nature and culture, human and non-human, the authentic and the artificial. As contemporary Western societies become permeated by screen-based digital communications systems, the ways in which we humans represent ourselves within such virtual spaces are myriad, complex and contradictory, but nevertheless *real*. While science fiction images and metaphors suggest such engagements entail leaving the 'meat' behind, contemporary theorists are insisting that the body, physical or otherwise, remains central to such experiences.

This conference addressed the relationship between bodies and technologies in terms of both fiction and the real world. Science fiction literature makes up a fertile area for experimentation and discussion, as do the fictionalised worlds of films and videogames. These genres provide a reflexive site where issues of identity, corporeality and embodiment in technology-saturated culture can be explored. Futuristic literature is often useful in discussions of synthetic worlds and digital communication because it gives us metaphors with which to understand the ephemeral processes that affect people in real ways. It allows us to productively consider events that happen 'in E-mail', 'on the Web' or in 'cyberspace', a term which was coined not by a computer scientist but by a science fiction author. The extent to which books set in the future comment upon contemporary anxieties, uncertainties and aspirations are addressed by many writers in this volume.

Novels and films were not the only source of fiction engaged with at this conference. Videogames too construct synthetic universes, which have varied relationships with the real. Some videogames trace their heritage directly from the science fiction literature discussed above - though with mixed success in terms of incorporating the thematic or philosophical elements of the genre. This digital medium, described by Henry Jenkins as

'the new lively art', offers unique ways of exploring imagined, often futuristic worlds, but also new ways of apprehending real environments. Videogame technology can be used as a platform to construct interactive representations of existing places, from multiple perspectives. In this way, a videogame can explore not only physical environments, but the emotional landscapes of the people who occupy these spaces. Furthermore, videogames have become an aesthetic of their own - helping to define the ways in which real humans interact with technology in general.

The recently emerged blogosphere was also addressed by several authors at the conference, and found to be as real as any other social realm, notwithstanding its location within cyberspace. Moreover, despite the celebratory language which surrounded early approaches to these digital sites of communication, and persists in popular accounts of new technologies, many writers assert the extent to which old oppressive bodily discourses - racism, misogyny and xenophobia - still operate within the spaces of new media. From the development of new words to describe our digitalised experiences, to the proliferation of racial, sexual or religious discrimination: we are very much human online, for better or worse. Synthetic spaces are not always digital either. Architects of the 1960s were experimenting with reconfiguring our physical environment in much the same way as we modify cyberspace today. The historical perspectives provided by contributors to this collection question the degree to which the bodily experiences of new media are really new at all. Artists are probing the boundaries of the body in technologically mediated spaces, in sculptures which present us with challenging visions of humanity in a post-human society, or through digital installations which play with the reflection of the human on the screen.

Finally, we project into the future. Will human beings have done with natural evolution and instead program their offspring like computers? We in the West have already begun to alter our bodies after birth. What steps will we take to modify future generations, both physically and psychologically? These are the questions presented and discussed in the following chapters: they do no less than consider what it is to be human.

This book consists from 17 chapters and has been organised into nine parts:

PART I:	Gender, Desire and Cyber Femininity;
PART II:	History, Political Writing and Thought Control;
PART III:	Time & Place;
PART IV:	Bodies & Identity;
PART V:	Merger & Embodiment;
PART VI:	Critical Philosophies;
PART VII:	The Literature of Cyberspace;
PART VIII:	Avatars, Humanity and Videogames;
PART IX:	Character-Community & Anthropology

The first part contains two case studies examining the ways in which digital realms reflect both transgressive and dominant constructions of gender and sexuality.

Ruzy Suliza Hashim and *Imran Ho-Abdullah* in their opening essay 'Desire Online: Private Articulations and Public Responses' offer a case study of a *Datin,* a female Malaysian socialite, who blogs about her often risqué social encounters in a conservative, Muslim society. This study analyses the *Datin's* texts themselves as an attempt to escape the conservatism and oppression of Malaysian norms, in the supposed egalitarian paradise of the Internet. What the *Datin* finds, however, is that many of the old, conservative norms have colonised this new space.

Naomi Nkealah in the essay 'Kinky Politics in Cyberspace: Gender and Xenophobic Violence in South Africa' considers cyberspace as a site contributing to discourses of racism, sexism, and xenophobia. Focussing on an unsolicited email reflecting on attacks upon immigrant communities in South Africa, the author relates the images contained in this anonymous message to the perceived sexual superiority of African immigrants over Black South African men. Exploring the internet as a digital public sphere, this chapter reveals a space perpetuating struggles between competing versions of masculinity, the relationship between xenophobia and sexuality, and the continued association between power and the phallus

The second part of this book examines real world and fictional societies' relationships with history.

We start with *Elsa Bouet's* essay 'Memory Erased: Effective Thought Control in Dystopia.' The science fiction worlds of the three texts, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Dispossessed*, all share a government-sanctioned destruction of history. These novels depict alternate ways of controlling a society by dismantling the memory of times gone by, thus reducing the population's ability to construct their own identities. Being incapacitated in this way, each society is vulnerable to the constructed, and of course, obedient, image of society that the government provides them.

Noraini Md. Yusof and *Ruzy Suliza Hashim* contribute the second article in this section: 'Contemporaneity of Historicity: Appropriation of Historical Identities in Malaysian Blogosphere.' This article analyses two bloggers who take on the mantle of historical Malay figures as part of their project of identification. Through the use of historical personalities, epigraphs, quotes and avatar pictures, the bloggers cobble together a collected presence that helps establish their relationship with contemporary Malay politics. These identities are not always completely coherent. For example, at times the views of the first blogger will contradict the characteristics of his assumed name. The analysis here explores the effectiveness of these identities, taking into account both the resonant consistencies as well as the occasional lapses.

Part three of this collection contains *Lara Schrijver's* essay 'Architectural Visions of Networked Futures: Envisioning the Physical Space of Cybercommunities in the 1960s', which explores various futuristic architects and designers of the decade. In some ways these examples are prescient in anticipating new consumer technologies such as the iPod and cell phone, or user generated content in current computer and video games. Others cases, such as images of portable housing, expansive and responsive architecture, remain the stuff of science fiction. Nevertheless, an overview of such visions affords timely perspectives on the relationship between individual and community within mediated societies, notions of mobile privatisation and technologies as prosthetic extensions of the self, and the ubiquity of connectivity within urban landscapes. That today's virtual spaces correspond to the utopian blueprint of these designers suggests their continued relevance to contemporary technologies, even if the same logic fails to inform material environments.

The fourth part of this book presents *Elena Marcevska*'s essay 'Body Coded in Motion', an illustration of the productive insights that emerge from the fusion of digital theory and digital practice. The essay explores interactive art installations which are combining motion capture devices, video projectors, and computer animation, situating bodies in virtual environments, incorporating spectators into the 'text' of the performance, and transgressing the boundaries between bodies and screens. Regarding interactivity and performativity as crucial aspects of new digital technologies, Marcevska examines the transformative relationship between bodies and screens in such digital media configurations.

Part five of this volume explores the theme of the human body and its status in relation to technology.

'Bio Instincts' by *Laura Boffi* centres on the ways in which contemporary attitudes towards death are being transformed by biotechnology and regenerative medicine. Boffi suggests that as human life has been increasingly infiltrated by medical technologies, such as stem cell therapy and transplantation, patients have become 'consumers of mass-produced life and mass-produced death', which becomes an individual rather than a social event. The author argues that this 'atomisation of death' is indicative of a Western culture, which is losing touch with its own biological mortality and concludes by presenting her own art instillation as an attempt to effect reconciliation with death at the level of the individual and of the species.

Devrim Ülkebaş follows this in her essay 'To Have Done with the Judgment of God: The New Flesh.' Marshall MacLuhan's famous quote 'We shape our tools, then our tools shape us,' can often be entertained quite metaphorically, as can the philosophy of a body without organs, or a new flesh. David Cronenberg, however, interprets these philosophies literally in

his films. This chapter examines tropes used in several Cronenberg films, *Crash, eXisTenZ,* and *Videodrome*, as they present a sharp contrast with the glossiness of technology in more traditional sci-fi. Instead of using the sterile, digital technology to escape the body in favour of a cyberspace of imagination, Cronenberg's characters use physical violence to dismantle the boundaries between organic and mechanic, in order to wipe out the 'natural order' inherited from our biology. Sex and violence are re-arranged and used as paths to a new kind of body, a man-made body without organisation.

The two chapters in the sixth part consider linguistics and philosophy in cyberspace.

The first essay, by *Rusudan Makhachashvili* is 'Linguophilosophy of Cyberspace through English Vocabulary Development.' This chapter examines the different terms that have emerged to describe the experiences of cyberspace. Using a linguistic approach to investigate language's reflections on the nature of the digital experience, Makhachashvili examines the processes at work, which produce such terms as *nerdistan*, *yestertech*, *cybergeek* and *knewbie* as indexes of new media understandings of space, time and knowledge.

Arash Moussavi in his essay 'Cyberphilosophy and the Nature of Personhood: An Information-processing Approach to the Notion of Anatta in Buddhist Philosophy' observes the impact that computers have had across the disciplines. The author uses computational philosophy as a productive new perspective through which to understand the operation of religious doctrines. Illustrating the ways in which traditional philosophical ideas have been translated according to the language of cybernetics and computer algorithms, Moussavi argues that the metaphor of the computer simulation can be a useful means of understanding the world and its relationship to the self. Introducing a philosophical perspective in which the body is 'a cursor on the screen of our consciousness', the essay concludes with an exploration of Buddhism within a computational framework.

The seventh part continues with 'Cyborg Hierarchies: Ecological Philosophy and Cyberculture in Marge Piercy's Body of Glass' from *Jayne Glover*. This chapter examines the ways in which this science fiction author uses cybernetics as a metaphor for exploring the processes of Othering, and the ways in which such processes might be transformed in an increasingly technologically mediated society. Through the familiar sci-fi device of the body plugged into technology, Piercy's novel is seen to interrogate the boundaries between human and machine, the nature of binary power relationships, and the consequences of the dissolution of divisions between Self and Other. By complicating the distinction between the natural and the artificial, this reworking of the *Frankenstein* narrative is understood to challenge common attitudes towards technology.

The eighth part includes four chapters examining videogames from different perspectives and with different aims.

Daniel Riha in his essay 'Game Noir Approach for 3-D Interactive Documentary' explores the mode of film noir and its relationship to both the computer game medium and the experiences of certain displaced nationalities within contemporary Europe. Distinguishing the surface iconography of noir from the deeper emotional structures that characterise the genre, Riha parallels techniques of noir film directors and technologies of game production, alongside the unique opportunities for multiple narrative perspectives, temporal immediacy, and lack of resolution afforded by the new medium. The computer game, the European city of Prague, the experiences of artists displaced by the Bosnian war, and the mode of noir, all share common qualities, propensities, or psychologies - 'urban setting, anxiety, mystery, nostalgia and alienation' - which the writer explores, proposing an interactive noir documentary which will examine the lives of refugees living in the city.

In her essay 'Aliens, Avatars and Andrew Ryan: Representations of Humanity in Science Fiction Games,' *Monica Evans* examines more commercial interactive experiences, while retaining a concern with genre and its adaptation. Similarly distinguishing between the imagery of a genre and the philosophical preoccupations which inform certain film and literary traditions, Evans asks why, when so many games appropriate the look and technologies of science fiction do few adopt the mode's more substantial qualities. As Riha argues in relation to noir, there is a particular fit between computer games and science fiction, and Evans explores three games in detail, *Half Life 2*, *Bioshock*, and *Spore*, as offering particularly intriguing expressions of this relationship.

Ewan Kirkland's 'Remediation, Children's Television and Dora the Explorer' is the third essay in this section. In media theory concepts such as 'convergence' and 'remediation' are often assumed to be moving 'forward' towards digital technologies: radio becomes podcast, television becomes YouTube, newspapers become blogs and all become accessible through iPods, mobile phones and laptops. *Dora the Explorer* serves as an example of the opposite movement: the 'remediation' of computer interface and activity into a television show. As is traditional within children's media, *Dora the Explorer* encourages participation in its audience, though instead of imagined conversation with on-screen characters, the viewer would imagine operating a computer mouse to select on-screen objects. This chapter examines these and other tropes used, and the cultural significance this engagement with Dora has with the wider landscape of modern digital technology.

Finally*, Alexandre Monnin* presents the essay 'Humanity and Digital Characters in Virtual Worlds: Crossing the Fictional Boundaries.' Can there be truth in fiction? Can the virtual world become a new type of reality? This

chapter begins by exploring such ontological questions regarding the distinction between a linguistic representation of some thing, and a wholly new synthetic world or character, which exists on its own terms. The paradoxical ontology of characters in a videogame who realise they are not characters in a videogame are the stuff of fiction and also of reality: player avatars in an MMORPG are both player/characters and synthetic beings inhabiting a synthetic world. Can these synthetic characters be said to be 'non-real' when they are not purporting to be anything other than what they actually are?

The ninth and final part of this collection considers humankind's relationship with ethereal cyberspace.

Anelie Crighton begins this section with her essay 'Among the Spirits of Cyberspace: An Analysis of Shamanic Motifs in *Neuromancer*.' In a realm of hard, glossy technology, one might be surprised to find parallels with the spirituality of ancient Siberian shamanism. This chapter follows lines of similarity between the religious practices of the shaman and Case, the 'cowboy' who also leaves his body to travel through the ether of cyberspace. Though the book dwells on the experience of technology, the author of this chapter asserts that it is Case's ultimate return to the body that is the novel's final message: we are all bound to flesh, and should revel in our humanity lest we lose it.

In the final essay, 'The Decline of Pseudonymity,' *Adam W. Ruch* observes the 'stiffening' of once-malleable online identities in the historical shift from the 'consensual hallucination' or 'imagined communities' of MUDs and MOOs to contemporary social networking sites. Like many contributors to this collection, Ruch uses developments within cyberculture to investigate broader cultural trends and social developments, observing that the same malleability of electronic information within the online fantasy dungeon facilitates electronic identity theft with serious real world consequences. The essay concludes with case studies of *Second Life*, *World of Warcraft*, and *Facebook*, illustrating varying degrees of identity as prescriptive (or descriptive) rather than performative, ambiguous, and pseudonymous.

PART I

Gender, Desire and Cyber Femininity

Desire Online: Private Articulations and Public Responses

Ruzy Suliza Hashim and Imran Ho-Abdullah

Abstract:
Communication carried out in cyberspace is believed to be an impartial ground for people in different locations to interact on the same footing. Women were particularly enthusiastic about the promise of this electronic liberty. They are drawn to this technology based on two assumptions that the internet promotes democracy, and it provides a secure outlet for women. Malaysian women, as do other women globally, have embraced this new tool as a means to be heard and to share their thoughts, lives and experiences in an engaging way. Traditionally, in the local context, discussions on desire are limited and subdued because the topic is seen as private and taboo. Weblogs, however, provide a space for a more open dialogue to take place. Using a blog purported to be written by a Malaysian female socialite who articulates candidly of her private life and transgressions, we discuss two aspects of her self-narrative - the content as well as the responses she receives as a result of her outspokenness. Cyberspace is seen as a place where constraints of power and traditional norms are supposed to be absent, and yet it is still a space where different structural and cultural standards for Malaysian women remain unchanged.

Key Words: Computer mediated communication, desire, sexuality, public, private, Islam, gender, surveillance.

*****

1. Introduction

Development of electronic communication emits the idea of a cyberspace community, a form of internet imaginaire, a term coined by Patrice Flichy to describe the breaking down of communication in the contemporary world. In its earliest form, the public electronic network allowed 'communication with people in different localities and, above all - as we are about to see - puts all interlocutors on the same footing behind a mask.'[1] The internet and its new communications framework, argues Gillian Youngs, provide a 'safe environment' for women to confront 'embedded male domination of technology and its social purposes.'[2] Hence, two assumptions emerge from this scenario - one, the internet promotes democracy, and two, it provides a secure outlet for women.

Many Malaysian women have embraced this new tool as a means to be heard and to share their thoughts, lives and experiences through the use of weblogs. The Microsoft MSN survey indicated that 64 percent of Malaysian

bloggers are women aged below 25.[3] The weblog is a medium that allows for one's personal voice to be heard - as Barbara O'Brien says 'one writer expressing his thoughts to the world in his own unique style.'[4] Historically, women writers have always welcomed the personal, engaging way - in the same mode as autobiographies, diaries, and journals, blogs have become another mode of expressing and narrating the self. Blogging, as Diane Penrod argues, is 'one area where literacy is rewriting cultural values and gender identification.'[5] It would seem as though the information highway is finally women's promised land.

Blog writing requires writers to negotiate political stances, social roles, and cultural identities through the subjects they discuss. This inquiry often extends into opening up one's gendered positions to the writing or thinking process. Sometimes a blogger's ruminations in her blog reinforce cultural and gender stereotypes, but her articulations may also challenge the assumptions found in society. When bloggers adopt anonymous online identities, they have decided on a certain level of privacy. But also, we would have to consider whose value systems are being alluded to in the blogs, and to what purpose these value systems are being made overt?

In this paper, we look at a blog purported to be written by a Malaysian female socialite who articulates candidly of her private life and transgressions. Choosing to remain anonymous, she calls herself 'Datin' in her blog named *The Datin's Diaries*.[6] Blogging from April 2004 until February 2006, she received about 246,000 hits. While identity in cyberspace is fluid and negotiable, we will take the Datin's identity at face value. We discuss two aspects of her self-narrative - the content as well as the responses she receives as a result of her candour. She wrote sporadically, as and when she pleased, sometimes a few entries in a week, sometimes she was absent for a few weeks. While her writings were revelations of herself, marriage(s), family and friends, the level of intimacy and openness set off varying responses from her audience, ranging from admiration and empathy to disgust and malice. The virtual world is seen as a place where constraints of power and traditional norms are supposedly absent, and yet these different structural and cultural standards for Malaysian women remain unchanged.

2. The Datin Diaries

The Datin titillates her audience by offering 'a secret peek at a public life'. *Datins* are women of leisure and pleasure; their affluence is normally attributed to having wealthy husbands. A *datukship* is conferred to successful entrepreneurs or corporate figures that have contributed to the country. In many ways, the blogging Datin confirms the representations of Datuks and Datins as people who are materially rich but spiritually and morally questionable.

The Datin exposes the realities of her daily life, and by association, she provides snapshots of the company she keeps. Indeed, she confirms the luxury of her class. By giving us a secret peek to these stories of other Datins, especially those relating to their misfortunes - straying husbands, marital problems, misbehaving children - the Datin shows us the shallowness of their lives. But she also sets herself apart from them because she knows the extent of their artificiality.

While the stories about the lives of the Datins and Datuks are interesting, it is the life story of the Datin herself that is captivating. Even the Datin cannot explain the motivation behind her desire to share her private world:

> Many will wonder why I am doing this. To me, it seems ironic of the many things surrounding me, this one will surprise people the most. Not the adultery, but the terms of my marriage, not the conditions of my life. But this one simple act of confession - to everyone and no one at the same time.[7]

The lure of being anonymous would be a definite impetus. But perhaps she can be understood in feminist terms, as argued by Joanne Hollows in her description of second wave feminism.[8] Hollows emphasises that women recognise common problems and experiences, and they used these insights to challenge existing ways of understanding the world which did not fit with their experience of it. Therefore, problems which women thought were confined to individuals, privately experienced and agonised over, or too trivial to be shared, developed into collective lived reality of women. By exposing and sharing her own experiences, the Datin probably hopes her readers can validate similar contentment and discontentment.

The Datin's attraction to confess to strangers in cyberspace can be understood from the location in which she speaks. Self-narratives of women in Malaysia are few and far between, and publishing a diary of one's intimate life is unheard of in Malaysia. But cyberspace, with its promise of liberty and fair playing ground, offers a place to resist a traditionally imposed subordinate identity while providing a break from the pervasive Islamic restrictions in public physical space. It is in that space that she articulates her thoughts and desires that are even kept as a secret from her husband.

Educated but unemployed, rich but lacking real friends, married but lonely, she expresses feelings of solitude and frustration, and reflect on what is not allowed or tolerated in controlled Islamic physical space. Among many things, the Datin exposes her empty marriage; her short bursts of happiness, her transgressions of Muslim Malay norms as well as her personal and marital insecurities. She is twice married. Her first husband was a musician

and they had a stillborn baby. She meets her second husband in the boardroom where she has been asked to make coffee, and soon after becomes his mistress. The Datin, second wife of the Datuk, now wonders whether or not her husband is cheating on her, the way he has deceived his first wife. As she confesses in her blog:

> Datuk is away today. He's been away for three days. Three long, glorious days that I can fill up with anything I want. Or so you think.
>
> We've been married for two years. Some in our circle say that still means I have three more before my 'use by' date. Still.
>
> It doesn't help from keeping me awake at night about some young woman he may encounter at the end of a boardroom table. […] I can't help staying awake, wondering about the other girl at the end of the table.[9]

It is here that we see the Datin's multiple identities emerging. She may have been the yuppie young woman who was ready for a tryst with a married man. Now she thinks of herself as the cuckolded wife, insecure in the knowledge that he is ready for another boardroom game.

3. Transgressive Desires

The courage it takes to be so frank about one's life is probably something new to Malaysians at the point in time. As Fereshteh Nouraie-Simone shows in her study of Iranian women bloggers, 'the liberating potential of online representation through text for uncensored articulation of repressed or forbidden subjects' is one of the reasons which contributed to popularity of blogging in the theocratic state.[10] It is the Datin's posting about her friendship with a male bachelor that initiates furious discussions by her readers regarding her decadent way of life as shown below:

> I have a friend of the heterosexual male persuasion. You know, the kind you sometimes play the 'what if' game in your head with. The one that you catch wondering about at odd intervals. The one whose kids you fantasize having in some parallel life. And imagining a sexual encounter with when your own sporting partner is out of town.
>
> The Bachelor is an attractive, successful investment banker in his mid-thirties. I've known him for ever […] He's like a

> brother but not quite. Like I said, the idea of sex with him doesn't slot into the 'incestuous turn-offs' category. […]
>
> About three weeks prior, he had lost a bet in bedroom acrobatics and found himself unable to wiggle his way out of a pair of handcuffs. Apparently, he wasn't able to reach the key. As to where the key was, I leave it to your imagination.
>
> So now, he owed the said captor, a champagne brunch, as payment for his release […]
>
> 'I don't even know how to turn on the oven! Macam mana?[11] Can I get it cooked the night before and then reheat everything in the micro wave?'
>
> Masya Allah[12]. The man didn't even realise bread becomes stone two seconds after a microwave treatment. […]
>
> So we broke open a bottle of champagne and I blended a can of peaches to make Bellinis for myself. It was sunset, and the view from his balcony was amazing.
>
> We must have sat in silence for about twenty minutes when I suddenly caught him gazing at me with an all-too familiar look on his face.
>
> Knowing what it meant, I said, 'It wouldn't work. We like the same things. We want the same things. Our life would be so dull!'
>
> He let out a slight snicker, downed his champagne. 'And they tell you it's all about finding your soul mate. I guess you're right. It's just that sometimes, the older I get, the more I wonder whether that would be such a bad thing.'
>
> 'No, it wouldn't,' I conceded. 'except we probably wouldn't surprise each other. And frankly, neither of us are well-suited to life without curve balls. Or in your case, hand cuffs!'[13]

This particular posting received many responses that we will deal in the next section. In Islam, even fantasising about another man constitutes

being unfaithful. Soon after dusk, Muslims pray their fourth prayer, *Maghrib*. It would be the time to contemplate God's greatness. But the Datin and her friend bask in forbidden pleasure. Clearly the Datin is not afraid of showing the extent of her transgressions. In feminist terms, the blogger is showing agency, exhibiting her freedom to say what she wants without any self censorship. But her idea of the democracy of the female voice is surprisingly censured, which brings us to the idea of double standards and 'male menace on the super highway.'[14]

4. Virtual Community

In his book *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Howard Rheingold describes the way in which the words on the screen can create a community from a collection of strangers. This is the promise of cyberspace that is enticing where 'we do everything people do when they get together, but we do it with words on computer screens, leaving our bodies behind.'[15] The Datin banks on this promise of togetherness and solidarity. David Bell, however, raises the question of the relationship between online life and off-line 'real life.'[16] What are the characteristics of offline communities? The Datin's blog shows us an offline community engaging in behaviour many Malaysians would deem as unIslamic. She makes an assumption that the online community, being technologically progressive would share an unconventional worldview. In Benedict Anderson's parlance[17], the Datin's 'imagined online community' shares a common desire to reach out to one another in a web of friendship. She is perhaps colluded into thinking that fluidity of space parallels flexibility of behaviour, norms and values.

The Datin gets both positive and negative comments for her entries. In her early entries, many readers are enthusiastic about her postings as 'fascinating,' 'interesting', and 'brave.' They feel like 'intruders, and feel 'embarrassed' in enjoying the Datin's stories. One particular reader is torn whether she 'appreciates' the Datin's writing skills or is she thrilled by 'voyeurism?' This response puts into sharp focus the indistinct lines between private and public realms. What started as a shrewd, but possibly naïve, campaign strategy ends up with readers making judgments of the conduct of the Datin and her tribulations. This destabilization of the private and public can be attributed to our continual surrender of information: as people relinquish control over increasing amounts of personal information, they expect increasing access to information in return.

But just as there are voices of support, strangers extending their hands in a show of support, there are many others who disparage the Datin's character and her lifestyle. They even insinuate about her sexual health by saying, 'Have u ever had crabs Datin?' a reference to pubic lice as a result of her promiscuity. Although the Datin herself never admits to having multiple

sexual partners, her articulations of desire have prompted unwarranted comments on her morality and sexual health.

These responses are the kind of flaming that happens in electronic communication. The respondents are hostile, provoking her by saying that she feigns her identity and that she is psychotic. The responses show the divisiveness of the online community. While they may believe in some shared conventions as citizens of cyberspace, it would seem that there exists a sub-community out there who polices the transgression of the social code. These reactions exemplify the refusal to accept that the Datin may actually be a real person who does whatever she confesses in her blog.

Once the Datin divulges her bachelor friend's sexual escapade and how she comes close to committing adultery, the responses illustrate the extent to which Muslim readers are offended by her actions. They reprimand her in many ways, by telling her not to use 'Allah's name in vain.' Most readers cannot accept that she has 'no shame admitting doing them.' As one reader retaliates, it is 'disconcerting' that 'God and the mention of vices' exist 'without any bit of fluster.'[18] Another response below is a further attempt at defending Islam:

> […] It's just that when the words 'Masya Allah' sticks out flippantly, it seems to me a bit paradoxical. You know, like a woman wearing tudung but showing her cleavage at the same time. Not that I'm patronizing here, I'm in early 20s, have had my share of 'vices' too, and have a lot of Malay friends who drink, etc. (It's sad when they substitute that as their source of happiness) Just don't make a mockery of religion.[19]

Her readers attempt to instruct her on Muslim ways and how to be a good Muslim. They believe it is their duty to bring her back to the right path that even in the fluid virtual space, one's morals and beliefs must remain intact.

The Datin is both 'amused' and 'horrified' by the degree of surveillance. By flaming, intellectualising, or posting line-by-line rebuttals of her posting, it shows that the Malay Muslim netiquette applies to her. Despite the enormous potential of her blog to be an avenue that promotes egalitarian and cooperative communication exchanges, the virtual reality is one where aggression, intimidation and plain macho-mode prevail.[20]

Many more abusive comments, adversarial in their stance, occur in the Datin's blog. Alienated in her off-line community, she finds herself being terrorised at every angle by her online community. Dale Spender imagines women using the computer 'as a means of communication, of plugging into the biggest network to be devised, of making and maintaining friendships and

contacts.'[21] But as the Datin finds rather mystifyingly, men and moral police officers have written the rules of the super highway.

More alarming, however, is a continuous barrage of comments written by readers claiming to be S. Vellu & the Gang and various Malaysian ministers. Altogether S. Vellu & Gang posted twelve comments, and all of them contain disparaging remarks in vernacular language about the Datin's smell, sexual preferences and visits to various bars. The Datin finally makes the following remark that 'Vellu and gang from various governmental watering holes have no clue who I am,' and pleads them to 'stop flinging sand in people's eyes.'

Strangely enough, although the blogger can remove comments from her blog, the entire mud-slinging of S. Vellu and friends, as well as the angry outbursts of Muslims were left intact. One reader even said, 'Datin, the comments are as interesting as the blog,' while another said in exasperation, 'for the love of God, get a new commenting system.' Why the blogger allows these derogatory comments in her blog is confounding. She seems defenceless, and yet she is not. Perhaps this situation is best summarised in Spender's terms that 'the only difference between the real world and the virtual world is that, if anything, the male domination of cyberspace is *worse*!'[22]

The Datin stopped blogging in February 2006. A fellow blogger called 'Mystifying Valley' concludes that 'some bollocks have successfully put her down and the site has been abandoned for months.'[23] The Datin's withdrawal can be due to many things: she is shocked, fed up, threatened or distressed. Perhaps her silence is also imposed, because she is not able to talk to her readers on topics she considers important without them being judgmental and offended by her way of life.

5. Implications

There has been excitement and hope that the internet provides a new space for women to articulate about issues which have been seen as taboo. The Malaysian blogger analysed here is very articulate in her blog. She is in her best face, using her best words. In most instances, these women do not get a chance to express themselves as courageously in face-to-face relationships. The blogger analysed in this paper perhaps cannot be generalized as representative of all women bloggers. Her blog initially highlights the sense of energy, optimism and empowerment which participation in cyberspace culture has produced. Raw and honest, her stories provide significant ways her private life can be shared and understood by the public.

But the cyberspace's liberatory discourses come with their own myopias, compromises, and dangers. Obviously there is a tension between the liberty the cyberspace promises and sexual freedom. The controversy and

conflict that plague *The Datin's Diaries* reveal fault lines in Malaysian sensitivities over issues of transgressive desire and gender identity. While things look bright and democracy rules in cyberspace, yet we come across instances of intolerance and moral policing being exercised. These public voices suggest that desire is still gendered and dangerous.

Notes

[1] P Flichy, *The Internet Imaginaire*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 84.
[2] G Youngs, 'Virtual Voices: Real Lives', in *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, W Harcourt (ed), Zed Books, London, 1999, p. 66.
[3] Link: <http://www.microsoft.com/malaysia/press/archive2006>, accessed 16 September 2007.
[4] B O'Brien, 'Blogging America: Political Discourse in a Digital Nation', Franklin, Beedle & Associates, New York, 2004, p. xii.
[5] D Penrod, *Using Blogs to Enhance Literacy*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2007, p. 49.
[6] The blog is no longer accessible. Its former url was http://the datindiaries.blogspot.com.
[7] ibid. April 27, 1.55 am.
[8] J Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000.
[9] <http://the datindiaries.blogspot.com>.
[10] F Nouraie-Simone, 'Wings of Freedom: Iranian Women, Identity, and Cyberspace', *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, F Nouraie-Simone(ed), The Feminist Press, New York, 2005, p. 63.
[11] *macam mana* - how?
[12] *Masya Allah* - the greatness of God.
[13] ibid. August 24, 2004, 8.16 pm.
[14] D Spender, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 193.
[15] H Rheingold, *Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, Addison Wesley: Massachusett, 1993, p. 414.
[16] D Bell, *An Introduction to Cybercultures*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 92.
[17] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983.
[18] <http://the datindiaries.blogspot.com>.
[19] Ibid.
[20] D Spender, *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 198.
[21] ibid, p. 192.

[22] ibid, p. 193.
[23] 'The Datin's Diary', November 16, 2004, (June 1, 2009) *Mystifying Valley: Tale of a Schizophrenic*, <http://stephanie.blogspot.com/2004/11/datins-diary.html>.

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Kinky Politics in Cyberspace: Gender and Xenophobic Violence in South Africa

Naomi Nkealah

Abstract
In an article entitled 'Sex and the Cybergirl' published in an online publication, *Feminism and Women's Studies*, it was noted that although cyberspace has been heralded as a great equalizer where race, gender, sexual orientation and physical appearance make no difference, many women are increasingly reporting cases of subjection to sexism and harassment in internet chat rooms. Such women are made vulnerable to sexual and violent messages and there are no stringent laws to stop users of chat rooms from preying on such ones. While certain online groups have taken some steps to penalize offenders by suspending their accounts, much of cyberspace still remains open and accessible to the weirdest minds. The article concludes with the following words:

> Will the promise of cyberspace fall to a few sexist cyberpigs? The only way to change the present course, as nearly everyone in cyberspace agrees, is to get more women on-line. In the meantime, it's a sty out there.[1]

It is from this premise that this article addresses cyberspace as a gendered space, a space that magnifies or portrays in vivid terms a struggle for domination among differing brands of masculinities. Using the case of the xenophobic violence that broke out in South Africa in the months of May and June 2008, this paper intends to show the ways in which the electronic mail in particular has increasingly become an avenue for the commodification of women's bodies and the 'showcasing' of contesting masculinities.

Key Words: South Africa, e-mail, xenophobic violence, contesting masculinities, women's bodies, sex, photographs.

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1. Introduction

In his book *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*, Francis Nyamnjoh acknowledges the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and notes that the internet in particular has facilitated the spread of information on matters relating to politics, the economy, culture, social development and others. The 'information superhighway' has opened up the 'possibility that all and sundry in the

electronic age can interact with each other through electronic machines which serve as a superhighway for the transmission of messages.'[2] This 'information superhighway,' brought into existence by the inter-connection of different computers in one huge network, is one of the marvels of modern technology. It no doubt comprises more than just cyberspace, though cyberspace is its core component. Cyberspace has been heartily embraced by many people around the world for the opportunities it creates in communication. Anglophone Cameroonians in the Diaspora, for example, have made excellent use of cyberspace to foster nationalist feelings for an independent Southern Cameroons state.[3] A study by Emmanuel Anyefru outlines various virtual communities of Anglophone Cameroon found in cyberspace and explains how Anglophones have resorted to this new technology of persuasion to articulate their nationalism.[4] While the speedy transmission of messages is a welcome change to the slow pace of communication under traditional media systems, there has been an increasing concern about the quality of the information transmitted, 'for an easily accessible and relatively cheap internet could boast of little more than 'information rubbish' and 'scrap opinion.''[5]

One of the biggest problems confronting internet users is their vulnerability to what Nyamnjoh calls 'unsolicited messages.'[6] These are messages that flood one's e-mail box from various persons to whom they were forwarded and who in response keep passing them on. I have perpetually been subjected to such messages which usually take up at least three hours of my time in a week to read through and what always capture my attention are the captions they bear. A good example is one I received on Sunday, 14 September 2008. The moment I saw the caption, *Ever Wonder Why Men Cheat?* I became instantly curious because the question of why men cheat is one that had occupied my mind since I left adolescence. Here at last, I thought, someone smart had managed to come up with a scientific explanation for what seems to be an inescapable experience for women in heterosexual relationships.[7] When I eventually read through, or rather 'looked' through, the contents of the e-mail, I could not but feel disappointed. For the e-mail gave me not a logical, constructive, or valuably informative reason for this phenomenon but a series of photographs depicting beautiful (white) women. The photographs were arranged in a collage and they portrayed mainly women in their prime. The women are all wearing sexy outfits, from tight jeans and sleeveless tops to short skirts and skimpy dresses. The author's hypothesis, if we can call it that, is that men cheat because women dress in revealing outfits that consciously or unconsciously seduce or lure them into their arms. I am not sure if the author's intention was to emphasize the irresistible beauty of women or the inability of men to control their sexuality. Or perhaps both. Either way, the e-mail reeks of

sexism as it depicts women's bodies primarily as objects of men's desires, as sexually consumable products for their self-gratification.

This e-mail is just one of many I have received over the last two years which seek to explain social phenomena but couching the explanations within gendered constructions of female bodies. Many times, it is not only the captions but also the concluding statements that are quite provocative.[8] As a student of literature, I tend to respond critically to anything that suggests a stereotyping of peoples, races, religions, or cultures. Because identity, as we know, is not a fixed category, sexual politics must give room for constant shifts in people's sexual orientation. In a country like South Africa where discourses on race are almost unavoidable, one learns to confront with stoicism images of ethno-cultural cleavages among groups, especially when such images are related to sexuality. In this regard, I draw much from Kopano Ratele's article on what he calls 'kinky politics.'[9]

The article is based on essays by three male African students in a psychology of racism class at a South African university. The students were asked to write essays on events in their personal lives that they would characterize as racism. In addition, they had to trace the colour line to where it connected to sexuality.[10] From the three responses selected for his article, Ratele argues that racism is kinky politics because it 'always involves a sexual warping of identity politics.'[11] This suggests that intrinsic to kinky politics is a standardization of difference in reductionist terms. This assertion finds resonance in the following explanation by Ratele:

> Kinky politics is personal and institutional practices, politics, programmes and cultures that naturalise, objectify, and stabilise difference, refusing to allow for its characteristic of movement and change. In respect to racial difference, kinky politics shows itself when that difference is held permanently constant and becomes an explanation of what the idea of race or the policy of racial domination generates in the first place.[12]

Ratele's postulation provides insight into dominant trends of thought within the South African social landscape where various races and nationalities intermingle and sexual relationships are often seen as 'transgressing' these differences. It has become increasingly common to find South African women in relationships with immigrants from other African countries, whereas the opposite - local men in relationship with foreign women - is also rife but relatively unpopular.

Not unexpectedly, tensions may rise between males and females, locals and nationals, or what Nyamnjoh calls 'insiders and outsiders', over what they each perceive as an encroachment into their territories.[13] Ratele

notes that 'preventing sex between women of one's group and other men is a widespread taboo in male dominated cultures and societies.'[14] But when such tensions are interpreted as the driving force behind xenophobia, one begins to question whether rationality has a place in terrains of sexual contestations. Using an email correspondence, this paper looks at cyberspace as a public sphere and interrogates the gender implications of using this medium to frame xenophobic violence as the result of contesting masculinities. Essentially, it attempts to decipher the power play embedded in the e-mail, to read meaning in what is said and what is left unsaid. While Ratele analyses kinky politics within the context of racism and sex in South Africa, this paper engages with the same theory from the angle of xenophobia and sex.

The specific email that inspired this paper was forwarded to my e-mail box by a friend on Saturday, 19 July 2008. It had the caption *Why South Africans sack and kill other fellow Africans such as TANZANIANS, MOZAMBICANS, NIGERIANS and ZIMBABWEANS?* Its subject was particularly captivating because it came at a time when South Africa was experiencing a wave of xenophobic violence launched against African immigrants. As it is true of many other situations of civil strife in Africa, as noted earlier, the internet became a widely used medium for the exchange of ideas on the crisis. But before I get into a content analysis of the email, it is appropriate at this stage to provide some background information on the xenophobic attacks.

2. The Alexandra Crisis

In the months of May and June 2008, a wave of xenophobic violence directed towards immigrants in South Africa caused a stir in the media, both nationally and internationally. Media coverage of the incident revealed that residents of the Alexandra township where the violence started were resentful of foreigners who had infiltrated their community in great numbers and were engaging in criminal activities such as house breaking and drug trafficking. Among the many reasons given as possible causes of the xenophobic attacks were housing shortage sparked by the influx of illegal immigrants, the competition for scarce jobs, the growing rate of crime in the townships, the failure of the South African government to implement stricter immigration laws, and, ultimately, the failure of the government to fulfil people's dreams in the democratic *New South Africa*. Although the violence started in Alexandra, it spread with speed to other parts of the country, such as Durban and Cape Town.

Alexandra is a township in the Johannesburg district of South Africa. It is located near Sandton, a suburb for the wealthy and an economic hub of the Gauteng province. The stark contrast between Alexandra and Sandton is evident not only in the standard of living of the people resident in both areas but also in the degree of accessibility into each territory. While

only the very rich can afford to own property in Sandton, almost anyone can have a shack in Alexandra. This inequality in accessibility to proper housing already points to a fundamental reason why it was not unexpected that the xenophobic attack on immigrants started in a place like Alexandra. Accepting Suren Pillay's view that there is a link between poverty, inequality and the struggle for economic survival in South Africa, one then has to admit that the competition for scarce resources in Alexandra is a strong force that fuelled the outbreak of the xenophobic violence.[15]

Media reports and police investigations revealed that the incident started on the night of May 11 when a group of local people armed with pangas, sticks and golf clubs combed Extension 7 house by house, beating anyone whom they suspected to be a foreigner.[16] Many who were identified by the attackers to be illegal immigrants were assaulted and kicked out of their homes. Some were told outrightly to leave the country and return to their home countries. As in many cases of violent attack, the looting of property and raping of women were an integral part of this 'cleansing' project. The May 13 issue of *The Star* reported the case of a Zimbabwean woman who was raped four times by four different men in two separate attacks in one night, during which attacks the men also robbed her of her belongings.[17] This is just one of the many cases of rape that characterized the xenophobic attacks. Admittedly, the media has a propensity for stretching the truth to its elastic limits for the purpose of appealing to a sentimental reading public. Yet, we know from history that in situations of conflict, such as in civil strife, guerrilla wars and racial encounters, women are often vulnerable to sexual assaults, thus ending up as the emotional and psychological casualties of violent movements.[18] Speaking about the xenophobic crisis, Michael Neocosmos notes that poverty could be one of the factors that led to the attack on foreigners, because it creates a sense of powerlessness in people, and often the powerless take out their frustrations on the weakest around them, namely, women, children, the elderly and outsiders.[19] Thus, the raping of women in this context could be seen as only one of the manifestations of the frustrations that led to xenophobic violence in the first place.

It should be noted that the foreigners who live in Alexandra are mainly from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and other Southern African countries. The recent humanitarian crisis in Zimbabwe has especially created room for a huge Zimbabwean population to take refuge in South Africa, and since housing is more expensive in the city centre many of these ones move into the townships where accommodation is less costly. Another reason for their moving into such areas is perhaps the fact that they can speak and understand Zulu to some extent, since their home languages share similarities in syntax and semantics with some indigenous South African languages. The Ntshona people of Zimbabwe, for example, are able to understand and speak

isiTsonga and to some extent isiNdebele, which are the languages of the people from the Limpopo province in South Africa. It was therefore not surprising that many Tsonga people (commonly known as the Shangaans) living in the surrounding townships were victimized and subjected to severe torture by angry mobs who thought they were Zimbabweans.

It must also be noted that this was not the first time xenophobic violence on immigrants was making headline news. *The Star* issue of May 13 contained a brief record of xenophobic incidences that had taken place in various townships around Pretoria and Johannesburg between January and April 2008. There had also been news reports on SABC about Somalis in the KwaZulu-Natal region who had been targets of violence from locals who claimed they had taken over the small business sector of their communities. In the Alexandra township itself, serious attacks on non-South Africans in December 1994 and January 1995 had been recorded by Human Rights Watch.[20]

In their study of conflicts between locals and Namibian immigrants in the Mizamoyethu community in the Western Cape, Belinda Dodson and Catherine Oelofse noted that one of the complaints launched against the immigrant community in the area, as reported by local politician Dickie Meter, is that the immigrants were better off than locals because they dressed smartly and 'flashed money around', thereby 'corrupting' local womenfolk, both young girls and married women, and encouraging prostitution.[21] This perception by the Mizamoyethu indigenes is re-echoed in the Alexandra crisis when one notes an article in the *Mail & Guardian* on 16 May which underlines the crisis as one sparked by competition for jobs and women. The said article reported that on 10 May the Alexandra Residents Association (ARA) held a meeting in which the members discussed their growing concern about foreigners who were gradually taking over the taxi industry. The article quoted Sox Chikowero, Chairperson of the Zimbabwe Diaspora Forum, who attended the meeting of the ARA as saying that the people (that is, members of the ARA) 'accused Zimbabweans of driving crime in the area and 'taking away our jobs and our women'' and they thus resolved that the foreigners must 'leave or die.'[22] The sentiment that foreigners were taking 'our jobs and our women' was as common in the Johannesburg district as the knowledge the Jacob Zuma was on trial for fraud and corruption charges. Of the two possibilities given here (taking jobs and taking women), the latter seems to have gained dominance over the former in an email correspondence that was designed to inform the virtual public of the 'untold true reason' behind the xenophobic attack.

3. 'Kinky Politics': Gendering Xenophobia through Cyberspace

The e-mail just referred to had been designed by someone who apparently felt compelled to call things the way he/she saw them. It was presented in the following manner:

> Why South Africans sack and kill other fellow Africans such as TANZANIANS, MOZAMBICANS, NIGERIANS AND ZIMBABWEANS!

This is the untold true reason for their anger.

After the colon comes three photographs of African men from different cultural backgrounds and nationalities. The photographs are arranged, presumably, in order of impact. The nationality of each person is stated at the top of each photograph.

The first photograph features a Duala Cameroonian on the Wouri estuary, standing with hands akimbo and looking at something on his left with obvious concentration.[23] He has a lean body but looks quite muscular. His hair is bushy and there seems to be sweat or water running down his face and chest. He is stark naked, with an erect penis bigger in size than the average cucumber.[24]

The second photograph portrays a Nigerian sitting in front of what looks like a kiosk or public telephone booth. The background is peopled with white faces, some walking and others sitting around tables in a place that looks like a coffee shop. The subject of the photograph is dressed in casual clothes: he is wearing a sleeveless top, sweat pants and sports shoes. There is a bandana around his head, and with this he cuts the image of an American hip-hop star. He looks quite self-confident as he speaks on a mobile phone and his general demeanour is that of someone who has achieved considerable success in life. From his face, one could guess that he is in his late thirties or early forties. Unlike the Duala young man who looks skinny, this Nigerian is huge, with big hefty arms and an intimidating body. Although fully dressed, what is immediately noticeable about him is the manner in which his large penis protrudes through his pants.

The third photograph presents a South African dancing to some kind of rhythm at a social event.[25] There are lots of people in the background, some having bottles of beer in their hands, and there are cooler boxes and platters of food lying around on the lawn. The atmosphere is one of conviviality and merry-making but everyone's attention is turned towards a man in the centre of the crowd. He seems to have been quite excited, if not drunk, to the extent that he has taken off his clothes. His hands are raised to the air as he moves his body to the rhythm of the music and the crowd around him is obviously entertained by his moves. This man, like the Duala in the

first photograph, is stark naked, but the difference is that although he has a bigger body his penis is much smaller than the Duala's.

Can this e-mail simply be dismissed as the artistic invention of someone who revels in what he/she perceives as a 'superior' manhood? The manner in which it contextualizes the xenophobic incident within the discourse of phallic power however demands that we explore the range of possible conceptualizations of masculinity embedded in it.

Firstly, the caption obliterates all other possible reasons for the xenophobic attacks and presents one as the pivotal reason - the perceived sexual superiority of African immigrants over Black South African men. The claim that what follows is the 'untold true story' implies that the issue of contesting masculinities supersedes issues of house shortage or increasing crime rates. It places the fear of a dominating male sexuality as the principal force that moved the inhabitants of Alexandra to attack foreigners living in their community. The photos themselves imply that the female body is a commodity that can easily be acquired by any man who possesses a penis as big as that of the Cameroonian or the Nigerian. In fact, it is intended to show that the foreigners were attacked because they were more successful in getting and keeping South African women simply because they exuded a more 'attractive' sexuality.

Such is the kind of stereotyping that is perpetuated through daily verbal intercourses between South Africans and foreigners and through web pages. Serious concerns about factors affecting relationships between foreigners and South Africans in the townships are reduced to one trivial 'theory' that is projected as the overriding factor. As many intellectuals showed in a xenophobia colloquium organized by the Faculty of Humanities at Wits University on 28 May 2008, the causes of xenophobia go beyond poverty, unemployment and housing shortage to encompass other significant issues such as economic inequality and democratic inconsistencies.[26] Neocosmos also argues that beyond poverty and other inequalities in South Africa, the cause of xenophobia is fundamentally the 'politics of fear' which finds its origins within the apparatuses of power and has been complemented by a 'fear of politics' - the unwillingness or inability of popular politics to break away systematically from a state politics of fear.[27]

Secondly, the photographs presented in this e-mail appear to be the outward manifestation of an internal turmoil, what Ratele refers to as 'hetero-masculine anxieties about penis size.'[28] The most noticeable aspect of all three photographs is the penis size of the characters. In this context, size means sexual power, or the lack of it thereof. Penis discourses are specifically linked to economic and cultural histories associated with power relations, and these histories of domination continue to affect the ordinary moments of every day life and relationships between individual Africans and members of other social groups in South Africa.[29] The centralization of penis

size in these photographs projects the possession of a bigger size by foreigners as the hallmark of a 'superior' sexuality and therefore a lack of the desired size presumably ignites xenophobic tendencies in black South African men in a case where they have to compete with their immigrant counterparts for women's affection.

In the context of the xenophobic violence as captured by the anonymous e-mail, power relations between Black South African men and foreign nationals are battled out in a sexualized space in which penis size becomes the sole determinant of who gets to keep the women. The following coded messages for the South African woman can be deduced from the three photographs:

Photo 1:	She will get plenty of satisfactory sex from him.
Photo 2:	She will get plenty of money from him, and good sex too.
Photo 3:	She will get *nothing* from him because he possesses neither the sexual nor monetary paraphernalia to attract the female sex.

The stereotyping of African male sexualities is often discernable in migrant discourses that are replete with generalizations such as '*West African men are good in bed'* or '*South African men cannot perform'*. Sad to say, women are often the agency through which these notions are dispatched in the public sphere, as evident in the case of popular model, Babalwa Mneno, whose declaration in the media that she will pursue romantic relationships only with men from other African countries underpins an acceptance of stereotyped masculinities as a norm.[30] Moreover, the immigrant male population, particularly from West Africa, has become notorious for perpetuating these stereotypes as a way of boosting its own image in the eyes of South African women.

Amongst many other media, the internet has been misused and abused through the spread of e-mails containing sexist and offensive notions about women and men alike. On what basis would one accept that the e-mail discussed above is the 'untold true reason' behind the xenophobic attacks on foreigners? What truth can one possibly ascribe to a theory that is so clearly prejudiced in its depiction of black South African men as 'sexually disadvantaged'? Such a truth begs interrogation as to whether it is not merely a convenient way of dismissing other fundamental factors that affect relations between South Africans and African immigrants or a ploy to assert the sexuality of one group of people over another.

Among other fundamental factors relating to xenophobia in South Africa is the question of class, for to some extent xenophobia is more an issue of class than of race whereby the working class feels more threatened by the

presence of African migrants than the middle and upper classes do.[31] In my six years of living in South Africa, I have come to realize that hostility towards foreigners comes mainly from the poor working class population (gardeners, security guards, domestic workers, taxi drivers, sales personnel etc) while those of the middle and upper classes tend to be more tolerant of their presence. In addition, xenophobic violence in South Africa is particularly negrophobic in character, to use Pumla Gqola's words, because although there is a huge migrant population in South Africa 'no one is attacking wealthy German, British or French foreigners in Camps Bay or anywhere else in South Africa.'[32] In the two months of intensive ransacking of the businesses of foreigners, hardly did one get reports of Pakistani or Chinese shops in the Johannesburg area being ransacked by angry mobs. On the other hand, I personally witnessed the ransacking of shops owned by Nigerians in the Joubert Park area. This scenario points to a subtle suggestion that only African immigrants constitute 'surplus bodies' or 'excess baggage' that should be disposed of, while the rest of the foreign nationals are given passports of *belonging*.[33] This power imbalance however should be read more in terms of the economic value attached to the non-African immigrants than to the sexual prowess of the Africans.

As sexist and offensive as our anonymous e-mail stands out to be, it forces one to think about the ways in which gender plays into conflict situations and particularly how conceptualisations of masculinities are linked to what Sasha Gear calls the 'commodification of sex' - where the body is 'exchanged for any number of necessities or luxuries.'[34] The e-mail seems to suggest that women trade their bodies for the 'luxuries' offered by foreign men.

4. Woman's Body, Men's Playground

In her article written in the wake of the xenophobic violence, Gqola draws a direct link between the sexualisation of xenophobia and the commodification of women's bodies. The following is her succinct analysis of the situation:

> Negrophobic xenophobic sentiment is often couched as a battle between two sets of men. This is very evident in the oft-heard retort, '*These guys come here and steal our women and jobs'*. Only the sexual, intimate and romantic preferences of *some* 'foreigners' matter in this way. […] Specific masculine entitlement and 'threat' are clearly encoded in this resentful articulation: Black South African women and jobs are the entitlement of Black South African men. Historically as well as in the contemporary moment, dominant Black masculinities index access to finance as

> linked to sexual attractiveness and virility. Therefore, the loss of both a means of income and the opposite sex is a threat to such patriarchal and heteronormative masculinities. The ideological baggage of such assertions comes from assumptions about women's availability for sale. If 'foreign' Africans have all the 'money', then South African men cannot compete, and this becomes the historic rumour that is much touted.[35]

One cannot help but agree with Gqola's reading of masculine behaviour in the face of threats of disempowerment. The link between sex and violence has been acknowledged in some scholarship on masculinities in South Africa.[36] Although the two cannot be conflated, practices of violent sex point to power as the overriding driving force behind it – power as domineering, controlling and oppressive. In the context of the xenophobic violence, Black South African women are seen to exchange their bodies for the luxuries offered by the foreign men, whether this is in terms of satisfactory sex, beautiful clothes or pocket money. Thus, the competition for Black women is intensified in a scenario where virility is defined by the weight of one's pocket and the size of one's penis. In this competitive space, the female body becomes simply a commodity to be secured by the highest bidder.

The manner in which the female body is inextricably linked to the display of masculine power is particularly relevant in this context. The term masculinity here is used in the contemporary sense in which it is often associated with violent, domineering behaviour by men.[37] Going back to the photos of the three 'sexually (dis)endowed' African males discussed above, can it be said that the conflict captured therein is one of heterosexual masculinities in conflict with each other? The centralization of the penis, which represents phallic power, points to this conclusion. Granted, the penis is also central to homosexual discourses, but what is clearly discernible in the anonymous e-mail is not a case of heterosexual masculinity in conflict with its homosexual counterpart but rather a case of Black South African heterosexual masculinity in conflict with non-South African black masculinity, because both have been placed in an ideological space in which the one is defined as *belonging* and the other as *intruding*. From the perspective of the author of the e-mail, the violence should be read as a case of Black South African heterosexual masculinity on the defensive.

In this scenario, the female body becomes the battleground on which phallic power is established or challenged: 'a woman is a mere object to be conquered and the penis is the ultimate weapon with which to dominate women and make them submissive.'[38] Where penis size becomes the ultimate determinant of power, then it is presupposed that a lack of the desired size

impacts on one's self esteem, hence the need to get rid of the enemy in possession of what one does not have, assuming that there can be no other solution to one's problem. Having acknowledged that the e-mail foregrounds a relevant discourse within the South African social space - that of contesting masculinities - the question still remains: what lies beneath negrophobic xenophobia? Is it simply masculinities in conflict? I think not. As noted earlier, there are many other fundamental factors that explain the rise of such gross hatred for the 'other' and a reduction of such into simply a question of masculinities in conflict, as portrayed in the e-mail, is something that should not be accommodated in cyberspace.

5. Conclusion

When Ratele speaks about the sexual superiority of Africans as expressed in the literature on penis discourses, he does not mean that white or coloured males are necessarily weaker in sexual activity than their African counterparts. In fact, his aim is to demystify the cult of the body which sees black males as sexually superior because they have bigger penises. He counters this perception by noting a newer discourse which challenges the notion of sex as located in genitals and argues ultimately that 'size does not matter.'[39] In present-day South Africa, more needs to be done beyond academic articles and conference papers to debunk the myth of the sexual superiority of the non-South African black male. The kink in the sexual politics of the e-mail discussed above is the mythologizing of the West African penis as the 'conqueror', the ultimate goal to which women strive because of the promises it holds out to them. This perception is a deliberate trivialization of the sexuality of the 'other' man, the South African man battling with the daily pressures of unemployment and economic survival. If cyberspace is a public space, then gendered perceptions of male and female sexualities should be interrogated in this medium in much the same way as it is done in the printed media.

Notes

[1] J Petersen, 'Sex and the Cybergirl', in *Feminism and Women's Studies*, viewed on 15 April 2009, <http://feminism.eserver.org/gender/cyberspace/sex-and-the-cybergirl.txt>.

[2] F Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*, Zed Books, London & New York, 2006, p. 5.

[3] After WWI, Cameroon was divided between the British and the French. In 1961, the part known as British Southern Cameroons voted to reunite with French Cameroon, which had gained independence in 1960. Over the years, however, English-speaking Cameroonians have been advocating a return to

an independent Southern Cameroons state owing to the inequalities that exists within government with respect to the opportunities offered to them. For details of the Anglophone problem, see P Konings and F Nyamnjoh, *Negotiating an Anglophone Identity: A Study of the Politics of Recognition and Representation in Cameroon*, Brill, Leiden, 2003.

[4] E Anyefru, 'Cyber-nationalism: The Imagined Anglophone Cameroon Community in Cyberspace'. *African Identities*, vol. 6, no 3, August 2008, pp. 253-274.

[5] Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*, p. 6.

[6] ibid., p. 7.

[7] By this I do not mean that only men are known to cheat on their partners. Since sex is basically a desire of the flesh that is often precipitated by a desire of the eyes, it is almost inevitable, albeit hardly justifiable, that frequently both men and women engage in it with persons other than those with whom they are in committed relationships.

[8] For example, in the e-mail just described the author poses a question at the end of the photographs: 'ANY CONTRARY OPINIONS?' This, in my opinion, is nothing but a provocation because the email itself is a classic illustration of people's desire to deny responsibility for their actions, finding it easier instead to shift the blame on to someone else than to acknowledge that one had succumbed to one's weaknesses. It resurrects the old biblical allegory of Eve the temptress, following which we now have the norm: 'Blame it on women and everything will be OK'. Another e-mail received on 24 November 2008 had the caption 'WOMAN HAS MAN IN IT' and after outlining a number of feminine references that had the word 'man' in them and insinuating that 'all women's problems start with men', it ended off by saying: 'Send this to all the women you know to brighten their day; send this to all the men just to annoy them'. After reading it, I didn't see how the suggestion that woman's existence is defined or validated by man's could brighten my day.

[9] K Ratele, 'Kinky Politics' in S Arnfred (ed) *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*, The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2004.

[10] ibid., p. 139.

[11] ibid., p. 142.

[12] ibid., p. 143.

[13] F Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*, CODESRIA Books, Dakar, 2006.

[14] Ratele, p. 149.

[15] S Pillay, 'Dangerous Ordinary Discourse: Preliminary Reflections on Xenophobia, Violence and the Public Sphere in South Africa', paper presented at the CODESRIA 12th General Assembly on *Governing the African Public Sphere*, Yaoundé (Cameroon), 7-11 December 2008.

[16] *The Star*, 14 May 2008.
[17] *The Star*, 13 May 2008.
[18] For a more detailed study on women's vulnerability to sexual violation during civil strife, see L Wambugu, 'Women and Displacement: Analysis of Coping Strategies Amongst Rwandese Refugee Women Living in South Africa', unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2001.
[19] M Neocosmos, 'The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics', in *Pambazuka News*, Issue 380, 12 June 2008, p. 1, viewed on 27 April 2009, <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/48712>.
[20] Human Rights Watch, *'Prohibited Persons': Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees in South Africa*, Human Rights Watch, New York, 1998, p. 135. See also R Adegoke, 'Media Discourse on Foreign Africans and the Implications for Education', unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1999, p. 16.
[21] B Dodson & C Oelofse, 'Shades of Xenophobia: In-Migrants and Immigrants in Mizamoyethu, Cape Town' in J Crush & D McDonald (eds), *Transnationalism and New African Immigration to South Africa*, Southern African Migration Project, Cape Town, 2002, pp. 134.
[22] *Mail & Guardian*, 16 May 2008.
[23] The photo itself states: 'Cameroonian (from Duala)'. Probably in a haste to put this on cyberspace, the author did not take time to learn that the term 'Duala' is only used in reference to the language and people of the Littoral Province in Cameroon. The city of Douala itself is home to people from various ethnic groups around the country.
[24] I found out later that this photo had been cut from a dating web site. This goes to show how extensively the internet has been used to proliferate images of so-called ideal sexualities.
[25] The introduction to the photograph states: 'Then, South African!' and the apparent intention is to draw attention to the contrast between this photograph and the previous two.
[26] A book has been published out of the papers presented at this colloquium. *Go Home or Die Here: Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa* was published by Wits University Press in 2008.
[27] Neocosmos, p. 1.
[28] Ratele, p. 151.
[29] ibid., p. 150.
[30] P Gqola, 'Brutal Inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence' in S Hassim, T Kupe & E Worby (eds), *Go Home or Die Here: Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2008, p. 219.

[31] I Ticha, 'The Representation of African Migrants in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* and Patricia Pinnoch's *Skyline*', unpublished MA thesis, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, 2003, p. 20.
[32] Gqola, p. 213. See also Neocosmos, p. 1.
[33] In her article entitled 'Woman as Sign in the South African Colonial Enterprise', published in the *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 4, no 1, 1988, pp. 3-20, Dorothy Driver shows how women were shipped to South Africa as a way of getting rid of what was considered 'surplus women' in England. Thus, the idea of eliminating 'surplus bodies' has a long association with South African history.
[34] S Gear, 'Behind the Bars of Masculinity: Male Rape and Homophobia in and about South African Men's Prisons'. *Sexualities*, vol. 10, no 2, 2007, p. 219.
[35] Gqola, pp. 218-219.
[36] See S Gear, 2007; see also M Crous, ''On Men and Masculinity in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* and K. Sello Duiker's *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*'. *Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. 23, no 1, 2007, pp. 16-40.
[37] Crous, p. 19.
[38] ibid., p. 24.
[39] Ratele, pp. 150-151.

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PART II

History, Political Writing and Thought Control

Memory Erased: Effective Thought Control in Dystopias

Elsa Bouet

Abstract
'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present, controls the past' runs the totalitarian Party slogan in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This statement expresses the total control the Party has over History and Memory and can create the illusion that Big Brother always existed. This statement embodies the terminal situation of dystopias: through the alteration of memory, society losses its freedom and alienates itself. This results in the loss of identity, both on an individual and cultural level. This paper will investigate the relation between social control and the alteration of social and individual memory in some major dystopias. The paper will exemplify its argument by looking at the cases of Guy Montag in *Fahrenheit 451*, Winston in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Shevek in *The Dispossessed*. These characters are similar in that they forget about their past, but are also unaware of the previous state of society. The paper will firstly focus on how the societies depicted in these novels affect historical, social memory through using Edward Said's 'Invention, Memory and Place', where he explains how memory is controlled and fear of the Other is instilled. Žižek's theory will supplement the analysis to investigate how this fear of the Other is used for political control and political involvement.

Key Words: Dystopias, Orwell, Bradbury, Le Guin, Said, Memory, Power, Control.

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1. Introduction

Edward Said states 'Memory and its representations touch very significantly upon the questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority' [1], that is to say that he believes that ideological memory can impact on the power structure of a society, on national and individual identity. The question resulting from this statement is that of what occurs when memory is manipulated to fit an ideological purpose, which is also a question raised by dystopias. This paper will therefore address the issue of representation of memory in some emblematic dystopias: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin. This paper will look at the relation between ideological memory and identity, authenticity and Otherness in those novels. Said explains that:

> Far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in schools and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalistic effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith.[2]

For Said, the study of history is not only the accumulation of facts and data about the past, but is intrinsically linked to the compiling of memory. The study and teaching of history in schools and universities serves to increase inhabitants' knowledge of their country, culture and identity, but also serves to ensure the inhabitants' devotion to one's country, and notably its ideology. In this sense, the study and teaching of history does not only lie in being a neutral collection of facts and truths, but in a bias study of the past, to ensure social cohesion.

This ideological use of history shows through in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The Party is in control of history and memory, and this can be seen through the slogan 'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present, controls the past.'[3] The Party believes that by altering memory, it can control the present and therefore influence future course of actions. The Party uses its power to create myths about its own coming to power, its own history, and the history of Oceania. Winston copies a passage of a Party's history book into his diary, which denotes the myths created about the past. The passage copied defines capitalists as 'fat, ugly men with wicked faces' and that 'they owned everything in the world, and everyone else was their slave.'[4] These statements show a simplification and falsification of historical past, thus changing the memories of the population. The liberal ideals of freedom, liberation and enjoyment associated with capitalism are replaced with gross generalisations and a new ideological stance. Citizens of Oceania are discouraged to question the facts, to think and to stray from the official line: 'orthodoxy' is the attitude sought by the Party.

In a similar manner, the history within *Fahrenheit 451* has been altered to ensure that the population would comply with the guidelines of those in charge: this can be seen through Guy Montag repeating the official line. Montag, a fireman in charge of burning books, questions his knowledge of his society after meeting Clarisse, an unorthodox teenager who asks him: 'Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?'[5]. He replies very assuredly: 'No. Houses have *always* been fireproof, take my word for it.'[6] He can only use his authority as a fireman, his 'word', as a proof of what he states, and his loyalty to the system in place is demonstrated by his use of the word 'always': memories of a different past have been supplanted by the creation of a new one. However, his view proves to be wrong when Beatty, the team leader of Montag's squad reveals how firemen

came to burn books. The change 'didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God.'[7] Beatty reveals to Montag that firemen did not always burn books and houses: what the institutions taught him was a lie. Montag's society was not always based on censorship or repression. Even if Beatty claims that the change did not come from the government, it is doubtful that this statement is true: Beatty claims that mass production through technology, mass exploitation of people and the pressure from minorities who disliked controversy enabled the government to remove English from school, alongside History, and replace those subjects with TV classes, more sports and other subjects devoid of intellectual thinking, a move which would prove useful for mass indoctrination.[8]

Those two examples taken from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fahrenheit 451* show how the governments have re-appropriated and altered history in order to implement their own ideology. Changing history enables the governments in both novels to assert that their ideology and systems are fitter than the past ones, or to present themselves as immutable. In both cases, the prospects of different systems have been annihilated or ridiculed in order to manipulate public opinion. The population is robbed of their memories. This relates to Said's explanation that memory should be something that 'that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain.'[9] Memory should be valued as a shared possession, intrinsic to every individual sharing it, and because it is shared, it should remain untouched, unsoiled by ideology. Memory should remain inert because facts should not be omitted, enhanced or manufactured for mass exploitation.

Montag and Winston find it hard to come to terms with the reasons behind such exploitation. Winston actions are led by his recurrent diary entry: 'I understand HOW: I do not understand WHY.'[10] The changing of the past is more obvious to him than to other Oceanian citizens, since he works at altering the *Times* to fit the needs of the Party, which leads him to ponder on whether or not he was *alone* in the possession of a memory', alone in realising the manipulation of historical facts.[11] In a similar manner, Montag is attracted to books - forbidden in his society - as a way to understand his cultural past. He asks his wife why no one talks about the war, about the censorship or the bombing on their country.[12]. Both characters are similar in that through the loss of collective memory, through the loss of the past, they also struggle to preserve their own memories. Winston struggles throughout most of the novel to remember what happened to his mother, and Montag finds it hard to remember how he met his wife, or how he fell in love with her.

Those examples show the idea of containment of memory within oneself that Said mentions: however, in the novels, memory is contained

outside the characters. This theme of containment of memory is also present in *The Dispossessed*: the story opens on the Port of Anarres, an anarchist settlement that is surrounded by a wall, symbol of its seclusion. The wall is described as follows: 'what was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.'[13] The idea of Otherness, desire and point of view are expressed through the metaphor of the wall: what defines an individual depends on which ideological side he is on, and this applies to Shevek. The wall symbolises Shevek's desires and his struggle to understand the past of Anarres as well as his own. Shevek's fascination and frustration with what the wall symbolises pushes him to cross it in an attempt to recover his identity as an anarchist, and as an individual. He goes to Urras, the capitalist planet, where he faces another wall: the sufferings of the proletariat are hidden from him. This idea of truth and memory being hidden from an individual also apply to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Fahrenheit 451*: both societies depicted are at war, and the true nature of the conflict occurs outside the wall. Therefore true history, and the potential for authentic memory, occurs outside the borders, beyond the walls of those societies.

Said makes a similar point, touching on the relation between the manipulation of memory and that of authenticity:

> The invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful.[14]

Said denounces the invention of tradition - which in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would take the shape of the Hate Week or the Two Minutes Hate - as a way to manipulate collective memory. Creating loyalty to a new tradition is a way to select, hide or promote the specific information a government or a dictator wants the population to remember. In this sense, memory is not authentic and true to the fact but rather a tool to be used to manipulate public opinion. Said pursues: 'rulers […] set about creating […] false, that is, invented memory of the past as a way of creating a new sense of identity for ruler and ruled.'[15] Memory being a tool, it can be manipulated and distorted to create a new sense of identity, in order to increase one's loyalty to one's nation, invented tradition and specifically to one's new invented ideological ruler.

This can be exemplified in *The Dispossessed*. Anarres is a newly settled colony, part of the proletariat who fled the repression on the capitalist Urras, inspired to do so by the writings of the anarchist Odo. On their new planets, the settlers have created a new language: the use of possessive in Anarresti is limited thus breaking away from the idea of ownership of their

capitalist past. In the same manner, production is centralised, regulated and organised by the Production and Distribution Coordination (PDC). These measures are taken to enable fairness and equality between the different members of the population and limit the possibilities of 'egoising'. However, the PDC has become dictatorial and created a hierarchy. As a result, Anarresti have become passive to the point of not discussing the PDC's guidance and this is concretised in their not refusing work postings. The PDC has worked at creating new beliefs, that of the silently directing bureaucracy, working slowly at changing what anarchy means for Anarresti: the balance between individual and community expressed in the writings of Odo is forgotten and replaced by shifting the focus entirely on the community.

In a similar fashion, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* also exposes a change in culture, in order to reinforce the social cohesion desired by the Party. At the beginning of the novel, Goldstein is exposed as the traitor, as the 'the Enemy of the People', the instigator of all the threats to the Party - and as always having been so.[16] Winston struggles to remember that this has not always been the case, that Goldstein has not always been an enemy but was actually one 'of the original leaders of the Revolution' but fled Oceania as some of his colleagues were executed for having allegedly spied for the enemy.[17] Goldstein has been turned into a figure of evil and hatred for the Party members. Memories of the past are erased and replaced by the entity of Big Brother, the reverence for a new ruler and new traditions, such as the Two Minutes Hate.

The past idea of 'Revolution' has also been altered and to illustrate this, Winston's understanding of the word will now be analysed. Winston can talk in terms of 'before' and 'after' the Revolution. He can read about life before the Revolution, although ideologically coloured in the language of the Party: society was striving on the enslavement of the proletariat due to the high control of the capitalists in their top hats. [18] He understands the life post-Revolution: he has observed the mechanisms of control and repression of the Party. In this sense, the Oceanian idea of 'Revolution' is that of a turning point, but all the surrounding meanings of the word have disappeared. The other meanings of the word that of fighting for an ideal, of bloodshed or conflict have been erased.[19] Winston does not understand the meaning and implications of the word, and this is the reason why he passively looks for the Brotherhood instead of trying to organise his own revolution. The population is made to forget that it can rebel. This process of making the population forget about the possibilities open to them can be further duplicated: Big Brother's cruelty can be erased. Big Brother has installed change by punishing traitors and this is put at the forefront of the propaganda, while Room 101 and the grim Ministry of Love are only mentioned through Winston's awareness.

Changing the past is one of the most powerful weapons a tyrant can hold. Altering memory is a way to ensure loyalty, but also redefine one's subjects through the dominant ideology. In dystopias, controlling memory is a way to ensure that the population believes that the way things are have *always* been that way, that there is and was no other way possible. This instillation of belief is a further way to ensure docility in the population, to avoid a rebellion, a revolution. Containing memory - as truth - outside the ideological wall is crucial in order to keep society in control, for power to remain in the hands of those who hold it. It is therefore important that the population has no desire to look outside the constricting wall, that they have no desire to look at the Other to find out about their own past, history, or discover that things were not always as they currently are - a desire that Montag, Winston and Shevek share. The wall containing the ideological memory - and excluding 'true' memory - creates exclusion, loyalty to a government that creates fake memories in order to hold individuals in his power.

Said explains that the issue of memory relates to nationalism and national identity, how 'memories of the past are shaped in accordance with a certain notion of what 'we' or, for that matter, 'they' really are.'[20] Here, Said makes an interesting distinction between us and our memory - memories are shaped according to a *notion*, a vague idea of what not so much 'us', but what our memories should be, so that we define our identities according to the fabricated memories. This quotation also raises the interesting dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', which leads to the concept of Otherness, also present in the idea of memories being contained outside oneself. Altering our memory can also mean altering our memories of the Other, of our neighbours. It interestingly relates this to Žižek's statement on the politics of fear:

> Today's predominant mode of politics is *post-political bio-politics* […]: 'post political' is a politics which claims to leave to leave behind old ideological struggles and, instead, focus on expert management and administration, while 'bio-politics' designates the regulation of the security and welfare of human lives as its primary goal. It is clear how these two dimensions overlap: once one renounces big ideological causes, what remains is the efficient administration of life […] *almost* only that. That is to say, with the depoliticised, socially, objective, expert administration and coordination of interest at the zero level of politics, the only way to introduce passion into this field, to actively mobilise people, is through fear, a basic constituent of today's subjectivity.[21]

Žižek explains here that politics claim to leave the old ideological models, that of the World Wars and the Cold War. Instead, politics claim to focus on the day-to-day objective management and administration of the country. Bio-politics focuses on the security of the nation, looking at protecting the welfare of the inhabitants from threats. Politics therefore present itself at its most basic: it has only to administrate and protect the country and can do away with ideology. However, this is ideological in itself insofar that this is only a claim: bio-politics creates a way to involve the population in politics. Bio-politics ensure the loyalty and involvement of the population through inducing fear - through ideological threats. And this is linked to how one relates to others: if memories can be erased, altered and manipulated, one's memories of the Other can also be altered, used to create fear and strengthen loyalty in one's system.

This type of politics is evident in the three novels mentioned in this paper: the PCD in *The Dispossessed*, the Ministry of Plenty in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the long billboards and constant advertising in *Fahrenheit 451* all ensure that production and administration achieve the levels required for economic sustainability. More interestingly, in those three novels, the loss of memory or alteration of the past, is directly linked to conflict and fear of the enemy. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Oceania is constantly at war with either Eastasia or Eurasia, although it is never certain who the enemy is.[22] Oceanian citizens place their trust in Big Brother, the Party who are working to protect Oceania. This fear of invasion enables the population to emotionally involve itself in the politics of the Party, in the Two Minutes Hate and to ignore the manipulation of memory. In a similar way, in *The Dispossessed*, the PDC creates a fear of Urrasti invasion: the capitalists could invade Annares and destroy their anarchist heaven any time, since they have the resources to do so. This idea, which makes the Annaresti fear for their freedom, justifies the strengthening of the borders and intensifies the loss of memory. Annaresti forget their origins, that they still have 'brothers' on Urras suffering from capitalist exploitation. Urras becomes an enemy: it is no longer seen as Anarres's point of origin.[23] This fear enables the PDC to enforce its own decision, its own actions, at the risk of becoming a totalitarian agency. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the enemy is not directly mentioned by the people in charge. Instead, the threat comes directly from books, symbol of knowledge and remembrance in the novel; the fear of annihilation, of the end of history is replaced by the fear of loosing one's possession. The fear of opening to the Other - books in the novel - is replaced by introversion into commodity consumption.

To conclude, it is interesting to note that each of the characters forget his personal memories, but also his cultural past. The alteration of memory results in the loss of cultural identity, but also personal identity. The void left by these constructed or erased memories and fabricated culture is a

sense of loss and destitution, both of the self within itself, and the self in its broader social circle. The three characters, Montag, Winston and Shevek are aware and struggling with their memory being toyed with. To find answers they all try to get away from the ideological centre of power. Winston goes to the slums, Montag goes outside the city to meet with people who know Literature and to escape, and Shevek goes in the provinces on Annares, and joins the proletariat on Urras. The only way for them to regain their memory is to escape the centre of power, and rejoin the oppressed, the cast away, to reach Otherness. This sparks a question which would provide further ground for enquiry, that of the relation between memory and geography.

Notes

[1] E W Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol.26, Winter 2000, p. 176.
[2] Ibid.
[3] G Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Penguin, London, 1990, p. 37.
[4] Ibid. p. 75-6.
[5] R Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*, Voyager, London, 1996, p.15.
[6] Ibid. p. 16.
[7] Ibid. p. 65.
[8] Montag's wife is seen interacting with the telescreens, but the scene she plays out does not make any sense, rather, it is just constituted of chitchat. In this sense, *Fahrenheit 451* seems to indicate the possible use of entertainment as a distraction from political, social issues - the war and censorship in the case of the novel.
[9] E W Said, op. cit., p. 179.
[10] G Orwell, op. cit., p. 83.
[11] G Orwell, op. cit., p. 63. This quotation occurs when Winston is at the cafeteria with Parsons and Syme and an announcement is made stating that chocolate rations were to be increased to 20 grams per week, when the day before, it was announced that they would be reduced to twenty grams. For Winston, changing facts for others equates that of 'substituting one piece of nonsense for another' (43).
[12] R Bradbury, op.cit., p. 81.
[13] U Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, Gollancz, London, 2006, p. 1.
[14] E W Said, op. cit., p. 179.
[15] Ibid. p. 178. the examples he provides he in full quotation - which follows - are taken from E Hobsbawm and T Ranger's compilation of essays entitled *The Invention of Tradition*. Said states: 'I won't try to summarize the ideas in this subtle and rich collection except to say that what was being studied was the way rulers - social and political authorities in the period since about 1850

- set about creating such supposedly age-old rituals and objects as the Scottish kilt or, in India, the *durbar*, therby providing a false, that is invented memory of the past a way of creating a new sense of identity for ruler and ruled. In India for example, the *durbar* - whose status as 'tradition' was a total fiction - was said to be a great ceremonial pageant designed to be implanted in the Indian memory though it served the British colonial authorities to compel Indians to believe in the age-old history of British imperial rule.' (178).

[16] G Orwell, op. cit., p. 13. For the whole Two Minutes Hate anger against Goldstein, see p.13-18.

[17] G Orwell, op. cit., p. 78.

[18] Ibid. p. 78-82.

[19] Although this idea of bloodshed is presence in the disappearance of Winston's mother and through the mentioning of the three traitors, Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford confessing of 'acts of sabotage causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people' (G. Orwell, op. cit. p.78-9), Winston does not associated the events with the Revolution and therefore looses sight of the idea of violence often associated with the word.

[20] E W Said, op. cit, p. 177.

[21] S Žižek, *Violence*, Profile Books, London, 2008. p. 34.

[22] This is particularly relevant when Winston reflects on the events following the Revolution and he reflects 'at that date, too, the enemy was Eurasia.' (G. Orwell, op. cit., p. 79). It is also interesting to note the change of enemy during the Hate Week: 'it had been announced that Oceania was not after all at war with Eurasia. Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Eurasia was an ally.' (ibid, pp. 187-8).

[23] Annaresti refer to each other as 'Brother' and 'Sister' to instil a sense of equality.

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Contemporaneity of Historicity: Appropriation of Historical Identities in Malaysian Blogosphere

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Abstract
Parts of history remain contemporaneous and dynamic in narrating the nation, more so in cyberspace. This paper is an analysis of bloggers whose blogs appropriate identities such as Mamak Bendahara Sri Maharaja Tun Mutahir and Tun Teja Ratna Benggala - both significant characters in the history of Malaysia. While traditional Malay practices uphold loyalty and obedience of the subject towards sovereign power, modern Malays, buoyed up by the emancipation and anonymity of cyberspace, have rejected these old norms and promoted new alternatives in their dealings with authority. There seems to be a paradox at play between the ancient identities assumed and the attitudes towards the contemporary issues and concerns discussed in their blogs. Our analysis focuses on the metamorphosis of historical figures and the bloggers' opinions towards contemporary figures of authority. We shall examine the issues raised which are relevant in the Asian context generally and Malaysian situation specifically, the positions the bloggers undertake, and the kinds of responses they receive from their readers. We shall seek to answer the extent to which the appropriation of historical identities by these bloggers has metamorphosed into voices of dissent and resentment of the current seat of authority and leadership.

Key Words: History, appropriation, Malaysian blogosphere, identity, sovereignty, power, politics, emancipation, metamorphosis.

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1. Introduction

The blog is a recent product of cyberculture which functions as a medium for the presentation of self; in this virtual space there is freedom for the blogger to express issues that reflect his or her concerns. Like writers, bloggers may choose to use a pseudonym by assuming an on-line identity and by doing this, they achieve visibility in cyberspace and yet remain invisible. In this culturally diverse and virtual community, bloggers may also incarnate themselves through avatars, alter egos or representations to re-present their blog identities. As an embodiment of the self, a new personification of what is a familiar idea, the avatars represent the bloggers persona as well as their actions, beliefs and interests.[1] For some Malaysian bloggers, the emancipation and anonymity of cyberspace present an opportunity for them to look back into their past and appropriate identities to re-present themselves

in their blogs. Choosing to speak through these identities, many focus on issues and concerns which are relevant in the Asian context generally and Malaysian situation specifically. This paper analyzes the metamorphosis of two historical figures via two Malaysian bloggers and their opinions towards contemporary figures of authority. These acts of appropriating historical identities by the bloggers show that parts of history remain contemporaneous and dynamic in their narration of the nation.

Why do some bloggers incarnate themselves as characters in history? While the use of pseudonyms to write is not novel - many writers do this as it is an accepted part of the tradition of writing - the point of interest here is the decision of choosing to speak as a notable figure in the history of Malaysia. More so when the writing criticizes present and past leadership, does the appropriation of historical figures then become a means for these bloggers to legitimize their role as social critics? Traditional Malay practices uphold loyalty and obedience of the subject towards sovereign power; the 'covenant or the Malay 'Magna Carta' agreed upon by Demang Lebar Daun and Sang Sapurba Taram Seri Tribuana' depicted in *Sejarah Melayu* (*The Malay Annals*) attests to this.[2] However, these modern Malays, buoyed up by the emancipation and anonymity of cyberspace, have rejected these old norms and promoted new alternatives in their dealings with authority. There seems to be a paradox at play between the ancient identities assumed and the attitudes towards the contemporary issues and concerns discussed in their blogs. Thus, in this paper we examine the positions the bloggers undertake, and the kinds of responses they receive from their readers. We also seek to answer the extent to which the appropriation of historical identities by these bloggers has metamorphosed into voices of dissent and resentment of the current seat of authority and leadership.

To enquire into the bloggers' choice of re-presenting themselves as historical characters, we have to understand the need for this act. It is generally understood that representation refers to the process of standing in for someone or something, or rather acting as a substitute for the 'real thing'. It is a complex process as it is cultural and not natural. Jen Webb asserts that people:

> practice representation all the time because we live immersed in representation: it is how we understand our environments and each other. It is also how we both *are*, and how we understand ourselves; representation is implicated in the process of *me* becoming *me*…each of us is produced through a complex mix of background, tastes, concerns, training, tendencies, experiences - all made real to us through the principles and processes of representation

> that frame and govern our experiences of being in the world.[3]

Hence, what matters to us are three central issues: who performs the representation; what the representation means; and what effects the representations have. It is essential to appreciate the representation of Malaysian bloggers' identities when we understand that processes of representation do not merely make connections, relationships and identities visible. The reality is these processes *make* those connections, relationships and identities.

2. Appropriating Historical Identities

The blogger's choice in appropriating historical identities is a conscious act that entails not merely selection but also motivation. While other scholars claim there are things beyond representation, Prendergast maintains, 'everything is representable' and offers two definitions; the first 'is the sense of represent as re-present, to make present again, in two interrelated ways, spatial and temporal'.[4] This is representation as *Darstellung*, which is the German word referring to the notion of making or *rendering* presence. The second is the sense of '*delegating* presence, or *Vetretung*: the substitution of something for something or someone else'.[5] The two bloggers studied substitute their real selves with historical characters to voice out issues central to contemporary Malaysian politics, revealing their attitudes towards the seat of authority through their avatars and personal ruminations. The bloggers, Hikayat Mamak Bendahara and Tun Teja Ratna Benggala, have appropriated the identities of Mamak Bendahara Sri Maharaja Tun Mutahir and Tun Teja Ratna Benggala - both well-known characters in our history text books. Other bloggers also undertaken similar appropriations, for example Jebat Must Die (Hang Jebat), Raden Galoh (Raden Galoh Chendera Kirana) and Sultanmuzaffar (Sultan Muzaffar Shah); however, they will not be analysed in this paper.

The bloggers' choice of self-representation through historical appropriation is re-visioning in nature. They have claimed old identities to re-create new ones from a contemporary perspective. Alicia Ostriker views 'revisionist mythmaking' as an 'employment of a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture … and the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends … but ultimately making cultural change possible'.[6] This means the bloggers' motivation has to be a conscious one as their appropriation leads towards cultural change. Re-visioning is central to New Historicism, and the deconstructive nature of the theory sanctions an appropriation of the past to suit the intention of the person doing the re-visioning. We seek their motive by analyzing their blog narratives, and fundamental to this is Michel Foucault's ideas on power and discourse.[7] As

social language that is created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, discourse expresses a particular way of understanding human experience and draws attention to the role of language as a vehicle of ideology. Objectivity is also affected by views of what is right or wrong, important or unimportant. Thus, by deconstructing the blog narratives, we hope to reveal hidden sub-texts, namely the explicit or implicit agenda in the blog discourse.

3. Hikayat Mamak Bendahara

Hikayat Mamak Bendahara, in his blog Dato' Bendahara Speakz, has appropriated the character of Bendahara Sri Maharaja Tun Mutahir, a Tamil-Malay descent who went on to become the most renowned person second only to the Sultan in Melaka.[8] Muhammad Yusoff Hashim reveals that due to 'circumstances and prevailing uncertainty surrounding the system of succession, the Bendahara frequently played a part in the choice of the heir to the throne'.[9] Accounts in *Sejarah Melayu* depict the Bendahara as one who was a staunch supporter of the sovereignty of the Sultan; in fact, wives of the Sultan had traditionally been daughters of the Bendahara. Needless to say, although this reason could have contributed to his allegiance to the seat of power, he was, nonetheless, an authority in the Melaka Sultanate.

Central to the blogger's concern is the people's right to speak freely. Hikayat Mamak Bendahara, who also refers to himself as Dato' Bendahara, exerts his power of speech through his blog, claiming that the 'freedom of speech is a right that should be taken for granted. No one should not stay silent, or forced to do so due to intimidation'.[10] By drawing upon his voice and agency, contradictory to his historical namesake, he speaks out against the country's contemporary figures of authority, while staunch in his mission to remain anonymous:

> About Me
>
> 
>
> Hikayat Mamak Bendahara
> The author is a not so conventional Malaysian; he wishes, desires and loves to remain anonymous in the blogging world. The blog reflects the author's view of the Malaysian political and social scene; he claims no responsibility on the repercussions or influence his writings may have to the world at large.[11]

What motivates a secondary school teacher living in Shah Alam, Selangor - as purportedly claimed - to choose a character from a comic-book

series written by Alan Moore and illustrated by David Lloyd, *V for Vendetta*; it was then turned into a movie of the same name.[12] The enigmatic protagonist, V, is an anarchist resisting a totalitarian state under the guise of Guy Fawkes. Does Dato' Bendahara too see himself as V, an anti-hero, the voice and champion of the masses? The Guy Fawkes mask certainly grants him invisibility, while his blog-voice visibility. His Malay historical alter-ego would have made decisions, though accepted by the aristocracy, unpopular to the common people in 15th century Melaka; the blogger, conversely, criticizes Malaysia's seat of power. In one blog entry he criticizes both the government, i.e. Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's Prime Ministrial performance, and the opposition, i.e. DAP's expansionary budget:

> …the government being led by technocrats who are detached from the mainstream society…For the Abdullah's administration, its capitalism on the way down and socialism on the way up. When the fuel price was skyrocketing, the public was served with a record-breaking 20% fuel hike followed by an unimaginable 40% torpedo… On the other end of the spectrum, DAP's Lim Guan Eng's…expansionary budget was presented to impress the less-educated public and was more of a publicity stunt. If Lim Guan Eng sincerely wanted to implement this proposal, Dato' Bendahara advises him to resign and run for office in a banana republic…[13]

The V-avatar he has selected reveals the blogger's attitude and perception towards figures of authority (Ruzy Suliza Hashim et al, 2009).[14] Speaking from behind a mask, Dato' Bendahara has taken it upon himself to be the people's dissenting voice, and based on the number of hits his blog has received - 27,047 visitors since November 7, 2008 - his fiery voice has certainly been heard. He has a regular following among bloggers too, for instance Dato' Mamax, who posts a comment on the said entry, concurring with his views:

> Kudos dato' bendahara: This is the only article here that I would agree on you. Malaysians are being shagged by their own filthy blood sucking government. Enough is enough. Believe me, change will come soon. Just wait till the end of this month :)…[15]

Another significant issue broached by Dato' Bendahara is the concepts of race and politics, especially pertaining to the 'Mamak'. In one of

his entries, 'Malaysia's Obama: Khairy Jamaluddin or Mukhriz Mahathir' he questions the birthright of leaders:

> The result of the US Presidential Election has clearly shown Americans has begun to look at each other beyond race or religion…Globalization has rendered us, Malaysians, unable to discard this fact as fantasy…Barrack Hussein Obama… promises change, and he is black. Mukhriz Mahathir promises change (Berani Berubah), but how is Khairy Jamaluddin black? Mr. jamaluddin is currently the UMNO Youth Deputy Chief…in UMNO, how can he be black? It is UMNO - United Malays national Organisation, a one race party, the heaven of right wing Malay politics. Yet, I still call Khairy Jamaluddin black! Mr. Jamaluddin's father is a Malay Muslim from Rembau, Negeri Sembilan. Not Black. Malays from Rembau are of Minangkabau, West Sumatera descent…Why are we still on the assumption that Khairy Jamaluddin is black?...So, he's mom is an Indian Muslim, or mamak as we prefer to call it. Mamaks tend to fake their ancestry and pretend to be Malays in Malaysia to gain special privileges, benefits and even political posts…The 'one drop rule' says that one is black even though one has only a drop of Negro blood in his/her veins…Applying this rule to Mamaks, Khairy Jamaluddin is a Mamak…Critics would now start to question the ancestry of Mukhriz Mahathir…a lot of talk among Malaysians regarding the father of Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad… [16]

Dato' Bendahara probes the criterion for leadership, specifically whether non-Malays should hold posts in UMNO, using the 'one-drop rule'. The issue of race politics is central here, especially pertaining to the question of whether someone from the minority can become a leader of the nation. In multi-cultural Malaysia, concerns of who we are as Malays, Chinese, Indian, Kadazan-Dusun, Baba-Nyonya or Mamak are still matters of concern to many people. The concept of One Malaysia, as proposed by the new Prime Minister has yet to take root. This blogger empowers his social criticisms by choosing to sit on the foundation of history and lashing out at what he perceives as wrong. However, one cannot help but notice the incongruity of this blogger mocking other Mamaks for being elected as leaders by the Malays; his purported claim to be one may have given him the legitimacy and authority to speak out on the issue. In addition, his hybrid creation of Guy

Fawkes-V-Mamak Bendahara Seri Maharaja Tun Mutahir-Hikayat Mamak Bendahara reveals the fragmented nature of his own identity.

4. Tun Teja Ratna Benggala

The other blogger who appropriates a historical identity is Teja who professes in her blog profile as a 'Muslim, Malay, UMNO member and BN supporter'.[17]

This blogger motivates herself as a 'Serikandi Melayu' - a female warrior, and her epigraph: 'Are your feet tied? Are your hands tied?' suggests a woman resisting bondage, either physical as the epigraph maintained or psychological as implied.[18] Her identity is an appropriation of Tun Teja Ratna Benggala, daughter of Sri Amar Di Raja Pahang. *Sejarah Melayu* tells how she was convinced by Hang Tuah (or Hang Nadim, depending on which version of the manuscript) to marry Sultan Mahmud Shah.[19] Popular legend claims she followed Hang Tuah thinking that he loved her (or an alternative version to the legend is that he used love potion to ensure her consent). Her voice is silenced in the classical text, and she is made a pawn in the politics of male supremacy. As a woman in 15th century Melaka, her fate was bound to the decisions of the men around her.

Contrastively, the present-day Teja is empowered by the liberty of cyberspace to voice her opinions, not merely about personal matters but on issues concerning the nation. She becomes visible; this is a transformation of the silenced historical character that accepts decisions by those with authority. In one entry, Teja declares her conviction of her voicing out against the challenges to nation-building, '*Saya cuma ingin memberi iktibar dan alert signal utk isu2 yg orang Melayu harus prihatin dan berhati2 supaya tidaklah satu hari kita merempat di negara sendiri…*'.[20] Again, echoing the first blogger, she is motivated by matters regarding race and politics.

Discontent with leadership is a recurrent issue in her blog. On Friday, 7 March 2008, she called upon the people to make a change in leadership during election, using religion, the nation and the state as her clarion call:

> *Unadilla dengan BIJAKSANA - Selamat Mengundi*
> *Maka, gunakanlah KUASA MENGUNDI kita dengan sebaik2nya serta dengan penuh kebijaksaan. Inilah masanya kita menyuarakan kehendak rakyat, setiap 5 tahun diberi PELUANG memilih wakil rakyat bekerja mewakili kita. Maka, pilihlah calon2 wakil rakyat yg terbaik buat agama, bangsa dan negara. Mana2 yg menjadi pengkhianat perjuangan kita, harap diTOLAK, mana2 yg baik undilah semula. Untuk Agama, Bangsa dan Tanahair.*[21]

In June 2008, Teja called for a vote of no confidence for the then present leadership, calling on their resignation and singing praises for past leaders. Traitors to the Malay cause must be rejected. The 'new' Teja resists the Malaysian seat of authority in 2008 through her pro-National Coalition and ethno-nationalist perspectives. Malayness is a recurrent theme in her call for change in the country. Her resistance to figures of authority is a far cry from what the historical Tun Teja has been capable of. She becomes invincible as Teja the blogger. Her claim to Malay historicity may be her way to legitimize her claim to speak for the *rakyat*, the people.

Inter-racial sensitivity is an issue raised in her defiance of the Opposition's majority win in four states in her blog entry dated Tuesday, April 8, 2008:

> *Teresa Kok and Her Three Little Pigs - Part Une*
> *Inilah wawasan* DAP, PKR dan PAS *bila dapat mengambilalih pemerintahan. Belum apa2 dah nak tunjuk* kurang ajar *pada Melayu dan Islam pribumi. Ini DAP baru dapat Pulau Pinang dan PKR dapat Selangor serta PAS dapat Kedah dan Perak. Adakah 5 ekor babi panggang yg ditayangkan Teresa Kok di blog beliau sebagai simbolism 5 buah negeri yg dikuasai pembangkang?*

> *Kurang ajar betul DAP dan kurang cerdik betul PAS. PKR pula memang sah menjadi barua DAP. Teramat KURANG AJAR DAN TIDAK SOPAN SUNGGUH Teresa Kok ini. Inilah dasar DAP dan politik babi mereka, amat kurang ajar kepada Melayu dan orang Islam di Malaysia.*

She lambasted Teresa Kok, an opposition leader from the People's Coalition for her insensitivity in making use of pig images in her blog. Having claimed her political allegiance to UMNO and the National Coalition in her blog profile, Teja's views are undoubtedly partial. The nature of *serikandi* that she claims to uphold is blighted by her attitude and harsh words used to express her resentment of the Opposition. The blogger appears to have exploited her appropriation of a historical Malay identity to legitimize her inequitable stand on race and politics in Malaysia. Hers is a dissenting voice towards the current seat of authority, especially in the opposition-held states.

5. Implications

A quick survey of Malaysian bloggers who assume historical identities to represent themselves in their blogs shows that parts of history remain contemporaneous and dynamic in narrating the nation, more so in cyberspace. The blog becomes a hybridized space where the past and the present, even the east and the west, converge to stage contestations. These bloggers may not hold the seat of power, what they say may only reverberate within cyberspace, but it is this promise of emancipation and anonymity that empowers them to articulate issues which would not be discussed in main stream media. The issues raised are relevant in contemporary Malaysia, especially regarding the performance of the National Coalition leading to and post the General Elections in 2008. Having appropriated historical identities they claim visibility in virtual space, yet they still remain invisible; more importantly though, their motivation to stand on the foundations of history to legitimize their voice gives them the invincibility to address issues on race politics. However, the positions these bloggers undertake are reflective of their subjectivity. Indeed, the appropriation of historical identities by these bloggers has metamorphosed into voices of dissent and resentment of the past and current seat of authority and leadership in the country.

Notes

[1] <wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>.

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[3] J Webb, *Understanding Representation*, SAGE, New Delhi, 2009, p. 2.
[4] ibid, p. 4.
[5] ibid.
[6] A Ostriker, *Writing Like a Woman*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1983.
[7] M Foucault, A.M. Sheridan-Smith (trans), *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Travistock, London, 1972.
[8] <http://hikayatmamakbendahara.blogspot.com/>.
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[14]Ruzy Suliza Hashim, Imran Ho-Abdulah, Noraini Md. Yusof & Zillasafarina Jaafar, Laporan Penyelidikan Pola Penulisan Blog Belia Malaysia, 2009. (Unpublished manuscript).
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PART III

Time & Place

Designing the Networked Environment: Architectural Visions of Cybercommunities

Lara Schrijver

Abstract
Many architectural projects of the 1960s incorporated early visions of potentially networked futures. As cheerfully imperfect as these visions were (relating more to a pop-sensibility of a progressive technology that knew no bounds and presented no threats), they offer us in hindsight a clear view of the questions we continue to struggle with today in terms of cyberspace and its relation to community and physical space. Projects such as the 1969 'Electronic Tomato' by Archigram hints at the development of the iPod, while Constant's 'New Babylon' is more deeply networked. The transposition of these projects makes it clear that the position of the individual and its relation with the community or the collective is still being reconfigured. Have we moved into the era of the iPod, where we can entirely enclose ourselves in the capsule prefigured in the projects of Archigram, or have we become one with our environment through the 'extensions of man,' as Marshall McLuhan might suggest? Cyberspace promises permanent connectivity but has ramifications in physical space. Although cyberpunk literature offers many examples of connectivity and a reconfiguration of the collective, the architecture projects of the 1960s made them tangible. While the projects of the 1960s literally transposed the network onto physical space, the question should be approached more in terms of complementarity. The existence of 'light communities' in cyberspace is based on affinities, while the traditional sense of Gemeinschaft is based on (long-term) physical proximity. I would argue that approaching these projects from the perspective of contemporary cybercommunities offers us a way to rethink our contemporary cities in order to incorporate both the fluidity of communities as we know them from cyberspace, while still including the various groups that one might encounter in the space of the street but not in the virtual realm of elective affinities.

Key Words: Architecture, 1960s, community, cyberspace, utopian visions.

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1. This was Tomorrow

Visions of brave new worlds filled with technological wonders were to be found throughout the architectural projects of the 1960s. Many of these visions prefigured the potential of the network, exploring it as a notion that could fundamentally transform our sense of space and the built environment.

As cheerfully imperfect as these visions were (relating more to a pop-sensibility of a progressive technology that knew no bounds and presented no threats), they offer us in hindsight a clear view of the questions we continue to struggle with today in terms of cyberspace and its relation to community and physical space.

It is precisely in many of the architecture projects of the time that we literally see a networked, cybernetic future envisioned. From the cheerful to the desolate, the physical ramifications of developments that will eventually be invisible to the human eye are explored in various forms. These projects demonstrate that the position of the individual and its relation with the community or the collective is still being reconfigured. Have we moved into the era of the iPod, where we can entirely enclose ourselves in the capsule prefigured in the projects of Archigram, or have we become one with our environment through the 'extensions of man,' as Marshall McLuhan might suggest? The promise of responsive technologies and some form of cybernetic was irresistible to some architects, leading to such radical visions as the 1964 Computer City by Dennis Crompton. The drawings for this project look like a wiring scheme or some form of electrical circuit board. It promised the potential of a city that would begin to respond to its inhabitants, sensing requirements through its extensive circuitry.

2. House, City, Network: Architectural Visions of the Future

We can distinguish three categories of spatial experience related to notions of virtual space and cybernetics, illustrated in a number of projects from the 1960s. These range from the self-enclosed or encapsulated space, to the city as a network, and the abstract 'extensions of man'. While the house becomes smaller, increasingly tending towards an individualized capsule with the minimal requirements for a personal space, the city becomes increasingly expansive and diffuse. The network itself can be seen as a provocation of architecture: although it seems to run counter to the material reality of architecture, it is nevertheless influential in how we understand space. The second half of the twentieth century sees the introduction of such notions as the space of flows, and 'liquid modernity'. When the architecture critic Reyner Banham introduces his notion of the 'second machine age', it forms a new understanding of technology that opposes the high modern 'first machine age', centred on the industrial machine, with a more organic and human-oriented form of technology, which incorporates responsive elements. The most radical conclusion to these ideas can be seen in Marshall McLuhan's idea of technology as a prosthetic, where he suggests that we are continually extending ourselves into the environment by technological means. In this view, we are continually mediated by the various technologies we have devised and subsequently incorporated.[1]

Banham saw his ideas on the second machine age being explored in the work of Archigram, a group of young British architects that worked together from 1961 to 1974. Archigram gained a reputation through their exploration of various 'space pods' and nomadic homes. These encapsulated environments promise the freedom to roam while maintaining a level of contemporary comfort. The Cushicle (1964, Mike Webb) for example, is in essence a lightweight home that can be carried as a backpack, but then (no doubt effortlessly) folds out to become a comfortable, enclosed personal space. Consisting of a chassis for appliances and an inflatable envelope, the Cushicle also includes a projection television and heating. A similar project accompanies an article by Reyner Banham in 1965 that revolves around the idea of a 'transportable standard-of-living package'. Alongside a drawing that shows a bubble with a small appliance that offers presumably all the requirements for comfort, the caption reads:

> To the man who has everything else, a standard-of-living-package such as this could offer the ultimate goody - the power to impose his will on any environment to which the package could be delivered, to enjoy the spatial freedom of the nomadic campfire without the smell, smoke, ashes and mess; and the luxuries of appliance-land without those encumbrances of a permanent dwelling.[2]

As a later exploration of the nomadic encapsulated dwelling, the Suitaloon (1968, Mike Webb), reduces architecture even further until it becomes mere clothing. The project description opens with 'Clothing for living in - or if it wasn't for my Suitaloon I would have to buy a house'.[3] Instead of the chassis that formed the frame for the Cushicle, the Suitaloon now includes everything, and is able to plug in to a wide range of envelopes (such as the home that is waiting). The Suitaloon also expands the space of the individual to include the possibility of sharing the envelope with someone else: the drawings show a woman stepping up to be enveloped in the space of the Suitaloon.

These projects appeal to the notion of flexibility that arises in the post-war era. They are facilitated by new technologies; yet still offer some sense of a 'grounded' home space for the individual. Their contemporary forms are perhaps more mundane than envisioned at the time, reducing the office to the minimal dimensions of the cubicle, and incorporating the potential for movement in the form of trailers (whether as recreational vehicles or trailer homes). Archigram's radical projections of small, enclosed pods that may traverse the world and plug in to various networks have remained more in the realm of science fiction. Yet the notion of a nomadic life has been accommodated by increasingly generic architectural spaces and

an extended technological network that allows us to at least plug in our consoles, if not our homes.[4]

Despite their presumed self-sufficiency, these capsules were also dependent on a network of facilities, intimating the development of a network city as their counterpart in envisioning the future. This offered unforeseen potential for architecture and urban planning, opening up ideas of flexibility within the city as visible in works such as the Plug-In City (1964, Peter Cook). This project is conceived as a vast infrastructure that allows various pieces to be plugged in or moved at will. The units in the city were designed on different scales of obsolescence. A range of periods of expendability was stipulated, with dwelling units and shops typically lasting the shortest, around 5 years, and the main structure of the city the longest, up to 40 years. In between these time ranges were the larger spaces oriented on collective functions such as lecture halls, shops, and other gathering spaces.

The Control and Choice project (1967, Peter Cook) focused on the underlying potential of near-future technology for architecture. Much like the Computer City, it focused on the responsive environment, combining it with the individualization implicit in the capsules. In drawings for this project, reference is made to a family as made up of individuals, who might each want something different from their space. It is drawn as a hybrid assemblage of many parts and systems that will be able to cater to the desires of 'George and Doris' as well as 'Bob' or 'Rita'.

A similar focus on the responsive and liberating aspects of new technologies is to be found in the project for New Babylon, developed in the late 1950s and revisited over many years, by the Dutch artist Constant Nieuwenhuys. He conceived of New Babylon as a total urban environment that would be continually reconfigured by its inhabitants, encouraging their creative appropriation of its spaces.[5] As a do-it-yourself city New Babylon offered a diffuse, covered city that could expand throughout the world. Its structure was to be built by its inhabitants, and the spaces were meant to create a fully artificial environment that would trigger the creative talents of all its occupants.

In a sense, each of these types of spaces in the 1960s already prefigures a reality we have come to accept. Even the ideas not directly related to the rise of computers and the digital era, are based on the unlimited potential of a networked understanding of society and its spaces. However, although the presence of a network has become part of reality, its ramifications were somewhat different than was conceived in these projects. The artificial environments envisioned by Constant certainly exist, but are primarily used in shopping malls and casinos, where they serve purposes other than creative exploration. The expansion of the Archigram's Plug-In City into a larger network offered the opportunity to connect many different locations in England, and engage them in a larger community. This too,

seems to have become part of contemporary everyday reality, but in a virtual form. Rather than a literal network of infrastructure with plug-in capsules, chatrooms, multi-user games and Internet forums have created a virtual network that exists alongside the physical spaces we occupy.

In the 1960s, this presence of the virtual is often seen to prefigure an increasingly ephemeral nature of architecture, as in the various capsule projects. Underlying these projects was the possibility that our spaces and the objects that surround us might disappear, becoming embedded in technology as a prosthetic. Marshall McLuhan's proposition that technology is less an instrument than an 'extension of man' gains a vibrant counterpart in a number of speculative projects by Archigram, including the Electronic Tomato (David Greene and Warren Chalk, 1969) and Manzak (Ron Herron, 1969). Manzak is most closely aligned with the contemporary form of the Internet. Although it is still designed as a physical object that ventures out into the world, its function is to 'Direct your business operations, do the shopping, hunt or fish, or just enjoy electronic instamatic voyeurism, from the comfort of your own home.'[6] Electronic Tomato takes an even more light-hearted approach to gadgetry, showing a woman dancing next to a large tomato, which is wired to her wrist, shoulder, ribs and leg. Its precise function may not be clear, but the description proclaims the joys of 'a groove gizmo that connects to every nerve end to give you the wildest buzz.'[7]

In these projects architecture as such has dissolved into the technological gadgetry that extends our limbs and senses. It is posed as an interface between us and the world, and thus makes few propositions about spaces anymore. These projects offer early visions of the world of iPods and cell phones, defining the space around them not by enclosure but by mediation. This mediation may still allow us to recede from the world, but our own physical presence as well as that of the built environment remains something to be contended with.

3. The Virtual Realm and Networks of Elective Affinities

In an interview with Jim Rossignol, Geoff Manaugh points out the resonance between the plug-in architecture of Archigram in the 1960s and the user-generated aspect of many contemporary computer games.[8] The larger virtual worlds may share premises with the ideas of the Plug-In City, but one might even argue that the resonance goes deeper than that: it is not so much about how we show the interaction between the user, the building and the community, but it is much more about how we perceive the relationship between the individual and the community to be formed. On this level, both the Plug-In City and computer games show a tendency towards communities based on elective affinities. The implication of the Plug-In City is that you would never need to remain in a place you did not like; you could simply

unplug your capsule and find a place within the infrastructure that was more suitable.

The Plug-In City forms a community based on ephemeral bonds of affinity or stylistic preference rather than physical proximity, as do its contemporary virtual counterparts, cybercommunities. Zygmunt Bauman argues that these 'aesthetic communities', bound by style, taste, or personal preference, allow little room for the shared cultural significance that can transcend personal preference.[9] In his view, these networks of elective affinities remain little more than that, and are easily shaken by an appeal to responsibility. In contrast, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Menno Hurenkamp suggest that 'light communities' are not necessarily less functional than traditional communities, but do operate in a different fashion, and are more volatile in their composition. Again, specific affinities form the foundation in these communities, whether they are related to style, hobby, or temporary collaboration.[10]

What becomes apparent in these notions of 'light' or 'aesthetic' communities is that there is still some distinction between the physical and the virtual realm. The perceived stability of the physical community has its roots in the distinction Friedrich Tönnies made between the *Gemeinschaft* (community) and the *Gesellschaft* (society). The mode of interaction in the *Gemeinschaft* derives from permanent bonds of physical proximity, as well as the knowledge of all who comprise the community. The more structured and regulated modes of interaction in the *Gesellschaft* become necessary when physical proximity is not permanent (as the bonds become fleeting, they contain no appeal to history or longstanding relation) and when scale expands beyond the clear individual identification of everyone within the group, as in the anonymity of the metropolis. It requires the legislation of conduct rather than the embedded, implicit forms of connection.

The fluidity of virtual communities, or the individualized and diffuse communities of Archigram and Constant, may simply be of a different order than those based on physical proximity. In retrospect, these projects suggest that the differences between the physical and the virtual realm must not be overlooked. While digital realms allow for certain level of perfection and coherence, applying the same totalising logic to the material world results in an environment that is unforgiving of aberrations. The later drawings of New Babylon by Constant seem to indicate the desolation that could result from a continually enforced creativity. Even when contemporary projects incorporate many variables through the complex scripting procedures of digital design, their imaginative, seemingly organic environments, appear to present a coherent style that denies the possibility of being occupied counter to the designer's intentions.[11]

Rather than the imagination, architecture is relegated to reality, which means some aspects of it must fall under a form of consensus or

community thinking - it must be held accountable to a broad group of users. Some level of control and choice is simply absent from the built environment. Although we may control our environment to some extent, as in the choice of an apartment, or the neighbourhood we live in, it is impossible to entirely design our surroundings. To some extent, we are at the mercy of the physical realm: not everything can be 'edited out' of the physical environment. In contrast, the virtual environment resides more within the realm of choice. Games may offer expansive worlds that extend our horizons in the virtual realm, Internet forums may have extensive regulations and rules, both explicit and implicit, and we may be deeply invested in our virtual personas. All of these elements bring the virtual realm very close to our physical presence in the world, yet in the end we can still retreat from our online worlds more easily than we can disengage from material reality.

4. The Physical and the Virtual Realms: Complementary or Oppositional?

The logic of cybernetics may be invasive but the question remains whether it is all-encompassing. This might be the distinction between 'control and choice' and New Babylon as two very different interpretations of the diffuse and extensive nature of cybernetics.

If cyberspace does not replace physical space, but rather adds to it, we may find in the expansion to the digital unexpected insights or potential new developments.[12] Some of the bonds in cyberspace seem extraordinarily strong, some might say despite the lightness of its community. Yet new research on the mechanisms of gaming communities also suggests a closer relation to physical space than originally expected, which seems to be related to both affinity and physical proximity. The typical gamer seems to interact primarily within close physical proximity and a circle of friends. Gamers that live within 10 kilometres spend up to five times more time together than players at a larger distance.[13]

The utopian drive that underlies many architectural projects is perhaps more appropriate to imagined futures than to present reality. The projects of the 1960s proposed communities and network cities that would undermine the traditional understanding of architecture as appealing to permanence and stability. At the same time, they contained a firm belief in the possibility of eliciting specific social behaviour in accordance with their appearance and design intentions. In retrospect, the tension between the physical and the virtual demonstrates not only this 'fallacy of physical determinism', but also indicates that the relation between the social realm of the community (physical and virtual) and the material presence of the built environment is a complex mechanism. At times it is circumscribed merely by parallel existence, at others by mutual dependence.

Much is to be learned about our relation to our direct communities and society at large through the realms of architecture and the virtual. The virtual realm has developed enough to demonstrate how deeply the bonds of elective affinities can be experienced. Architecture seems to not yet have come to terms with the fluid nature of contemporary bonds of community. If this could be incorporated in our understanding of architecture, perhaps we could more accurately approach questions of public and communal design. At the same time, yesterday's visions of the future should also suffice to remind us that the world of our imagination should not always become part of the fabric of reality.

Notes

[1] M McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 2001 [orig. 1964].
[2] R Banham, 'A Home is not a House', *Art in America*, vol. 2, April 1965. Illustrated by François Dallegret. pp. 70-79.
[3] M Webb, 'Suitaloon', in *Archigram*. P Cook (ed), Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel, 1972, p. 80.
[4] In the discussion at the conference, the point was raised that to some degree, people now consider their laptop their 'home'. For many of those present, it was easier to conceive of making do with a limited range of comfort in their physical space, than without their laptop, with all its embedded information and potential for (virtual) contact. Nevertheless, we are also still tied to the physical realm: a minimal level of shelter is a prerequisite.
[5] Constant was a member of the Situationist International from its founding in 1957 until 1961, when his arguments with Guy Debord resulted in his retreat from the group. The early work of the Situationist International, in particular on 'unitary urbanism', was a primary influence in the designs for New Babylon. In 1959 and 1960, New Babylon (then stilled called a 'covered city') was presented as the prime example of what a city that would trigger the creativity of its inhabitants might look like. Constant, 'Une autre ville pour une autre vie', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 3, 1959, pp. 37-40. Constant, 'Description de la zone jaune', *Internationale Situationniste*, no. 4, 1960, pp. 23-26.
[6] R Herron, W Chalk, D Greene, 'Manzak and Electronic Tomato', in *Archigram*. P Cook (ed.), Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel, 1972, p. 124.
[7] ibid., p. 124.
[8] G. Manaugh, 'This Gaming Life: An interview with Jim Rossignol', on *bldgblog*, May 20, 2009, viewed on June 1, 2009, <http://bldgblog.blogspot.com/2009/05/this-gaming-life-interview-with-jim.html>.
[9] Z Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, 2000.

[10] J W Duyvendak, M Hurenkamp (eds), *Kiezen voor de Kudde: Lichte gemeenschappen en de nieuwe meerderheid*, Van Gennep, Amsterdam, 2004.
[11] For an overview of a number of digital technologies and their impact on architecture, see N Leach (ed), *Digital Cities*, special issue of *Architectural Design*, June 2009.
[12] This includes the sharing of physical office space through 'coworking' sites, which offer maps with office spaces that can be shared or rented for short periods (see for example: <http://www.coworker.nl/>, <http://citizenspace.us/>, <http://the-hub.net/>), and the introduction of the virtual campus to accommodate individual learning trajectories.
[13] P van Ammelrooy, 'Dwerg is fit, maar nogal depressief', *de Volkskrant*, Feb. 28, 2009, Kennis, p. 3. The article offers preliminary results of an extensive sociological study of the online gaming community EverQuest, Noshir Contractor, Chicago (phone interview). Dmitri Williams, Annenberg School for Communication.

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PART IV

Bodies & Identity

Body Coded in Motion

Elena Marcevska

Abstract
This paper examines the digitally mediated interactions between the analog entity of the human body and its digital representations. For the purpose of my research I navigate the screen as a fuzzy border that engages constant transition: offline-to-online, signal-to-sample, analog-to-digital. The research is based on the premise that 'a computer machine and a computer program can be whatever a programmer wants it to be' [1] and for that reason 'possibility exists to create new paradigms of computer programming that build on humankind's inherent visual and bodily perception skills.' [2]The pioneer in the field of embodied aesthetics of new media, Myron Krueger believes that the computer is always a vehicle for exploring and expanding embodied (human) interaction with the world and with other human beings. The paper will be focused on how the human motion can be used as a signal for the computer to produce output and how this process is transcribed in the computer screen through the use of the programming languages. Furthermore, I will try to explore the power of technologically mediated sensory engagement in the production of embodied being.

Key Words: body, computer code, human computer interaction.

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1. Introduction

We live in an era where human motion becomes accelerated by technology and the points of stopping, looking, observing are rare commodities. Nowadays new technologies become extensions of the human body and as such influence its identity.[3]Human interaction with technology is an important area of study in an age of ubiquitous digital technology, for new media studies as well as for performance studies. Interaction is crucial, although their perspectives diverge.

But, first of all, I want to explain how I arrived at this point and what was my motivation to undertake this research. I started to work as an educator in Macedonia, in the 1999, during the Kosovo crises. The country was in an economical and political crises and the war in the region was deepening the already existing problems. Working in a team of educators who used different approaches to utilize art as a tool for social change, I was always questioning the existing methodologies. Especially, I was concerned how technology was introduced as a tool for change to the children who are experiencing trauma. I was interested in the notion of the 'spect-actor' that draws upon Augusto Boal's politics as well as his knowledge of theatre and

of what might now be called 'serious play'. Boal's games for actors are developed from his brutal life experience and his translation of that embodied knowledge into a theory and method, documented and analysed in his work as a cultural activist as well as in his writings and professional practices of and for the *Theatre of the Oppressed*. But in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, Boal went further to offer a way of seeing the spectator of a theatre performance as an engaged, embodied participant in a dynamic setting. This work has influenced the methods not only of theatre, but also of live art, and more recently, of media artist, whose work is deeply indebted to the role-play analyses of early theatre scholars. [4]Technology must be engaged in artistic means if it is to help us realize new social-political configurations. Imagination and creativity are critical to social change. For my work on this project, in 2005, I received a Fellowship, to attend the IDEAS Institute at The MIT Media Lab, USA. The MIT Media Lab has initiated a new leadership program called the IDEAS (Innovative Design Experiences After-School) Institute. The Institute was for professionals working in after-school programs in low-income communities, who are dedicated to helping youth learn to express themselves creatively with new technology. The Institute aim was to nurture an international, collaborative network of after-school professionals, encourage community leadership, and inspire young people to learn new things in new ways. There, I was introduced to Scratch, which is a new programming environment that children can use to create their own animated stories, video games, and interactive art and share their creations with one another across the Internet. Also, I came across Crickets, a device that can help children create musical sculptures, interactive jewelry, dancing creatures, and other artistic inventions and learn important math, science, and engineering ideas in the process. This experience had made me aware, both as an educator and an artist, about the importance of the concept of participation in the Human Computer Interaction. To foster a change, these projects were developed with the explicit goal of helping people develop as creative thinkers or as stated by Resnick:

> designed to support what I call the 'creative thinking spiral.' In this process, people *imagine* what they want to do, *create* a project based on their ideas, *play* with their creations, *share* their ideas and creations with others, and *reflect* on their experiences-all of which leads them to *imagine* new ideas and new projects.[5]

Interactivity and performativity are crucial elements of experiencing new technologies. I am interested in art works that are interactive in a really deep and gripping sense, a sense much deeper than that of picking from a menu and clicking on something. IDEAS experience had led me to my

current research, which is focused on exploring integration of body-centered performance practices with motion tracking software. This paper explores the interdisciplinarity of technologically mediated motion engagement in the production of embodied being.

2. Screen as Site

'I see display screens everywhere, and I wonder whether they are happy. Happy? Well, maybe 'happy' is not the right word. Instead, 'Do they live meaningful lives?' may be the question to ask. ' [6]

Building upon the fluidity and multiplicity of the screen as a medium that is surrounding us, our most powerful relationship with certain sites is more often mediated by the screen. There are various ways in which screen configure, affect, mediate and/or embody social relations. Martin Heidegger, in his pivotal essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', describes technology as *bringing forth* or letting 'what is not yet present arrive into presence'.[7] He equates the process of *bringing forth* with revealing truth. In this sense, screen technology is also a vehicle for praxis. Reflecting and drawing on the work of Alan Kay, Myron Kruger, John Maeda, Ben Fry and Casey Reas this paper will try to demonstrate how an anthropocentric conception of the world is increasingly shaping and influencing the outcomes of the HCI (Human Computer Interaction). Special attention will be drawn on interdisciplinary art works that are using social-constructionist approach that centers on human beings, who, 'in conjunction with technology, form a dynamic system with diverse feedback options'[8]. Historically the relationship between the arts and the sciences has been a stormy one, sometimes close and sometimes distinctly separated, but the last century has seen increasing levels of formal intersection between art and science (and also new technology) as discrete yet complementary disciplines. Ascott argues that art, technology and science are converging in important ways to produce new strategies, new theories and new forms of creativity, increasingly relying for their advance on a kind of trans-disciplinary consultation and collaboration.[9]

The pioneer in the field of embodied aesthetics of new media, Myron Krueger believes that the computer is always a vehicle for exploring and expanding embodied (human) interaction with the world and with other human beings. In his most acclaimed piece *Video Place*, he places human embodiment in a position 'to constrain the referencelessness of digital code, thereby installing it as the agent whose action actualizes the (abstract) potential of code' [10]In this way Krueger is introducing new approach in which 'the computer system's role as interaction partner fades into the background, and it now makes itself available as an instrument for the visitor to use'[11]. Myron Krueger's *Video Place* system (1970) was the first computer

mediated responsive interface of its kind - it had both reflexive and performative aspects. An individual's silhouette was projected onto a large video screen, into a virtual world. Based on real-time video tracking, the performer could use body movement and gestures to actuate his silhouette within the virtual world, interacting with its critters and floating across its horizon. Krueger noted the reflexive mirroring quality of his piece, remarking that performers felt as equally self-consciousness and private about their projected silhouettes as about their bodies. Performers' identified with their virtual likeness to such an extent that some were telepathically creeped out when critters crawled over their silhouette. More than a mirror however, *Video Place* has a strong performative quality because the mirrored image could also constitute a highly expressive artwork - that is to say, it could be regarded not only as a means, but also as an aesthetic end suitable for audience. Krueger tackled the important issue on how the human motion can be used as a signal for the computer to produce output and how this process is transcribed onto the computer screen through the use of the programming languages.

Casey Reas and Ben Fray, the creators of the Processing, took this idea further. They are working from the premises that 'a computer machine and a computer program can be whatever a programmer wants it to be'[12] and for that reason 'possibility exists to create new paradigm of computer programming that build on humankind's inherent visual and bodily perception skills'[13]. Processing is an open source programming language and environment designed to bridge the gap between programming and art, empowering anyone to produce creations by using mathematical patterns. Processing is a contemporary of an early alternative programming language concept Logo, developed for children, by Seymour Papert in the late 1960s. Initially, it was developed to support Papert's version of the turtle robot, a simple robot controlled from the user's workstation that is designed to carry out the drawing functions assigned to it using a small retractable pen set into or attached to the robot's body. But, also Logo for the first time made it possible for children to program different media. Logo opened up possibilities for new generation of programming tools and activities to be developed (Processing, Scratch, Crickets, among many), which can help making computer programming more accessible to everyone. According to Fray and Reas, Processing relates software concepts to principles of visual form, motion and interaction and with that, opens up endless possibilities for creation of hybrid media projects that expand our corporeal approaches to computational systems and environments. In a historical sense, Alan Kay, a pioneer at Xerox PARC, explains how important software literacy is:

> The ability to 'read' a medium means you can access materials and tools created by others. The ability to 'write'

> in a medium means you can generate materials and tools for other. You must have both to be literate. In print writing, the tools you generate are rhetorical; they demonstrate and convince. In computer writing, the tools you generate are processes; they stimulate and decide.[14]

In conclusion, the screen becomes a site for multiple interactive activities: programmabile manipulation of different media (images, animation, movies, etc. - technological component), shareability (social component) and finally, integration with the physical world (performative component). The role of performance-based techniques and scenarios in participatory media and in design of interactive systems has been examined. Whilst endorsing these studies, I am looking for deeper understanding of the value of creating change through performative utilization of technology. Focusing on motion in the next chapter, I will try to tease out some of the complexities and the possibilities of how interdisciplinary research of the screen technologies might create change.

A. Body, Screen, Motion

> The new interactive media, however, require acts of performance. We must physically interface with them in order to activate them, in order to get them to respond.[15]

The contemporary focus on motion in a range of technologies and applications has not increased the importance of sensory engagement so much as made it more apparent, and it is the task of scholars, as much as of artists, to understand the nature and significance (individual, cultural, social, political) of this engagement. If we focus our attention toward interactivity, the only way the 'audiences might start caring for (new media) art […] is when they're given reason to. Seeing their own images, their own realities, lives and experiences is, perhaps, one key element in helping people care about art in the information age.'[16] As argued by Janez Strehovec**:**

> Today we come across new media art projects as post-industrial art services that occur at the intersection of contemporary art, new economy, post-political politics (activism, hacktivism), technosciences and techno lifestyles. The artwork is not a stable object anymore, it is a process, an artistic software, an experience, a service devoted to solving a particular (cultural and non-cultural) problem, a research, an interface which demands from its user also the ability for associative selection, algorithmic (logical) thinking and for procedures pertaining to DJ and

> VJ culture, such as mixing, cutting, sampling and recombination.[17]

In the wide terrain of multimedia performance work, which can be defined as performance that creatively utilizes media technologies as an integral component, mixed-reality works that are incorporating the human body lie somewhere in between the domain of virtual theatre and postdramatic theatre as identified by Hans Thies Lehmann. This includes performances where media technologies are brought into the theatrical frame as a feature of the mise en scene.

In the piece *trajets*, Susan Kozel and Gretchen Schiller are looking at the physical bodies of the audience as they wander through a forest of screens, and also the bodies of dancers as these are dissolved and re-corporealised through video capture, editing, and projection techniques. Visitor location causes the video projections to respond, effectively creating a visual-physical choreography across people, screens and images. The screens in *trajets* do not separate the subject of the visitor's movement experience from its representation, but instead seek to develop a participatory dynamic which continuously maps and renders present movement perception between the participant and the given feedback experience. As described by Kozel:

> The locus of the performance in *trajets* is shifted from the specific bodies of the performer (dancer, actor, musician) to the distributed bodies of the screens, image-bodies and public.[18]

Trajets reduces the gap between action and representation. The screen is not only a projection surface, but also a dynamic participant in the performance. *Trajets* strives to conceptually get at the interdisciplinarity that blends theory with practice, to link theory and practice, not as distinct and divergent domains, but as epistemologically interdependent in the emergent field of digital performance studies.

Digital media, now applied in the contexts of performance art, may be said to represent a break with the respective traditions, production practice and theoretical frameworks, e.g. liveness vs. mediatised performance. To adapt knowledge and methods of diverse fields such as, media studies and performing arts become a question of not only merged conceptual frameworks, but merged methods and aims, in this instance, of theoretical reflection.

4. Display Movement: Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Since 2005 I am researching how the motion can be used as a signal for the computer to produce output. In my early work on this topic, inspired

by the Muybridge research in capturing frame-by-frame human motion, I developed the project 'Display movement'. My aesthetic guidance was the photographical work of Edward Muybridge (motion studies of the 1880s) who believed in the special power of photographs to convince viewers in counterfeit motion. Muybridge used fast-shutter speeds to break action into moment-by-moment increments, rendering movement stationary. For animators and other artists, the images he captured in the numerous sessions remain a standard reference, a dictionary of movement. In *The Philosophy of Photography*, Vilem Flusser outlines how the technical images are products of machines that are themselves the product of texts, e.g. research, engineering and others. This indeed articulates how we understand the body in western and globalized cultures, as compelled and defined through the technology of the lens and the camera.

The theoretical point of interest was the divide between the live and the virtual in the performance discourse. This was a topic for a debate concerning live theatre and mediatised performance, initiated by the differing perspectives of Peggy Phelan and Phillip Auslander. While Phelan asserts the authenticity of live performance, arguing that performance is non-reproducible, Auslander critiques the concept of liveness arguing that it exists as a result of mediatisation. This ongoing dialogue has established an assumed opposition of the live and virtual within performance studies. In performance where 'liveness' and physicality are frequently focal elements, it is difficult to ignore technological influences. This rather condescending view devalues the digital, rather than appreciating it as another facet of the performance possibilities. The focus of 'Display movement' is on the body as placed: the space it takes up in lived experience and within the alternative frame of screen presence. The work revolves around the notion that each body and each body memory, gesture, deliberate and multiply framed staging of self in performance leads to another layering of communication as bodily inscription. 'Display movement' is not seeking a form of technology that can infiltrate performance invisibly, but instead searching for methods by which the technology can extend the possibilities of performance.

My experience of practice-based study of interdisciplinarity between digital media and performance derives from 'Display movement' - collaborative multimedia performance piece that I did with my students at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The project captures the speed and glimpses of the performers movement in the era of fast communication and technology. For this work I took sequences of isolated moments and by unfreezing time I combine them in a single image. The methodology was bridging between my practical and theoretical work and analyses the link between technological performance and the performative embodiment in new media through the use of motion capture devices and programming language Processing. The performer sees representation of them on the screen. This

representation follows the movements of the performer like a mirror image or shadow, transformed by the potentials of the space. These transformations were realized by software running on a computer. In this piece of work, 'the content is contained in this difference between the gesture and its transformed or recontextualized reflection'[19]. 'Display movement' explores the experimental, process oriented practice-based inquiry into digital media involving performance contexts. While exploring the integrations of body-centred performance practices with motion tracking software, I was also exploring the features of digital media as performance. Motion tracking involves real-time sensing and analysis of location, speed, duration and various other characteristics of movement. The results of this analysis were fed to a computer system that generated video and audio in response to the movement. But the outputs are always incomplete and approximate, or as argued by del Val:

> When a motion analysis system is developed it is important to consider that what is being analyzed is not the moving body: it may be a threshold of light in case of the camera, and the parameters we extract have little to do with our own perception and understanding of moving and dancing bodies. It is thus important to know that we are dealing with discrete representations of the moving body, and not with moving bodies themselves, and that these representations carry along a large amount of assumptions about what the body is, of how we identify, understand and dissect movement and so on: in that respect any representation of a movement will always be arbitrary and discrete, embedded and contingent.[20]

This is partially why the work developed beyond realism to explore notions of non-linear association, embodiment and reflexivity by creating motion graphic visualization. This somehow resonates with Grotowsky and his idea of how to allow the body to be free, or as he described, to give body

> freedom from the time-lapse between inner impulse and outer reaction in such a way that the impulse is already an outer reaction. Impulse and action are concurrent: the body vanishes, burns, and the spectator sees only a series of visible impulses. Ours then is a via negativa - not a collection of skills but an eradication of blocks. [21]

Or as argued by Goodman:'Grotowski's principles of 'poor theatre' with no sets, no props, no make-up or stage lighting are typical of mass

produced digital performances, but also quite distinct from the higher tech mediated performance technology showcases that still challenge a performance paradigm, and that Grotowski did not code in his juxtaposition of 'poor', 'rich' and 'total' theatres.'[22]New production designs and new theoretical frameworks are crucial to get at novel digital media forms. The interplay of for instance digital media and live performance may be fruitfully achieved only through interdisciplinary practice-based research. Technology, by complicating our experience of self might also encourage a similarly heightened, even somatic, awareness. Technologist Sherry Turkle calls for personal transformation:

> If we cultivate our awareness of what stands behind our screen personae, we are more likely to succeed in using virtual experience for personal transformation ... Our need for a practical philosophy of self-knowledge has never been greater as we struggle to make meaning from our lives on the screen.

Focusing on motion, 'Display movement' tried to tease out some of the complexities and the possibilities of sensory engagement, locating it in relation to the negotiation of embodied subjectivity, in which we are all, as embodied subjects, involved.

5. Conclusion

There is an urge to develop new guides to conduct and new ways to tackle the interdisciplinary research in art, raised by breakthroughs in science and technology. Moreover, as argued by the Goat Island performer and writer Matthew Goulish:

> The human produces the transparent entity of the technology, and in return, the technology offers to retransparentize the human. Moreover, we must ask ourselves not only how we will USE technology, but also whether we will BECOME technology.[23]

Kolcio takes this even further when she argues that:

> In reconfiguring basic parameters of perception, communication and expression, technology asks 'What can we become?' In doing so it asserts the potential for human transformation. Dance and technology share this implicit commitment to the possibility of human transformation. Both operate on the premise of putting theories and ideas

> into practice. Both ask 'What can we become?' through (embodied and disembodied) praxis.[24]

The point of the practice based enquiry and research is surely about keeping this dialogue alive, keeping thoughts relevant. This paper is part of a process of re-engagement, re-interpretation and re-examination pf the process of interaction between new media and performance studies, body and technology. The only way these ideas evolve is when others interact with them. Practice as research is still an evolving form, and although many examinations of embodied experience of performing through the technology focus on interactivity within the framework of technology and technological innovation; there is a great deal into performativity as a way to approach technology. Creativity in an arts project is centred on finding solutions to non-functional problems, problems associated with aesthetic outcomes. But this solutions are seed of change, or as Resnick, director of the Lifelong Media Group, explains:

> New technologies play a dual role in the Creative Society. On one hand, the proliferation of new technologies is quickening the pace of change, accentuating the need for creative thinking in all aspects of people's lives. On the other hand, new technologies have the potential, if properly designed and used, to help people develop as creative thinkers, so that they are better prepared for life in the Creative Society. [25]

Notes

[1] J Simon, 'Space' in J Maeda (ed), *Creative Code: Aesthetics + Computation*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2004, p. 44.
[2] C Reas, 'Space' in J Maeda (ed), *Creative Code: Aesthetics + Computation* Thames & Hudson , London, 2004, p. 44.
[3] D Rokeby, 'Transforming Mirrors: Subjectivity and Control in Interactive Media' in: S Penny (ed.) *Critical Issues in Electronic Media*, SUNY Press, New York,1995, p. 123.
[4] L Goodman 'Performing Self beyond the Body: Replay Culture Replayed', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media.* vol.3. issue:2&3, pp. 104.
[5] M Resnick, 'Sowing the Seeds for a More Creative Society', *ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education),* 2007, viewed on 23 March 2009, <http://web.media.mit.edu/~mres/papers/Learning-Leading-final.pdf>.

[6] J Maeda, *Creative Code: Aesthetics + Computation*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2004, p. 12.
[7] M Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology' in D Krell (ed)*Basic Writings* Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1999, p. 36.
[8] M Friedewald, 'The Continues Construction of the Computer User' , in G M Buurman (ed) *Total interaction*, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2005. p. 26.
[9] R Ascott, (ed) *Art, Technology, Consciousness: Mind @ Large.* Intellect Books, Bristol, 1999. p. 48.
[10] M Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media*, Routledge, New York, 2006, p. 128.
[11] Ibid, p. 128.
[12] J Simon, op.cit.
[13] C Reas, op.cit.
[14] A Kay, 'User Interface: A Personal View', in B Laurel, (ed) The *Art of Human-Computer Interface Design*, Addison Wesley, Massachusetts, 1990, p. 191.
[15] Guertin, 2007.
[16] P Wilson '*WITH THINGS AND EACH OTHER' hospitals, workers, meters and marchers /the point of centre, head and neck, finding & making audiences*, unpublished, 2008, p. 4.
[17] J Strehovec, 'New Media Art as Research: Art-making beyond the Autonomy of Art and Aesthetics', *Technoetic Arts: A Journal of Speculative Research*, vol.6(3), p. 233, viewed on 1 March 2009, <http://www.swetswise.com/eAccess/viewToc.do?titleID=224419&yevoID=2440937>.
[18] S Kozel, *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology*, MIT Press, Massachusetts, 2008, p. 178.
[19] D Rokeby, op. cite.
[20] J del Val, 'Situated Tékhne: Beyond the Performative: Metaformative Bodies and the Politics of Technology in Post-Postmodernism', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, Vol.2. Issue. 2, 2006, p. 189.
[21] L Wolford & R Schechner (eds), *The Grotowski Sourcebook.* Routledge,London. 1997, p. 46.
[22] L Goodman, op.cite. p.110.
[23] M Goulish, *39 Microlectures in Proximity of Performance*. Routledge, London, 2000, p. 44.
[24] K Kolcio, 'A Somatic Engagement of Technology', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, Vol. 1, Issue. 2, 2005. p. 107.
[25] M Resnick, op.cit. p. 18.

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PART V

Merger & Embodiment

Bioinstincts

Laura Boffi

Abstract
The project looks at the recent progress in biotechnology and regenerative medicine and how it may change the way man perceives life and death. My work is a research on how humanity has been culturally building death from the very beginning up to our age, through beliefs, rituals and objects around them. Nowadays the way we perceive death is quickly turning from the idea of a natural event in everybody's life into the feasible possibility of controlling our passing through the intervention of science. I wonder how we would cope with death in the society we live in, where biotechnology and medicine seems to be able to neutralize human mortality. What if we could envision symbolic meanings of our new passing and build a material culture around them? In my work I try to foresee future rituals that man could perform around death. From setting different scenarios around the way we perceive death in our actual age, I build up social fictions and new objects that I design specifically for them.

Key Words: Critical design, Biotechnology, Instincts, Death, Medicine, Bioengineering, Incubator.

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1. Death as a Cultural Representation of Man

Man experiences death both as the most natural biologic event and as the most cultural one. Death occurs in the intersection between biology and culture: that's why over different times man felt the need to build a meaning for death[1]. The representation of death in myths, rituals, religions, has been the cultural answer of man to attribute a meaning to the passing. Trying to establish a connection between biology and culture, man has mainly been representing the passage to death through metaphors of biological process, such as the 'rebirth' (fecundation) and the 'double' (reproduction)[2]. Both Jesus' resurrection and the reincarnation are respectively examples of those metaphors.

In each case, death representation has turned the unavoidability of death into reversibility through a symbolic exchange between life and death[3]. The symbol sets an end to the reality, blending it into the imaginary. There is no disjunction among life and death, but each one is perceived as a shade of the other one. The reversibility between a living person and a dead one is solved through a cultural intervention. When man expresses death symbolically, he performs a representation about an exchange between life

and death. A new social relationship between the living person and the dead one is being built and thanks to this they are still allowed to interact. From endocannibalism[4] to mummification, man's representations of death[5] are deeply linked to the humanity that generates them. In fact man organizes specific anthropopoietic programs in the creation of a particular form of humanity in a specific cultural context, according to the classical Greek definition of *anthropopoiesis* as the 'idea of making, of constructing, of fabricating human beings, or more precisely of models of human beings' through shared social practices.[6]

The anthropopoiesis doesn't finish with the biologic life. In order to keep the sense of humanity that characterized him during the life, man also designs his passing to death. He elaborates a cultural scheme to give a social role back to the dead person[7]. Each representation of death is a dynamic product of the anthropoietic activity of man in building the meaning of the society he belongs to.

2. The Dilemma of Symbolic Exchanges between Life and Death in the Age of Death's Technical Reproducibility

Biotechnology and regenerative medicine are changing the way man experiences his life and death. Thanks to scientific progress, man is now able to modify his biological cycle, both in terms of time and eugenics[8]. This involves that now people need to culturally redefine their forms of humanity according to the anthropoietic values they attribute to the possibilities offered by science. Living in an age of fast scientific and technological development is preventing us to build any social meaning around science. Basically we accept in a passive way any *bio-development* as the outputs of an unquestionable black box. People often polarize their opinions around science on the basis of the information easily spread by press or television. Somehow the lack of a pertinent understanding is leading the establishment of two extreme parties between those claiming for the rapid ascent of scientific development, such as Transhumanists[9] or cryopreservation subscribers, and on the other hand those who are a priori frightened by any lab experiment. The effort to develop a new anthropoietic project according to our age might be unsuccessful if before we do not accomplish to unpack the black box of science. I think that the design discipline could be the right platform to explore the new relationships that may raise from the deep understanding of science and technology in daily life. Envisioning new scenarios and building fictional products could be a direction to project the scientific development into our reality.

Nowadays man is continuously assisting to the manipulation of life by biotechnology, especially through stem cells and transplantations. For evidence, he has recently been confronted with the possibility of raising stem cells for therapeutically use from hybrid embryos, an animal embryos whose

nuclei has been replaced by a human adult cell one. According to scientific research, stem cells could heal chronic and of terminal illnesses, from Alzheimer disease to muscular dystrophy, since they could replace any kind of body damaged tissue. If up to now the only way to get stem cells have been from human embryos, like cloning, or from umbilical cord, thanks to the new biotechnology of hybrid embryos we could have a numerous amount of stem cells without requiring either any human embryo or the donation of the blood cord. The British government was the first European one to allow in 2007 the lab experimentation on hybrid embryos. A great public debate has raised on issues like this: 'Which kind of humanity are we building if we implant cells from animals in the human body? Are we transforming the human beings in chimeras?' The British Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority, the HFEA, responsible for licensing of the human-animal hybrid research, has held a consultation on the ethical and social implications about this research and published a public survey[10] on the personal views of citizens. We may have the chance to recover ourselves and live longer, but in exchange we need to compromise our biological identity with animals.

While assisting to the manipulating life, we have also started to experience death differently from the natural biological course. If on the one hand, we could be able to replace damaged cells or organs, on the other one we may experience the unsuccess of science in all those cases we cannot avoid death. As the side effect of the scientific development itself, death still occurs due to incurable diseases or by accident. Instead of living the passing as a natural event in our life, we may experience it as an industrial product in the same way life has been extended through the bioengineering manipulation. We all are somehow turning into consumers of mass-produced life and mass-produced death. During my research I started to realize that nowadays we are more or less unconsciously experiencing death as:

1. *a-mortality*[11]: through the replacement of sick tissues with stem cells and transplantations our life is extended beyond the natural biological possibility, proceeding towards a theorical immortality;

2. *accidental death*: death that suddenly occurs to a particular, single individual without any previous warning, such as terrorist attacks or domestic gas leaks;

3. *death as expiration date*: irreversible death that occurs when medicine fails, for instance for the terminally ill and patients asking for euthanasia.

In all cases we experience the scientific irreversibility of the passing and the autonomisation of death as an individual event, not as a social relationship between the members of the same community. Due to scientific determinism, we have split the moment of birth and of dying as if they were two separate phases excluding each other. In this way life cannot attribute any sense to death but the unavoidable destiny of the body[12]. Any symbolic exchange seems to be impossible because of the cultural disjunction of life and death. New symbols are needed to link life and death since it is through the symbols that they stop to exclude each other and one melts with the other.

3. Envisioning New Symbolic Exchanges between Life and Death in the Biotech Age

According to the hypothesized three new ways we experience death in the age of biotechnology and regenerative medicine, I started designing different scenarios about the new symbolic exchanges we could associate with each death. My aim is to turn the perspective we may have on science in order to suit the human need to create a cultural meaning around the new ways of experiencing death. Man experiences death differently, according to the socio-technical context the person lives in[13]. The context also determines the cultural meaning people build on their passing. Each project of death, as symbolic exchange, has to be coherent with the humanity which designs it, referring here as humanity to a society in its particular context. In our current age, science and technology are the socio-technical conditions that will determine the new cultural meanings of life and death. Despite them and through them, we should be able to build the new symbolic exchanges between life and death.

In this paper I will deal in particular with *Bioinstincts*, the scenario I built for the case of accidental death. The progress of science seems to immunize humanity from mortality giving the possibility to recover from chronicle and terminal illnesses. On the other hand, man is still susceptible of accidental death, from domestic gas leaks to terrorist attacks. As a result, man may start to see death not as a biological event in his life, but something that may occur to the 'unlucky on call'. We may need to be reminded about our biological mortality[14], but at the same time we should suit our human feeling of keeping the death away from us, of being protected from dying.

My design consists of bioengineering instincts for accidental death that could accomplish to both those requirements. I have designed those particular instincts in the human species to give man back the awareness of his own mortality in an age where biotechnology and regenerative medicine are changing the boundary between life and death. On a big scale, redefining the biological time of a single species in the whole ecosystem may involve serious consequences on the ecological equilibrium[15].

In this context, the action of bringing back the consciousness of being mortal may actually consist of an ethical choice made by the individual towards the whole ecosystem. On an individual scale, it would be up to the parents to decide whether or not bioengineering their baby's embryo with the instincts' genes. On the one hand, it would depend on their moral values to agree on the genetic modification or not for the sake of the social ecology, which considers the society as part of the natural ecosystem. On the other hand, the ethical decision of engineering the awareness of self-mortality should not be disconnected from the natural parents' concern of protecting their baby. Otherwise the scenario wouldn't be realistically human at all. From the parents' point of view, providing their child with an instinct of accidental death actually expresses their attempt to protect him/her from the danger.

The *Bioinstincts* for accidental death are inspired by the way animals have adapted to the dangers over their evolution. A kind of sea pansy and the railroad worms developed luminescence to deceive their predators. Butterflies did the same modifying the spots, the colours and the pattern of their wings. In many animals and insects, appendixes of the bodies, like whiskers or feelers, work as chemicals receptors. What would happen to the human beings if they could get the instincts against accidents? How would their physical aspect adapt to the expression of such instincts?

4. Designing New Symbolic Exchanges between Life and Death for the Biotech Age

Looking at daily life, I developed further the *Bioinstincts* scenario from a quite diffused cause of accidental death occurring in the domestic environment: the gas leak. My project focused at this point on the design of a new material culture and new rituals as symbolic exchanges between life and death. Both the interactions and the objects of my design are meant to mend the disjunction between life and death through the mediation of a symbol that brings back the imaginary into the reality and dissolves the reality into the imaginary. The aim of my design is to visualize the cultural re-appropriation of death through the scenario I built and to offer tools and processes to perform the new symbolic interactions between life and death.

The bio-instincts for gas leaks consist of the design of glowing eyes that activate in case of gas saturation in the air. The developed eye would consist of chemo receipting eyelashes and of extra eyelids with bioluminescent spots. The shape of the eyelids is also functional for the reflection of the light to the pupils. Thanks to the glowing effect of your eyes, you will get up at night if a domestic gas leak occurs in your house. The bioengineering of the instinct starts from the artificial modification of the human genome in the baby with the genes that codifies for the instinct itself. Anyway just introducing the new genes is not enough to get the modified

body structure and the behaviour responses. The context is what allows the genes to express into the morphological and behavioural changes. That's why my bioengineered baby, although genetically designed to perceive instinctively a domestic gas leak by chemo receipting eyelashes and bioluminescent eyelids, needs to be provided the right environment to develop these physical features. Actually he or she would be born under developed, still susceptible of the domestic danger of gas leak, and would need to be put into an incubator. The incubator would be part of my design together with the bioengineered eyes for gas leak. It would both protect the baby thanks to the positive pressure inside and favour the body development thanks to a pipe communicating outside where the mother could breathe out from time to time. The carbon dioxide provided by the mother in small concentration would simulate the environmental condition that would allow the genes to express in the baby as physical features.[16]

The incubator represents the physical object where the dialectics of my project shows itself in all its contradictions. It is the place where the short circuit between the responsibility of the human species and the caring for your own baby generates and solves into the decision of bioengineering your baby and raising him into a technical environment. But it is also the place where the natural environment itself, and I mean here an environment which excludes any accidental contamination from domestic gas, is reproduced artificially by the technical womb of the incubator and the toxicity is provided naturally by the breathing out of the mother. Eventually, I may conclude that in a future scenario we could actually be confronted with an artificial human evolution, like babies' bioengineering for a more natural and primitive consciousness of death; with a technological breeding which still relies on the instinctively natural protection from a mother to her child and with the intellectual will[17] of man to codify the human mortality directly in the human genome, even before the birth.

Figure 1. The bioengineered baby and the incubator. Particular of the bioengineered eyes and of the mother breathing out into the incubator. Photo courtesy of Laura Boffi.

5. Getting Nearer to Ambivalence

In these conclusions, I would like to explore the moral and ethical concerns that motivate my design and me during this research. I was questioning how death could still be accepted in our biotechnological age without denying the contradictory feelings that the idea of dying generates in man. My work is an attempt to research how deeply the new developing technologies can adapt to human feelings, when biotechnology and regenerative medicine themselves deal with the critical human aspects of life and death.

The bioengineering of instincts of accidental death, the main design of this work, may be a way for man towards a reconciliation with death itself, both on the big scale of the species and on the small scale of individuals. On the other hand, it could also represent an *artificial* evolution of the species. Thanks to these instincts we could reach a condition of *species adaptation*[18] to death, like the animals that realize the danger by particular features of their bodies and subsequently act to survive. Actually man's progenitors belonging to the *Australopithecus* were provided with instincts for danger and death, but according to the evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr[19] they lost them as a consequence of climatic changes, when in the Eastern Africa the tropical forest turned into bushes and savannah. In particular the loss of these instincts was determined by the evolution of the *Australopithecus* into *Homo sapiens.* Homo sapiens adapted to the dangers of the environment developing his brain and intellectual capability and adding morphological changes to his body. As humans, we have adapted to death by using our intellect. This means we protect ourselves by thinking and making decisions more than following our innate instincts. This also means that, despite all the improvements in biotechnology and regenerative medicine, we are still susceptible to accidental death.

I wonder where the cultural attitude to interfere with death may lead the human species. We have never been nearer to the achievement of defeating death than today, thanks to the development of biotechnology and regenerative medicine. Every time we interfere in the end of life with the tools and techniques that scientific progress provides us, we consciously or not may run the risk of letting artificial genetic variants take over the evolution and become permanent artificial adaptations. The danger may be in the fact that the mutation could artificially appear and later naturally be selected without us having any control on it.

Personally artificiality doesn't scare me and I must agree with the artist Patricia Piccinini[20] when she says that the perception of what is natural and what is artificial depends on the context we belong to.[21] But artificiality does contain a risk when we are not able to control it, because we cannot predict the behaviour or future development of what we create. That is mainly the reason why the philosopher Hans Jonas speaks about the need of

introducing a new ethics, the *ethics of the future*[22] that could deal with critical issues, such as biotechnology and regenerative medicine. Hans Jonas also introduces the *heuristics of fear* as the method that may drive our long-term choice regarding science. We need to imagine and emphasize all the possible impacts of the scientific progress on a macro scale in order to understand where it becomes dangerous and meaningless for humanity and finally being able to take the right decision. That's why I feel that it may be extremely dangerous if the human species looses the consciousness of its mortality. The implications could occur at the level of disequilibrium in the social ecosystem, but also at an individual level. Individually, we could be disoriented in terms of values and suffer from the changes of the definition of humanity we may experience. It could be seen as a paradox, but this genetic manipulation of accidental death instincts actually is meant to bring man back to his more natural essence, that of a human being which is born and going to die.

Where actually could we establish the border between artificial and nature? Could the use of a 'new' technology or a technology we are not comfortable with be enough for setting this border? Or do we run the risk of labelling what we personally ignore by a quick heuristics of the unknown? We may need to elaborate more on this in order to predict the future scenarios and eventually being able of feeling the fear about what could happen in reality.[23]

These are some of the questions I try to address with my work and also motivate my design research. Both my passion for the topic of life and death and my curiosity for emerging technologies inspire my personal way of working as a designer. Thanks to my design, I try to make technologies adapting to human deepest feelings, fears and dreams. Mine is a design like a question mark, that doesn't ask you to buy it or not, but to think if you would like it to exist or not. It is a question about a scenario that you would be willing to accept or not. My products become alive when people debate on them. I feel there is a lot to be explored in the field of emerging technologies and human interactions with them. My instinct tells me that there are many more ways for us to experience those interactions than the way we may do now.

Notes

[1] This concept is fully developed by E Morin, *L'uomo e la morte*, Meltemi Editore, Roma, 2002, p.25. In his prefaction to the edition of 1970, he actually reports: 'Death is exactly placed in the crucial joint that links together the biologic world and the anthropological one, since it represents the most human aspect, the most cultural of the whole *anthropos'*. Edgar

Morin was active in the study of anthropo-biotics and he introduced the word of 'genetic anthropology' to refer to his subject.

[2] E Morin, *L'uomo e la morte.* Meltemi Editore, Roma, 2002.

[3] Along the whole word, I mean the symbolic exchange between life and death according to the conception introduced by J Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 1976.

[4] The rituals of eating dead bodies' flesh or ashes practiced by ancient indigenous societies and still common among the Indigenous Australians, the Native American population of Mayoruna and the Nothern Indian tribes of Aghoris.

[5] From here to the end, I assume the definition of 'representation of death' as a synonymous of 'symbolic exchange between life and death'.

[6] From behavior schemes, modalities of perceiving the emotions and feelings to the most visible practices of body treatment, like tattoos or way of dressing.

[7] This cultural intervention of man in the sphere of the hereafter is called thanato metamorphosis and it consists of the treatment of the dead body and of the practises that bring it through the passing, up to investing it with this new socially recognised and human coherent role. For a bibliographical reference see: F Remotti, *Morte e trasformazione dei corpi: Interventi di tanatometamorfosi*, Bruno Mondadori, Milan, 2006, pp. 1-5. (Title literal translation: Death and bodies transformation. Thanato metamorphosis interventions).

[8] Literally meaning 'normal genes' from classical Greek, eugenics aims to improve the genetic constitution of the human species by selective breeding.

[9] For 'Transhumanists' are meant the members of Transhumanism, the intellectual and cultural moment believing in the human enhancement through the development of science. Their aim is to defeat stupidity, aging, suffering and death by the emerging technologies, such as bioengineering and nanotechnology.

[10] It is possible to download a copy of the survey from this webpage: <http://www.hfea.gov.uk/docs/HFEA_Final.pdf>.

[11] According to the definition of Edgar Morin, the a-mortality is based on the biological property that molecules/cells are not susceptible to die; according to the definition of the biotechnologist Simone Maccaferri, the a-mortality is based on the biological property that molecules/cells continuously replace themselves.

[12] This thought remind me of the image of Damien Hirst's art piece The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991).

[13] The anthropoietic program the person takes part of.

[14] A kind of new memento mori for the biotech age.

[15] As the anarchic philosopher M Bookchin (1982) claims in his work *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, the supremacy of a species over another one may be the cause of the collapse of the whole ecosystem. He was the founder of the discipline of Social Ecology, consisting of a radical philosophy that aims to apply nature structure to society. The following is a quote that could particularly support one of my hypothesis of an application of biotechnology and regenerative medicine that may take over the limiting nature of human beings: 'The very notion of the domination of nature by man stems from the very real domination of human by human.' (1982).

[16] The carbon dioxide, popularly known as carbon anhydride, stimulates similar reactions in the body compared to the carbon monoxide, responsible of intoxication due to domestic gas leak, but still having less toxic effect.

[17] I say here intellectual because I want to exclude any religious or beliefs system involvement.

[18] According to Charles Darwin's theory, an adaptation is a positive characteristic of an organism that has been favoured by natural selection and that allows the organism to live in its own environment. It can be structural (changes in the body morphology), behavioural (changes in the way the organism perform in its context) and physiological (the organism could start performing chemical reactions inside its body). The adaptation appears randomly as genetic variant in one organism and then naturally selected. That means that all the organisms without that variant would die out, while the other ones with it would in turns replace them.

[19] For more details, see E Mayr, *What makes Biology Unique? Considerations on the Autonomy of a Scientific Discipline*, Cambridge University Press, London, 2004.

[20] P Piccinini is an Australian artist who became worldwide well known after her exhibition in the Venice Biennale in 2003 with a work on xenotransplantation called 'We are family'. She is interested in expressing the critical debate on the emerging technologies, such as biotech, through the arts. She wants to question people about the boundary between nature and artificiality and about the good and bad aspects of applying biotech. One of her thought that inspires me is: 'after centuries and centuries of selective breeding, the ancient correspondent of biotechnology, we actually think about our horses as natural, even if they are the result of man manipulations.' (Piccinini, 2008).

[21] That's why our generation may perceive the city environment more natural than a wild forest. These two signifiers, the city and the forest, were always been associated respectively to the signified of artificiality and nature. What is changing around us and actually allow us to attribute different signified to

the signs ‘city’ and ‘forest’ is the context. As saying that in the biotech age, we may have a different perception of what is natural and what is artificial comparing to some decades ago.

[22] For more information see H Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search for an Ethics in the Technological Age*, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1984.

[23] I am here referring to the heuristics of fear by Han Jonas, underling how it could be easily misused we polarize our opinions about emerging technologies on a basis of a not enough deep understanding of them.

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To Have Done with the Judgment Of God: The New Flesh

Devrim Ülkebaş

Abstract
David Cronenberg uses both technology and body in his films. The well-known notion of Cronenberg's cinema, *the new flesh* is the result of the blurring border between humans and technology. Metamorphoses, wounds, anagrammatic erogenous zones are the typical features of Cronenberg's films, all resulting from technology. While the limits of the body are forced, violence and sexuality remain as a natural part of this condition. In Cronenberg's cinema, technology is used in a different manner than it is used in the science fiction genre. This technology is not a fictional or futuristic technology, yet it is a daily life technology that not only shapes and transforms the human life but also changes the body. Cronenberg uses the body as a medium to distinctly show the things that society represses and also the things that man avoids to confront. Cronenberg aims to disturb, instead of frighten by confronting man with the issues that are avoided. Cronenberg's cinema moves into the dark corners of the human psychology and physiology.

Key Words: The new flesh, technology, cyberculture, body without organs, David Cronenberg, cinema.

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1. Background

Marshall McLuhan describes technology as extensions of the human body.[1] Mechanics are actually designed as an extension and even imitation of the organic. By saying, 'We shape our tools, thereafter they shape us.' [2], McLuhan paradoxically describes how man-made technology begins to shape him. Doubtlessly, technology has widely changed social life. Furthermore it has changed the biological development of the human being. Under the influences of technological devices like the automobile, computer and television, human bodies gain new deeds, but also loses some of its existing ones.

One of the major transformations in human life caused by technology can be experienced in the field of communication. Communication has become more social since the internet has widely extended into daily life. Through this type of communication, individuals have begun to change. In this virtual and limitless medium, new and fictional identities are easily constructed.

Amanda Fernbach describes in her paper *Fetishism and the Future of Gender*, how internet chat rooms create identity morphs, transformation of fantasies and fantasies of transformation, transformation of existing genders as well as the future of the human body. This new type of communication introduces new notions like cyber culture, cybersex, cyberspace, all based on the word *cyber*, meaning 'related to computer and computer systems', into our lives. In addition to the transformation of identities and fantasies, a human's physical being also changes. According to Fernbach, this hybrid and technologised body indicates the physical and conceptual end of the natural body.[3]

Like McLuhan, Baudrillard also describes technology as extensions of the human body. Furthermore, he conceives technology as a rival of nature, triumphantly remolded it in its own image.[4] The human exerts his own hegemony over nature by using technology. As a matter of fact, the cybernetic revolution already has blurred the distinction between man and machine and the balance between human and machine has tipped in favor of machine.[5] Artificial organ transplantations, prostheses and microchip transplants underline this kind of relationship between human and machine.

Today, it is obvious that people interact with objects more than they do with other persons.[6] It seems that we shape our life according to objects like automobiles, televisions and computers. Man-made artifacts and artificiality are increasing in importance in our lives more than ever. In a society where everything is a big, exaggerated show, artificiality inevitably affects all parts of life. Artificially created cities like Las Vegas, artificial genders, transsexuality, et cetera, are the result of this artificiality; hegemony of human over nature by using technology. In this man-made life, the body also becomes artificial.

London's fetish club *Torture Garden* is a typical example of such transformation in public life. Here, the participants embrace a new type of fetishism, where the transformation of the body is glorified.[7] The body is transmuted into new forms through various outer but also inner prosthetic objects. Torture Garden depicts fantasies of hybridity of technology and human.[8] In this new experience violence, sexuality, gender, body and objects interlace with each other.

Antonin Artaud also questions the natural being of the body. The very well known notion, *Body without Organs*, which was developed by Gilles Deleuze in collaboration with Felix Guattari, was originally borrowed from Artaud's radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*. *Body without Organs* simply argues remaking and reconstructing the body in order to scrape off the badly constructed order of God and restored him to his true freedom.[9] *Body without Organs* is not actually a body without organs, it is a body without an organisation; in other words, the organisation of God's order.[10] Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* aims to disturb the audience and reveal

the forces of nature. Neither cruelty nor violence are used as a suffering sadistic act, but rather as tools that free humanity from the false reality that drags us into an illusion.

This kind of disturbing style can also be seen in Georges Bataille who is influenced by Artaud. Bataille uses violence to disturb the conventional meanings established by society. In Bataille's work, sexuality and death are integrated into this disturbing violence and the object of this violence is, again, the body.

Having important influences on post-structuralism, Bataille has a critical approach to the concept of structure, both for the physical and spiritual being of the human which he calls *extreme states of being*. Bataille argues that a person has to exceed constructed inner or outer limits. Sexuality, violence and death are at the very limit of human possibility. In *The Tears of Eros*, he draws the connection between sexuality, violence and death with the memorable quote from Prehistoric Painting in Lascaux and in *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* and *Inner Experience*, Bataille points out that sexuality, violence and death are maybe not natural factors of being human, but certainly they are about man's condition which have always been forbidden, avoided or concealed in social life. According to Bataille, sexuality and violence are important tools for demolishing taboos; inner or outer limits of a human. Therefore as Michel Foucault mentions, these concepts have always been manipulated by authorities of power. In the *Story of The Eye*, Bataille pushes the lines of language, meaning and also sexuality. The lines of sexuality are forced with violence and get closer to death. Bataille tries destabalise and reverse the conventional meanings; taboos, bourgeois values, the religious and societal structures like church and family, mainly patriarchal institutions, institutions of power.

In sum, according to Bataille and Artaud, the conventional values of the *symbolic order*, patriarchal institutions, should be deconstructed and reconstructed by man himself and sexuality and violence are the revolutionary tools for this transformation.

2. The New Flesh

David Cronenberg questions the psychological and physiological structure of the body in his films. According to Cronenberg, like all revolutions that disrupt organisational unity of the society, the things like mutations; formations and even cancer that disrupt the organisational unity of the body also have a revolutionary content.[11] Therefore the limits of the natural being of the body are forced with violence and sexuality which are the tools of the reconstruction and remaking of a new body.

The natural structure of the body is deliberately deconstructed in Cronenberg's films. For instance, new organs of this new body appear at unexpecting zones. The organs and genders are transitional. These changes

reveal themselves as related to violence, mutilation on body and sexuality. Technology is at the very important point of these changes. The penis-like armpit spike in Rabid was caused by a technologically experimental surgery. The vagina-like slit in the stomach in *Videodrome* caused by the hallucinative Videodrome broadcast. The vagina-like leg-wound in Crash was caused by car accidents. Each of these are typical examples of such transformation.

The film *Crash* is based on J. G. Ballard's novel of the same name. In this film, Cronenberg successfully represents Ballard's illustration of the diffusion of car parts and human body and the sexual pleasure gained through car accidents. James Ballard's marriage with his wife Catherine becomes a boring routine. After a car accident, Ballard finds himself attracted to the sexual excitement of pain and mutilation of accidents. In that new experience where the body and car merges, Ballard and the people of this technological world, Helen, Vaughan and Gabrielle, explore the sexual and physical boundaries of the body. In the film, the wounds that are the memoriums of the accidents are not shown as abnormality, instead, they are accentuated as iconic features of this new and exciting body.

In *Videodrome*, as we see Max Renn's hallucinative story where he searches for a new striking television programme with sexual content for the television channel he manages. Max, watches some pirate Videodrome broadcast by coincidence, which contains sadistic sexual footage with torture and killing. The frequency of the broadcast of Videodrome causes Max to develop a brain tumor. Max starts seeing hallucinations because of the tumor and eventually loses the distinction between real and virtual. In Max's hallucinative world where everything loses their bond with reality, his body firstly begins to transform into something new. The film questions the perception of reality and physical existence of the body. At the end of the film, a new type of body is formed: *the new flesh*. Likewise in *Crash*, this new body is formed where the physical body dissolves.

eXisTenZ is the story of Allegra Geller, the designer of the virtual reality game eXisTenZ, who is attacked at the first group trial of the game and Allegra's protector, Ted Pikul. eXisTenZ is played directly through the nervous system and the players need an apparatus called *bioport* implanted on the spine to allow the information flow between the nervous system and the game. Here again the body transforms into a new body where the boundary between reality and the virtual is blurred. There is a tension between the characters throughout the film in regard to the matters of reality and body. Pikul's character in the film is faithful to the reality and his real body, while Allegra finds reality and her real body insufficient and unexciting.

In his interview with Adam Simon, Cronenberg states that he finds it so fascinating to deal with the body and how the human inability to understand what he physically is.[12] Man still approaches his inner body with

a tone of disgust. In his films, Cronenberg turns the perception of the natural being of the body and conventional beauty concept inside out. Cronenberg's critical approach to the conventional beauty perception of human physical appearance can be seen in *Dead Ringers.* Beverly, one of the identical twin gynecologists, tries to *fix* his patients' bodies that he thinks that they are *badly structured*, with his custom-designed surgery tools. Elliot, Beverly's identical twin, also emphasizes the beauty contests are always for the exterior appearance of the body and he suggests that there should be contests for the internal organs of the body.

Cronenberg calls the body the closest thing we get to touch any kind of reality and he emphasizes that we have the desire to flee the body.[13] Here it is seen the reflection of Artaud's *Body without Organs* concept, as man can free himself through a self-created body. The same train of thought can be seen in Allegra's words from *eXisTenZ.* Allegra tries to convince Pikul to participate in the game in order to figure out her game pod's situation after the attack. Pikul, who is going to play for the first time, is nervous about the transition from real to virtual and the mutilation of his body. Pikul does not want to have a strange object pierced through his spine. Allegra tries to convince the Pikul to leave the real life and play the virtual reality game eXisTenZ. She calls the lived reality as *cage*, which keeps a person trapped pacing about in the smallest possible space forever. And by saying 'Break out of your cage', she suggests Pikul should go into the virtual reality where he can be anything he likes, have any body he likes.

Pikul who eventually agrees to play the game and finds virtual reality extremely *real*. He reflects his amazement within the first seconds in the game as he states 'I feel just like me. Is that kind of transition normal? That kind of smooth interlacing from place to place?'. By saying 'Depends on the style of the game. You can get jagged brutal cuts, slow fades...shimmering little morphs', Allegra points to the possibility of adopting different bodies within these different realities. The players of the game are much more liberated with their new bodies in these new realties. In the following scenes it is figured eXisTenZ is actually a sub game of another game called transCendenZ. At the end of the movie the players who plugged themselves out from transCendenZ, finds themselves in another assassination. This time the attack was conducted by Allegra and Pikul against Yevgeny Nourish, the creator of the game transCendenZ. Allegra and Pikul accuse Nourish for the harm that he has done to the human race and the most effective deforming of reality and they try to kill Nourish after saying 'Death to the demon Yevgeny Nourish'. This mirrors a quote from the first scenes of the film where Allegra was attacked, as mentioned above. The assassin tries to kill Allegra after saying 'Death to the demoness Allegra Geller!' This scene repeats, but for another game, transCendenZ, and for another person, Nourish.

One of the confused players of transCendenZ asks if this attack is also a game. The spectators, as well as the players, are left in confusion about whether this is also a part of another game or the existing reality. In this case, what is reality? Maybe the reality does not exist anymore where everything becomes hyper real. As Pikul states, 'I feel just like me' about his body in the game, maybe now everything is a simulacrum; *not* real but also not unreal, everything substituted by the signs of the real for the real, where the difference between *true* and *false*, between *real* and *imaginary* blurred and the whole system becomes weightless.[14] Then, what kind of body is this body that exists in the simulated universe? At this point as Artaud's statement, the players that freed from their bodies, their cages, are now also free from the reality that drags them into an illusion. Now they exist in the reality created by all players as a whole.

In *Videodrome* the new body which Max has, is an objectified body. A television channel is needed to for the Videodrome broadcast. Barry Convex, one of the creators of Videodrome, is after Max's television channel. Convex manipulates Max into killing his partners in order to get the channel. All of his orders are transmitted to Max through a videocassette inserted into the vagina-like split on Max's stomach. Max's body is now a video player, a machine. This objectification process continues as a gun turns into part of his hand. As the gun becomes more organic, Max's hand becomes more mechanic. After killing his partners with this gun, Max retreats to a hiding place in where he sees his dead girlfriend Niki's image on a television screen. Niki tells Max who has lost the perception of reality, that she will guide him and death is not an end. Max's body has already gone through certain changes. However this is only a beginning. What Max needs is a total transformation, a new body. For this purpose, he has to kill his existing body. Niki shows Max, what to do through the television screen in order to achieve this. In the images on the television, Max sees killing himself with the gun that is now part of his body. Max does the same things that is shown in the screen and points the gun to his head and says the cult quote of Cronenberg cinema; 'Long live the new flesh'. The movie ends with Max exploding his head and freeing himself from his cage by getting rid of his existing body. He is now going to have a new body for the new beginning that Niki had mentioned. Human is now free with a new body without organs as Niki's body in the television.

The objectification of the body presents itself with *bioport* in *eXisTenZ*. Bioport that allows the information flow between the nervous system and the game, is kind of a new organ of the body. The name of this apparatus, bioport refers to the unity of mechanic and the organic. Technological device, the game pod, can only be plugged into the biological body through the bioport. The power source of the game is the human nervous system. When the player grows tired, the game slows down too. This

is the fusion of organic and mechanic. While human body becomes mechanical, the mechanical also becomes organic.

Likewise in *Crash*, integration of human body and technology fascinates the male character Vaughan. While Vaughan investigates and photographs the car accidents, he tells Ballard that he is fascinated by 'reshaping of the human body by modern technology'. The female character, Gabrielle with her scars, leg braces, a full-body support suit is, in Vaughan's words, reshaping her body through the use of modern technology and this body, unlike the conventional beauty perception, is sexually attractive for both male characters James, and Vaughan and the car salesman in the automobile showroom as well as for the female character Helen. Gabrielle's metal and organic alloyed body is an objectified body.

In *Crash*, the wounds caused by accidents are the new erogenous zones of these objectified bodies. The wounds on Vaughan's body are the erogenous zones for James and his wife Catherine. Gabrielle's vagina-like wound on the back of her leg is the new vagina of this new body. When Ballard makes love to Gabrielle in the front seat of the car, Ballard explores Gabrielle's objectified body. The sexual experience lived with these new sexual organs of these new bodies, is a new experience. Furthermore, the orgasm is lived at the moment of the accident when the car and the body alloyed to each other, when the existing body extincts.

Baudrillard contemplates that 1960s sexual revolution has not led to sexual liberation but to confusion of genders that he calls transvestism.[15] Baudrillard points out how this situation changed the perception and experience of sexuality. Cronenberg also claims that sexuality is separated from childbearing. Sex, as pleasure and energy and politics, is reinventing itself.[16] While sexuality reinvents itself, it pushes its limits from conventional tones to violence and destructiveness in Cronenberg's films.

In *Videodrome*, Max lives a new sexual experience with his girlfriend Niki. This experience is lived through the television, which sucks him into the hallucinative world. In the film, Max experiences a sexual pleasure with the television, which has an image of Niki's lips calling for Max. In *Crash*, sexuality is only possible through car crashes and the wounds that happened via these accidents. In *eXisTenZ*, the first moments of Pikul in the game is shown as the first moment of first sexual intercourse and the bioport that's implanted in Pikul's body as like the sexual organ of this new body. Allegra tries to ease Pikul's tension, which seems similar to the tension one will experience before the first sexual intercourse. Allegra also prepares this new sexual organ for the moment of the intercourse by wetting Pikul's bioport that is being very sensitive as if before its first intercourse.

J.G. Ballard, in the introduction of his novel *Crash*, talks about how technology has an influence on the transformation of life; sexuality, reality, experiences, identities. Although everything naturally changes, it is

undeniable that technology has a radical influence on this change. Cronenberg explains that our body is physically different than it was hundred years ago, our bodies are constantly evolving. Cronenberg states that the body continues its transformation, the only thing is that we don't know what direction this is going.[17] As he sees this transformation as natural, Cronenberg questions whether this transformation is positive or not. In *Videodrome*, the brain tumor is not seen as a disease, it is seen as a new organ that opens the doors of a new reality. By saying 'What if it's not bad? What if it has some hidden positive aspects to it? What if it's actually a force for good and necessary.'[18], Cronenberg argues how the mutations of the body may not be so negative as we think.

In his films, Cronenberg interrogates the absoluteness and positiveness of nature, conventional knowledge, aesthetic and moral values. Thus, he confronts the spectators with these values by using violence, sexuality and new formations of the body.

3. Conclusion

Like McLuhan mentions, the devices that man designs to facilitate his life, began to shape him and his life. New organs, fusion of organic and mechanic, objectification of body in David Cronenberg's films emphasizes this kind of transformation of the body. The body starts to change into a new formation through the objectification of the body, while the entirety of natural body dissolves.

Nature can be seen as a threat, a physical bound for human. Likewise, the physical being of the body is a bound for human, as Allegra calls it *cage.* This is why as Artaud mentions and as Niki mentions, the final stage of creating *the new flesh* is a *Body Without Organs* where *the natural body* is dissolves. The self-created body should be replaced with the natural, god-creation body.

Actually science is not a tool of understanding nature, it is a tool for transforming the nature due to the needs and demands of human. In *eXisTenZ,* players of the game calls Allegra goddess. If the god is the creator of the nature, Allegra, namely technology, is the creator, god of the artificial; man-made. Technology has given people the virtue of being their own creator, an opportunity to be a god. Technology gives man an opportunity and freedom to create a body that he can construct on his will, instead of to settle for the things that is given by nature.

Natural and societal structures, both are bound for human and they should be exceeded. Uncannyness in, Artaud, Bataille and Cronenberg's styles, pushes the spectators beyond the known borders of meaning and values. As he says 'My understanding of movies as art was that they were to communicate things that were real but not allowed by conventional society. That really was important to me, the deliciousness of the forbidden'[19],

Cronenberg same as Artaud and Bataille, sees violence and sexuality as revolutionary tools to blow up these structures.

In Cronenberg's films the body exists in a hyper and virtual real world. While the reality reinvents itself due to technology, body becomes an objectified and a virtualized being. However in both cases, body is a self-created formation and the new flesh that is fused with technology by technology, expels the existing one. Life continues to transform and like everything around us, the transformation of the body is also inevitable; *a fait accompli.*[20] Though inevitable, this transformation is exciting. All these new organs, reconstructions, alloys are not shown as dangerous or negative in Cronenberg's cinema. The new flesh is an artificial, therefore free existence and David Cronenberg's cinema blesses this man-made body; 'Long live the new flesh'.

Notes

[1] M McLuhan,'The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis', in *Understanding Media:The Extensions of Man*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2001[1964], p. 45.
[2] ibid., p. xi.
[3] A Fernbach, 'Fetishism and The Future of Gender', in *Future Imaginings: Sexualities and Genders in the New Millennium*, Delys Bird, Wendy Were and Terri-Ann White (eds), University of Western Australia Press, 2003, p. 55.
[4] J Baudrillard, 'Crash', in *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981], p. 111.
[5] J Baudrillard, *Kötülüğün Şeffaflığı, Aşırı Fenomenler Üzerine Bir Deneme (The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena)*, Ayrıntı Publishing, Istanbul, 2004 [1990].
[6] J Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, Sage Publishing, London, 1998 [1970].
[7] Fernbach, op. cit., p. 60.
[8] Fernbach, op. cit., p. 55.
[9] S Sontag (ed), *Atonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1976, p. 570-571.
[10] G Deleuze, 'Hysteria', in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2003 [1981], p. 47.
[11] A Simon, 'The Existential Deal: An Interview with David Cronenberg', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 43, Autumn 2001, p. 52.
[12] ibid., p. 45.
[13] ibid., p. 46.
[14] J Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981], p. 5.

[15] J Baudrillard, 'The Eternal Irony of The Community', in *Baştan Çıkarma Üzerine (Seduction)*, Ayrıntı Publishing, Istanbul, 2001 [1979], pp. 21-23.
[16] Simon, op. cit., p. 45.
[17] Simon, op. cit., p. 45.
[18] Simon, op. cit., p. 52.
[19] Simon, op. cit., p. 43.
[20] Simon, op. cit., p. 56.

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PART VI

Critical Philosophies

Linguophilosophy of Cyberspace through English Vocabulary Development

Rusudan Makhachashvili

Abstract
The study objective is the investigation of innovative linguophilosophic aspects of English vocabulary development in the sphere of cybertechnologies. Research methodology is based upon the supposition of the cyberspace-related word-stock terminological nature. The dual systematisation character of terminology determined the analysis of both linguistic and external (ontological, anthropological, social) paradigmatic parameters of English cybervocabulary. Paradigmatic parameters of English computer terminology are featured from the following perspectives: perception of basic dimensions of cyber-reality ('space' and 'time') and anthropologic categorization of cyber-reality, thus both the anthropocentric and the sociocentric paradigmatics of English cybervocabulary being reflected. The 'artificial' digital environment is acquiring more independence as far as the 'parent' reality is concerned and establishes the basis for being considered a separate metalingual entity. Hence, one of the prior ways fundamental ontological categories are exposed within cyberspace being through the language (precisely by means of contributing to the modern English vocabulary), we may assume the natural language itself to find its realization in ontological manner.

Key Words: Linguophilosophy, cyberspace ontology, cyber-anthropisphere, vocabulary development, cybervocabulary, cyberterm.

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1. Notes on Methodology

The world surrounding a human being is endless in multiple varieties of its forms. In the course of centuries the mankind has been fulfilling the attempts to represent the objective (as well as subjective) reality through language to the utmost. However, at the dawn of the 21st century the human mind has progressed quality-wise in the ways and methods of reality perception[1-2]. Cyberspace stands an integral ontological entity[3], a unique environment demanding new cognition and perception ways via complex philosophic, cultural, social, linguistic approaches, providing unlimited opportunities for human intellect and language development and research.

The current study primary *objective* is the investigation of the innovative linguophilosophic aspects of the English vocabulary development processes in the sphere of new computer technologies. Over 3000 cyberspace

and computer technology related lexical innovations of the English language served as *research material*.

Linguophilosophic approach to the study of English lexical innovations in the new computer technologies sphere allows to efficiently investigate lingual manifestation of cyberspace ontology (namely space and time dimensions), to closely study the generic categories and dimensions of cyberanthroposphere, to denote its existential anthropocentric character.

It ought to be pointed out that the research centres upon the synthetic definition of the '*philosophic*' notion that incorporates ontological, gnoseological and anthropological parameters.

Modern cyberspace apparently presents a functional ontological model of Being, the linguo-semiotic presentation of which takes place currently and prospectively within cognition and research grasp, as opposed to non-cyber-reality, linguo-ontogenesis of which could be retrospectively constructed on mostly hypothetical principles.

Research *methodology* is based upon the supposition of the cyberspace and computer technology-related word-stock terminological nature that leads to the impending necessity of the terminology as a specific lexical layer study. The dual systematisation character of terminology determined the analysis of both linguistic (morphological and semantic) and external (ontological) paradigmatic parameters of computer terminology of the English language. Throughout the investigation we've come to the conclusion that due to its polydimensional nature the term acquires the unique, supralingual status (the entity of Being and Language respectively). The cyber-term as a specific intralingual and extralingual phenomenon due to its complex nature turns out to be both the means of perception and comprehension to a degree as well as the metaphysic actualisation and categorization source of the modern cyberspace and technosphere. The introduced approach to defining the cyberterm might pose as a key to comprehending the hidden mechanisms of linguistic actualisation of cyber-reality.

2. Semiotic Paradigmatic of English Cybervocabulary

Linguistically the development of English computer terminology acquires an ambivalent character. Primarily, the sources of English computer vocabulary root in the conventional word-formation types, such as affixation, abbreviation and acronymy, telescopy, etc. and semantic derivation. However, according to our research results, the enrichment process of the computer terminology of English incorporates the emergence of the word-formation ways and means, quite authentic to the given lexical sub-system, such as: semantic-functional transorientation, heterogeneous reduplication.

Semantic-functional transorientation - is a transformational process comprising of 2 stages. Throughout the *initial stage* the given lexical unit

semantics acquires a 'technogenic component' (seem rendered as 'of or referred to modern computer technology'). The *ultimate transformational stage* involves the attribution of a new functional status to the semantically modified unit that proceeds through computer terminological paradigm as a structural component. Up to date within the English cyberterminology the given pattern is rendered via such elements of unlimited productivity as *cyber-, web-, electronic-, virtual, techno-*, etc.

Heterogeneous reduplication in its turn - is word-building model based upon parallel simultaneous functioning within cyberterminology of authentic and borrowed (semiotically heterogeneous), semantically equivalent or identical formants. It should be noted that not only affixes are (super- / über- / arch-) 'heterogeneously cloned' but conceptually relevant stem morphemes as well (way / Bahn, city / polis / stan, etc.). This serves as an apparent manifestation of computer lexical unit terminological nature through the transparency of the ontological connection between the lingual sign and notion / concept.

Besides the progress of terminological system in cyberspace determines the new conceptual approach to the 'word-formation element' notion. Our research results actualise the possibility to derive a unique element of word structure, designated as a *false morpheme*, the chief distinctive feature of the given unit being its freelance motivation.

False morpheme - a part of an inherently monomorphemeic word arbitrarily singled out to productively function retaining the original meaning of the parent lexeme. The empirical material allows to position as false morphemes an array of monographemic (e-, i-, v-, -b) and polygraphemic (-jack, -zine) abbreviations as well as the verbalized form of an electronic address unit (dot).

3. Cyberspace Ontology through English Vocabulary Development

The prominent paradigmatic parameters of English cyber-terminology are featured from the following perspective: the terminological (lexico-semantic) perception of basic metaphysic dimensions of cyberspace (that being 'space' and 'time'). Virtual reality emergence resulted in some significant alternations within the perceptive sphere as well, that being, above all, the rethinking and reshaping of the corner-stone ontological and existential categories: Space, Time, Reality and Knowledge.

Here at once we deal with a linguistic (or rather philosophical) paradox. From the metaphysical point of view 'reality' is an environment given to our perception and observation. Therefore, there seems to be no need to attach an attribute 'virtual' to it, which bears its first meaning as something 'true' (or 'real'). On the other hand, the space the World Wide Web opened access to forms in itself some sort of a 'fourth dimension' which cannot be sensually perceived nor recorded to the utmost and thus cannot be logically

defined as ‘reality’. But it does exist. There are no doubts of it. The cyberspace is in current being and moreover, functions in the ways resembling greatly those of ‘natural’ reality. Linguistically the paradox proper has been solved in a peculiar way. The ‘virtual’ notion has changed its meaning to a complete opposite, denoting now something non-existent or WWW-related.

Besides that a peculiar tendency is observed lately, to conceptualise and denote the natural environment in terms of its opposition to cyberspace. In the recent years such retronymic neologisms have been recorded as *real reality* (note the deliberate tautology for opposition sake) and *meat space* (contrary to cyberspace). Apparently, the objective reality is exposed in the dialectical philosophic unity of real and virtual parameters, the latter being an indispensable implicit component of the lingual actualisation of modern Being. The ordinary, non-cyber world is rendered recently as *Outernet* as opposed to the Internet. Thus we may reach a conclusion that with impending extrapolation of computer assisted technology and cyberspace spread the concept of the Net acquires the peculiar ontological status.

As long as it has been assumed that cyberspace exists as some special sort of material entity the question arises of how it should satisfy the necessary matter parameters - namely those of Time and Space. As for the Space, cyberspace is apparently endless (or at least its boundaries have not been distinguished up to now - hence the emergence of such concepts as *deep Web*, *Internet 2*, *black hole*, *forking*), therefore this very characteristics may not be defined numerically but only descriptively (thus through vocabulary means). What is extremely peculiar is that the main emphasis is made again on the real reality connection, for cyberspace, still being treated as Reality, may be referred to as *augment reality* or *annotated reality* revealing thus the notion being somewhat supplementary. However, metaphorically it is also defined as *a greybar land*, this very notion signifying the ideal space beyond certain perception limits.

Moreover there could be identified the lexically fixed platonic binary division of the special dimension of the technosphere, namely the differentiation of cyberspace into ideal and material planes accordingly (*technopolis, nerdistan*).

Before long Time has existed in cyberspace ‘virtually’ (in the newest meaning of the notion). This implied that every member of the Internet community used the time convenient for him/her according to his on-the-spot location. In other words Time was ‘fragmental’, distinguished in direct correspondence with the non-virtual one. In other words Time was ‘fragmental’, distinguished in direct correspondence with the non-virtual one. But, however, a proposition has been made throughout the Web to provide a single uniform Internet time, measured not in terms of minutes and seconds,

but in terms of information units (1000 per day)[4]. (Note yet another linguo-ontological cornerstone of cyber-reality - information).

It ought to be pointed out that the leading conceptual and notional dominant of cyber temporal innovations lies within the plain of Past vs. Future opposition - that is periods of *before* and *after* cyberspace elaboration (*yestertech / retroware* - yesterday technology, and *new chip* - newly introduced technology).

Moreover, the lingual elements of computer related temporal paradigm incorporate the apocalyptic semantics, terminal chronological parameters[5], which serves as the apparent validation of cyberspace existential nature.

4. Cyberspace Anthroposphere through English Vocabulary Development

The anthropologic terminological categorization of cyber-reality involves both the anthropocentric and the sociocentric paradigmatics of English cybervocabulary. It seems appropriate to systemize the present and potential English computer neologisms through multidimensional aspects of anthropic virtual existence, namely: self-identification, gnoseological social stratification, economic interaction, etc.

While Time and Space are the ontological categories by which Reality is defined, Knowledge (Gnosis) may be considered one of the dimensions human mind has established itself with, the anthropocentric coordinate within the ontology of Being. According to our calculations approximately 1/3 (one third) of the researched cyber-vocabulary consists of the human-factor related units. Though a much greater number of virtual neologisms may be viewed as anthropocentric (both directly and implicitly) we would like to dwell here upon the ones defining precisely the WWW users. In this respect we find it possible to trace Knowledge 'status' in cyber environment.

It has turned out so that cyberspace has been (and is being) created, used and altered simultaneously, dividing thus the ones who contribute to these processes into two major groups: those who *know* how to influence the very nature of cyberspace and those who *do not know* how to do it and due to this use the Net solely for utility purposes.

The tendency has been thoroughly reflected in the English language. One of the most prominent notions defining the Knowledge progress and dynamics within cyberspace is the so-called *information food chain*[6]. It has little to do with the one presented in nature (though there are certain metaphorical correspondences), but denotes a process of modifying Information from raw data (bits) to processed data (information proper) and later on to assimilated data, that being Knowledge itself. Besides, it

metaphorically conceptualises the intricate route from a computer neophyte to an expert.

The whole multitude of cyber-related persons got the name of *computerdom*. Linguistically and conceptually they have been divided into *cyber elite* and *cyberaddicts*. The common trend is to concentrate the new lexical units denoting computer-'pros' round the Knowledge-marked notions. That way such new word-building elements as *-guru, -geek* and *-savvy* have acquired outstanding popularity providing the basis for such neologisms as for e. g. *cyber-guru, cyber-geek (technogeek)* or *computer-savvy (net-savvy)*. It should be specified that all the elements listed above bear the meaning of 'professional' (as for the word *savvy* it was adopted into the English language from French as a 'modified' form of the verb 'savoir' - to know).

Computer professionals are also referred to as *cyberati* or *digirati*. It is necessary to point out that this kind of word-building model, though new, has become widely used in the modern English vocabulary creations. The idea is to blend the corresponding word-forming element with the word 'literati' which functions nowadays in the meaning of a 'properly qualified; competent person'. Besides that, new vocabulary units appear to add up to the cyberspecialists superiority status (due to the Knowledge they possess), defining them as being in charge of the affairs in the Net: *E-mentor*, *Webrarian (Web + librarian)*, etc.

However, the difference between a new-comer and a cyber-professional at a certain point may be a vague one. Such lexeme as *newbie* may, for instance, serve as the best illustration for the statement. The neologism presents a general notion for a 'pro' being actually a homophone of another neologism - newbie - denoting a computer 'novice'. So, as we can see, the first notion (newbie) semiotically integrates two 'skill-wise' opposite categories of users, providing with a premise for their recomprehension and reconceptualisation.

Unusual as it may seem, but non-professional computer users as a social stratum have found almost as various a reflection in the modern English language as the experienced gurus. Generally non-pros are referred to as *randoms*. Alongside they are subdivided into read-only users (the ones that use the Net only to fish out information) and the so called *shiftless* - unaware of all the possibilities Internet provides. Besides that, there happen to be *lusers* in cyberspace (by phonetic analogy with the word 'looser'), who use the Net by intuition, without knowing exactly how to operate it. Same way as it is in the 'real' world, in cyberspace the absence of experience and expertise is being disguised under pretended or assumed Knowledge. That way a user, constantly installing someone else's HTML sources in order to look confident is referred to as *paster-boy* and the one pretending to great knowledge but lacking fundamental skills in 'computer savvy' is linguistically presented as a *poser*.

It needs to be pointed out that the Knowledge concept lingual manifestation within cyberspace is fulfilled via the following means:

1. through explicit verbalization (employing elements which nominate or refer to the concept of Knowledge directly) - *chief knowledge officer, knowledge engineer, newbie, cyber-savvy, Net-savvy*;

2. via secondary semantisation (the gradual transformation of the corresponding unit semantic plane as to incorporate the archseme 'cyber-professional' - *geek, nerd, avatar, freak* etc.

On the other hand the referents of absence // lack of knowledge concept fall under further gradation:

1. the ones negating or claiming no reference whatsoever to cyberspace and / or computer technologies - *Internot, neo-Luddite, leadite*;

2. the ones using the Net as an information search tool - *read-only user*;

3. the ones unaware of the wider spectrum of WWW utilities - *shiftless*;

4. non-professionals, the ones utilizing the Internet and suchlike technology intuitively, not possessing the skills necessary to manipulate cyber-reality - *luser, random.*

It is worth noting that the Knowledge phenomenon in this context acquires a rather peculiar meaning and its opposition to the Absence of Knowledge is of a specific character. The paradox of the situation lies beneath: as it has been stated by some contemporary researchers the Lack // Absence of Knowledge possesses much greater development potential than the Knowledge itself. Besides, the Absence of Knowledge purpose in the world is environmental protection (in a way)[7]. As we can assume now, 'plain' users are more likely to contribute to cyberspace prosperity than some of the geeks (let alone hackers), this being due to their apriori inclination to vertical evolution (self-education, self-development) and thus, creative (rather than destructive) activity potential. The study results make it possible to interpret the notion of Knowledge and its terminological realization as a specific social stratification criterion within the cyber community.

5. Conclusions

Cyberanthroposphere functioning is actualised upon objective anthropic principles. However, recently a tendency to reverse conceptual dominants within the cyber-related lexical corpus from total anthropocentrism to technospherism could be noted. The tendency is actualised via gradual release of the so-called ontological denotatum within the semiotic plane that, in its turn leads to the anthropic nucleus of linguocybersphere diffusion.

The 'artificial' digital environment is acquiring more independence as far as the 'parent' reality is concerned and establishes the basis for being considered a separate metalingual entity. Hence, one of the prior ways fundamental ontological categories are exposed within cyberspace being through the language (precisely by means of contributing to the modern English vocabulary), it may be assumed the natural language itself finds its realization in ontological manner. Thus, the problem provides significant basis for further discussion.

Notes

[1] D Bell, *Social Framework of the Information Society*, Oxford U. Press, Oxford, 1987, p. 9.
[2] E Davis, *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information*, New York Publishers, Inc, New York, 1998, p. 86
[3] M Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, Westport Publishers, LA, 1993, p 31
[4] B Shneiderman, *Human Needs and the New Computing Technologies*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 57.
[5] *doomsdate, Y2K paradigm, TEOTWAWKI - The End Of The World As We Know It, Y2K leap year bug, Y2,38K problem*
[6] M Heim, 'The Nerd in the Noosphere', *Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine*, vol. 2, № 1, 1995, pp. 3-6.
[7] B Nardi, *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*, MAT Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 48.

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Cyberphilosophy and the Nature of Personhood: An Information-processing Approach to the Notion of *Anatta* in Buddhist Philosophy

Arash Moussavi

Abstract
Computational metaphysics is a broad concept that should be taken to include a wide variety of systems. The idea behind all of these systems though is more or less the same: to exist is to be computable. Most formulations of computational metaphysics start their work with discussions about the nature of the external world as a computerized reality, i.e. a physical world that is programmed into a massively parallel computing machine. In this paper, I begin my representation of computational metaphysics by relying on *consciousness* as the first and foremost reliable reality. Drawing upon the Cartesian radical doubt and phenomenology, I attempt to sketch an outline of a computational world-view in which our body is a cursor on the screen of our consciousness. The principles of psycho-cybernetics (information processing approach in psychology) then help me to provide a rigorous account of our interactions with this digital consciousness. This framework provides me with a novel standpoint from where I can have a fresh look at the nature of some of the well-known Buddhist doctrines particularly one of the most counterintuitive amongst them: the doctrine of *anatta* (Selflessness). This is of course a far-reaching research project. I try here to draw its main lines.

Key Words: Computational metaphysics, consciousness, information processing, Buddhism, Anatta.

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1. Introduction

The ideas proposed in this article represent an attempt associated with an international movement of reform departing from the traditional forms of Buddhism towards interpretations more suited to the intellectual needs of the modern world. The main Buddhist doctrines are represented and scrutinized in terms of a new language that transcends cultural and national boundaries and that global language is the language of Computation.

Computers have recently had profound impacts in almost every research area, including philosophy. Concepts and ideas such as information, computation, complexity, algorithms, and alike have been used to reformulate traditional philosophical problems. Some well-known examples

include: computationalism in philosophy of mind, information theoretic approaches to epistemology and language, automated discovery in philosophy of science, and information and computer ethics. Computational philosophy can be viewed now as a justifiable philosophical sub-discipline which uses computer as an intuition pump and research tool.

Computational approach comes mainly from the analytic camp in philosophy. Therefore, it's not surprising that it has had almost no influence in the *philosophy of religion*. This research is aimed to show that a computational approach offers representations of religion that surpass those previously employed. Starting with consciousness as the first reliable reality, I attempt to sketch an outline of a computational world-view in which our body is a cursor on the screen of our consciousness. The principles of psycho-cybernetics will help me to provide a rigorous account of our interaction with this computerized world. This framework then provides me with a novel standpoint from where I can look at the nature of religious doctrines from a fresh angle. As a convenient representative for the mystical core of a typical religion, Buddhism along with its major doctrines including the notion of *anatta* (selflessness) are reformulated and scrutinized in computational terms. This is of course a far-reaching project. I have only tried here to draw a rough picture of the main ideas. Two major phases in this research are:

1. Foundation of a computational model of the world;

2. Reformulation of the main Buddhist doctrines based upon the computational framework established in the previous phase. Each of these phases is discussed briefly in the following sections.

2. Towards a Computational World-View

Drawing visible plurality from the mathematical simplicity primarily is a Platonic ideal that has been injected into the metaphysical semi consciousness of the new age through Rene Descartes and his contemporaries. Nowadays, this ideal may be close to its realization due to appearance of digital computers that expose derivation of such complicated processes as artificial intelligence from such simple procedures as logic of 1 and 0.

Nowadays, we are facing theories about the nature of reality that take the concepts of theoretical computer science and artificial intelligence as their most fundamental ontological and methodological principles. Although *computational metaphysics* is a term that should be taken to represent a wide variety of systems, the main idea underlying all of these systems can be clearly summarised by the following slogan: to exist is to be computable.[1] In

this approach, Descartes' two fundamental essences, extension and motion, have been replaced by their computational equivalents: data and algorithms.

Constructing such a system, Descartes' radical doubt and his phenomenology is a convenient starting point. According to Descartes, we must not initially assume even the existence of an external world. The world is not known directly to us, only certain conscious perceptions are, so the *world*, if there is any such thing at all, must for the time be put aside, placed in parentheses or *bracketed* as an unjustified prejudice. When we wake up in the morning, there is only the consciousness and our life is formally a closed loop which includes sending signals in the shape of output (muscles motions) into the consciousness and receiving the results.

The mechanism of our interaction with the content of consciousness can be explained via a cybernetic feedback loop. A feedback loop contains four components: input, output, comparator and reference value. The main aim of this system is to lessen disagreements between the input and the reference value.[2]

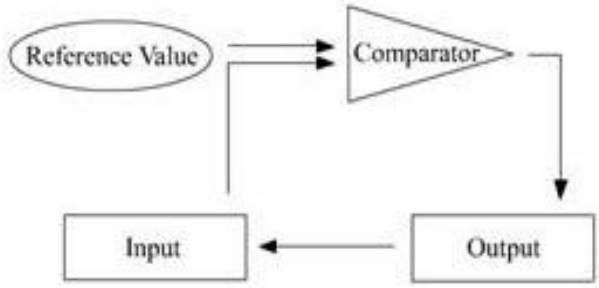

Figure 1. A Feedback Loop.

The most common example here is the function of a thermostat whose reference value is a certain temperature. The thermostat receives the present temperature of the room as input and compares this with its reference value (e.g. 25 degrees centigrade). If there is no difference, nothing happens. But, if there is a gap between these two, a special output happens: for example switching on a cooler or a heater. Then, the thermostat again receives the room's temperature via its input and the cycle continues this operation until the disagreement between the read temperature and reference value becomes almost zero.

The conditional loops in computer algorithms are also examples of the feedback loop. Consider following sample:

```
if  n ≤ 100  then
begin
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
(running instructions along with changing n )
. . . . . .
 end
```

This loop which may be a part in a big program can also be indicated by a feedback loop. In this case, we need to take the number 100 as the loop's reference value. Output function is conducted by running instructions along with changing the variable n. Input function reads the new value of n and the comparator puts this new value against the reference value 100.

A person's behaviour in front of a mirror just before leaving home is also capable to be modelled by a feedback loop: receiving the reality from the mirror (input), comparing the reality with the personal ideal of the outward appearance (reference value) and then, physical motions by hand (output), reducing the difference between the real appearance and the ideal one. This loop will work until the gap reaches to a satisfactory small size. There is a belief that almost every part-action in human life is intended to lessen the disagreement between the real situation of the system (consciousness) and the ideal situation (reference value).

This simple picture, of course, is capable to be richer by insights of decision theory, game theory, cognitive analysis of perception, and a socio-psychological account of the establishment of values. In addition, covering more complicated behaviours, this model can be developed toward hierarchical organizations and interconnected loops. Now, it has been made clear that human being has both superordinate and subordinate goals. Human goals and values, in the form of a hierarchy like a waterfall of control, manage the behaviour. At the top of this hierarchy, there is the feeling of an *ideal self* including a set of characteristics, and the bottom contains series of programs and scenarios that work as operators of superordinate values at the behavioural level.

From a computational point of view, this hierarchical organization is very similar to the structure of an algorithm including sub goals and sub algorithms. In other words, a typical human life is something like a giant algorithm with a main goal on the top and a pyramidal structure of sub goals and related sub algorithms. So, the situation of human being against the universe is something like the situation of a robotic mind (as a collection of algorithms) with visual capability in front of a computer screen.

Completing our model, we can arrange that the robotic mind will be stimulated with the same sort of inputs that a normal brain receives. To do

this, the robotic mind is connected to a giant computer simulation of a world. We can imagine that an advanced computer simulates the entire physics of a world, keeping track of every last particle throughout space and time. The simulation determines which inputs the robotic mind receives. When the mind produces outputs, these are fed back into the simulation. The internal state of the robotic mind is just like that of a normal brain, despite the fact that it lacks a body. From the robot's point of view, things seem very much as they seem to you and me.[3]

The robotic mind could also be associated with a particular simulated body, something like a cursor on the screen. A connection is arranged so that whenever this body receives sensory inputs inside the simulation, the robotic cognitive system will receive sensory inputs of the same sort. When the robotic cognitive system produces motor outputs, corresponding outputs will be fed to the motor organs of the simulated body.

Making a general scheme of our model, we can say that there are two huge softwares against each other. The first super software simulates the person's mind while the second one simulates the person's entire world (=consciousness). The interactions between the person's mind and his/her consciousness are also simulated by a cybernetics feedback loop. Our computational world-view depends on these correspondences:

Mind ⇔ World
| |
Software1 (Robotic Mind) ⇔ Software2 (Simulated World)

The first line stands for *reality* and the second line for computational representation of reality. The symbol | shows the simulation relations and the symbol ⇔ indicates the cybernetics feedback loops. While the mind acts in the world via a body, the robotic mind acts in the simulated world via a simulated body or a cursor.

In recent years, there have been considerable philosophical debates on the limitations of computers as well as possibility of the realization of artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the question that whether we're living in a computer simulation has prompted agreeing and disagreeing arguments.[4] These issues occasionally have even been subject to artistic creations and ambitions. But, out of these controversies, handling a pragmatic and moderate approach, we can at least accept that the *metaphor* of computer can be considered as a model for obtaining a deeper understanding about the reality of the world and our relation with it.

Summarizing this metaphysical model in a simple expression, we can say that our body is something like a cursor on the screen of our consciousness. Our situation in relation to the world resembles a person

sitting in front of her/his personal computer trying to exert her/his favourable modifications on the screen by the means of the cursor. In a more mature scheme, though, we will see that in fact, there is no a distinction between a watcher and a screen. There is consciousness and that's all.[5]

3. Buddhism from a Computational Viewpoint

The confliction between a materialism of standard purity and the religious doctrines is an old opposition. However, this is principally a western problem inherited as a dominant feature of Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. The monotheistic shape of belief in these traditions reflects a dichotomous conception of reality, that is, a distinction between a transcendent divinity and the rest of the world.[6] The style of formulation of computational metaphysics, in many cases reflects the same dichotomous conception. It seems as if, for many, it's impossible to be monist and at the same time keeping the religious faith to be safe. My scheme mainly is designated toward the suggestion of a reinterpretation of Buddhism. However, I think, a similar work on at least the mystical core of *Islam* is possible.

As an example, Islamic view of the observable world as a *dream* obtains its modern expression well in the virtual reality of a simulated world. Mohammad, the prophet of Islam says: people are in dreams; when they die, they wake up.[7] In addition, the central notion of *manifestation* (Tajalli) in Islamic mysticism and its hierarchical mechanism can be represented through the equivalence thesis of Alan Turing along with a computational perspective of the universe.

The Buddhist version of manifestation seems to be the notion of *Emptiness*, particularly developed by the philosopher *Nagarjuna*. He saw all beings depending, for their existence, on other beings. So, he said all beings are empty.[8] But, In spite of such metaphysical issues among Buddhist philosophers, the central concern of the Buddha was not directly of a metaphysical sort; it was, of course, about the elimination of unnecessary discontent.

A key tenet of Buddhist doctrine is that discontent is an outcome of desires grounded in false beliefs. The most important of these false beliefs is that one’s own individual existence is more important than those of other individuals**.** To counter this false belief, Buddhist philosophers adopted the radical strategy of trying to show that in fact human beings do not have selves or individual identities. That is, an attempt was made to show that there is nothing about a person that remains fixed throughout a lifetime.

Within a computational framework, the false belief of a fixed self is a production of *concept formation* in the comparator part of the feedback loop. The comparator, disclosed in more details, includes a system of *problem solving*. This system is an algorithm that receives the problem as a

data structure with two main components: input conditions and the goal. Through a process of spreading activation, the problem-solving algorithm tries to retrieve the appropriate concepts and rules from the memory and somehow solve the problem.[9] In the context of problem solving as the main process it is triggered also a subprocess called *Induction*, forming *schemas*. Roughly, a schema is a large, complex unit of knowledge expressing what is typical of a group of instances. The belief of one's *self* is also a schema, produced by this triggering everyday subprocess. This account is capable to illuminate not only the subjective nature of the *self* but also the social functions of a fixed self in an ordinary life.

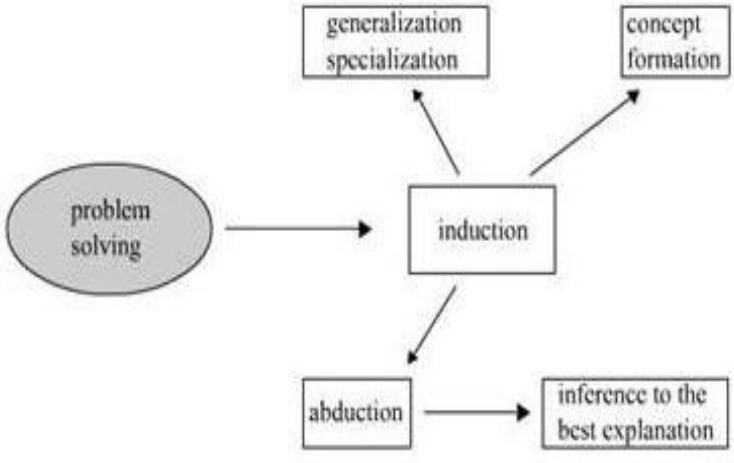

Figure 2. Problem solving and induction in comparator[10]

Closely related to this issue is the Indian doctrine of *the cycle of rebirth*. Remember yourself when you sat for the first time in front of a computer monitor, especially the period of time you spent coordinating your hand motions with the cursor. This is exactly a model for a baby and her/his first experience of the world. Initially, there is no any meaningful difference between the cursor/body and the other parts of the picture and it takes a certain amount of time realizing its central significance. At first, looking at the picture is a *pure* look, though, it's gradually changed into a *biased* look due to emerging a *goal*. Through a procedure of confirmation and negation the screen/mom causes you to run the appropriate algorithm to catch the goal. This is the first step in the journey becoming a specialized algorithm or a *person* and simultaneously going away far from being a mere and universal consciousness. In the course of time, each goal creates a set of new sub goals

and creation of any goal means triggering a new feedback loop in the previous waterfall of interconnected loops. In the end, we have a professional user; continuously interacting with the screen, comparing the information with his/her favourable situation and acting toward his/her own interests.

This procedure is capable to be computationally formulated in details. However, for this short outline, it is important pointing out the results for a new interpretation of some Buddhist doctrines. The first application of this model obviously is a precise understanding of the cycle of rebirth that is represented as a process of mechanical proliferation of goals, constructing a whirlpool of interconnected loops. This process, as we saw above, gradually converts the *non-existence* to a person or a universal presence to a biased look.[11] This model also implies a kind of automation that reflects the Buddhist insight into 'uncontrollability' of one's body and mind.

Buddhists tend to argue that the only kind of happiness worth pursuing is lasting freedom from the pains and turmoil of life; this could be won only by bringing rebirth to an end. The only hope of any lasting freedom from the pains of existence is to remove oneself from the cycle of birth and death altogether. In the computational terminology, this means removing all the algorithms which has specified the personality of a person and therefore being converted again to a general entity; Going beyond good and evil, beyond differences and privileges. This exactly reflects the Buddhist monk *Tissa Moggaliputta* whose view was that awakening is not a *positive* trait but merely the absence of delusions.

Through a computational perspective, we can also explain some characteristics of mystical life, particularly its seclusion. The wise is a man who has almost no interaction with his world. The reason is that, he sees neither unfavourable nor favourable situation on the screen. The wise is out of desires and goals. He is out of the game of life. He's dead before death.

Among the external expressions of this actionless life is the silence. Meanwhile, some passages depict Buddha as a man who answers questions that have been put to him by showing why the question cannot be answered. Providing a rigorous analysis of these cognitive issues, particularly mental meditation, is a task which computational approach can fulfil rather adequately, especially because of the existence of a mature literature on the field of computational cognition. We saw before that the mental system of problem solving serves as a part of a feedback loop. Therefore, in lack of any loop in the case of a mystical experience, it is clear there is no need for a cognitive system of problem solving. On the other hand, the problem solving itself is capable to fall somehow into the hands of an internal roving loop. Therefore, in a Buddhist conduct, the silence is not only an effect but also an important cause.

Finally, we should point out some controversies concerning the nature of Buddha. According to some texts, the Buddha pervades all regions

of space at all times. Others argued that the Buddha exists only where his human body is located. This issue was controverted for over a millennium in India. The eleventh-century Buddhist *Ratnakirti* eventually argued that all particular acts of individual awareness are merely parts of a single universal consciousness that he identified as the mind of the Buddha. One of the most powerful aspects of computational metaphysics is the ability of integrating ubiquitousness and eternality from one side and spatiotemporality from the opposite side in a compatible perspective. In this view, human being is portrayed as an entity fluctuated between a universal consciousness and a strictly specified and bounded personality. This portrait is also capable to give a sufficient answer to the issue of whether there are degrees of Buddhahood or different ranks of *Buddhas.*

4. Anticipated Conclusions

It is widely believed that one of the most serious challenges of the 21st century is the so-called gap between modernity and religion. A systematic study of religion including a critical reading of the corpus of religious texts and doctrines helps thinkers in both developed and developing societies to engage adequately with this challenge in theory and in action.

Notes

[1] A F Randall, 'Quantum Phenomenology', 1997, online: <http://home.ican. net /arandall/Phenomenology.Html>.

[2] C S Carver and M F Sheier, *Perspectives on Personality*, Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1988.

[3] D J Chalmers, 'The Matrix as Metaphysics', 2003, online: <http://www.UArizona.Edu/~chalmers// papers/matrix. Html>.

[4] N Bostrom, 'Are you Living in a Computer Simulation?', *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 53, 2003, p. 243.

[5] Avoiding the solipsistic spirit which a typical computational metaphysics may inspire, I recall a very promising article in the field of philosophy of science written by P Thagard in 1993 and called *societies of minds*. In this paper, he proposes a new model that views scientific communities from the perspective of Distributed Artificial Intelligence (DAI). He sketches this alternative view, partly to reject autonomy models of science. I think the idea of DAI is very useful in the field of metaphysics as well. We may reconstruct it in the shape of *distributed consciousness*. So, the model of an individual person before the screen will become richer considering a society of watchers, each looks into a common virtual reality and acts with her/his own cursor, Something like the World Wide Web. And then, when we remind that, actually, there is no distinction between the watcher and the screen,

there will appear suddenly a very amazing landscape in front of us: there is only one consciousness distributed among and based upon individuals.

[6] M Eliade (ed in chief), *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*. Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1987.

[7] I Toshihico, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983.

[8] R P Hayes, 'Buddhist philosophy, Indian', in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy CD-ROM*, Edward Craig (ed in chief), 1998.

[9] P Thagard, *Computational Philosophy of Science*. MIT Press/Bradford Books, Cambridge, MA, 1988.

[10] adopted from Thagard, 1988.

[11] Indeed, a baby is not merely a non-existence. She/he is a complex of *genetic* algorithms, though this complex itself is a result of a historical procedure of confirmation and negation in the course of the long-term biological evolution. But, in a sociological sense, we can still say that the baby is a non-existence. In fact, the first goal, here, has a biological nature and in the course of time it proliferates to a set of social subgoals and gradually constitutes a *social self*.

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PART VII

The Literature of Cyberspace

Cyborg Hierarchies: Ecological Philosophy and Cyberculture in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*

Jayne Glover

Abstract
This chapter argues that Piercy, in her 1991 novel *Body of Glass*,[1] uses cybernetics and robotics in order to engage with concepts of hierarchy and difference. In particular, debates about nature and culture, the natural and the artificial, as elucidated by some ecological philosophers, may contribute to a clearer understanding of Piercy's intentions in the novel. By asking where the boundaries lie between human and machine, this paper argues that Piercy points out the importance of freedom and respect in relationships, and rejects a hierarchical structure of dominance and submission through her portrait of the cyborg Yod's relationships with the human characters in the story.

Key Words: Cybernetics, ecocriticism, othering, speculative fiction, cyberpunk.

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Marge Piercy's 1991 novel, *He, She and It* was published in the United Kingdom as *Body of Glass*, a title perhaps more evocative of the fragility of embodiment in a posthuman world than the original American title. What the American title does achieve, however, is the sense of otherness expressed through the word 'it'. 'It', in this case, represents, among other things, one of the main characters in this futuristic text: a cyborg named Yod.

So often philosophical and literary scholarship devotes itself to the problem of Othering by focusing on the more common examples of the so-called Other encountered in our daily lives, such as race, class or gender 'others'. Ecological philosophers base their theories of Othering on the instrumentalist behaviour of humans towards their environment - rejecting the kind of dualism which sees the natural world as a mere instrument to be used to benefit human society. *Body of Glass* deals directly with the question of Othering, but rather than merely assess how Othering works in our current society, it pushes the issue one step further and asks the question of how societies which place the Self on a hierarchy of worth above the Other might evolve in a world which is becoming increasingly dependent on information technology. The relevance to us today can be seen in our increasing reliance on technology: we communicate with friends and colleagues over email on a daily basis and the growing number of users of Facebook or Twitter indicates

that our social interactions, our very 'friends', depend more and more on our connectivity to the internet. Marge Piercy's novel takes a hard look at a possible future for us, describing an imaginary late-twenty-first century where our very survival depends on technologies such as these.

Body of Glass is what could perhaps best be called an ecological dystopia. The very ability of humans to survive in Piercy's vision of the future depends on their access to technology: following the irreparable damage done to the environment, most animals, unable to survive the increased UV radiation and life in nature, have become extinct. Human life is only sustainable under artificial domes built over cities; those unable to afford to live in such spaces survive underground in places like the murky 'Glop', existing in gangs scratching a living in old subway tunnels and eating 'vat food, made of algae and yeasts'.[2]

This is the typical setting for apocalyptic science fiction and cyberpunk in particular - as the resonances with the seminal cyberpunk text, William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, suggest.[3] Furthermore, as a cyberpunk-styled text, it is a way to explore the increasingly complicated boundaries between humans and machines, in what Fukuyama has called a 'posthuman' world. Veronica Hollinger has called the novel an exploration of 'the technological ramifications of experience within late-capitalist, post-industrial, media-saturated Western society',[4] and Piercy, as one of few women writers dabbling in cyberpunk, uses the genre to explore binary power-relationships.

The most important way in which the binaries between the human or natural and artificial or technological are challenged within the scope of cyberpunk is through the idea of bodily connection to technology. As is traditional in cyberpunk, the 'Net' in the world of Shira, the main character of *Body of Glass*, is not the purely computer-based internet of our own age, which was only just emerging at the time of Piercy's writing. It is a highly sophisticated and complex interactive tool. Access is not only through interfacing with a screen, but via full immersion in the virtual world of the Net: each computer terminal is fitted with a male coupler that slots into a socket in the temple of the user.[5] The characters are able to access the Net directly because, as Shira explains, '[o]ne of the components in the plug embedded in her real body was a decoder that made her able to access machine language, [and] translate it instantly into numbers and words.'[6] The human brain and the computer processor therefore become one tool, communicating through binary code and allowing human subjects to project their consciousnesses into the virtual world of the Net wholly, and without the boundary of the computer screen or keyboard.[7] In Piercy's novel, then, direct bodily connectivity with the Net is 'the standard way people communicated, accepting visuals, code or voice'.[8] In an invention perhaps analogous to the Blog or Facebook profile page, the characters can only

access the Net through their own personal 'Base', which is like a home-page, but which is physically linked to each person's brain and personality. Society has got to the stage whereby people cannot function without their base - they cannot communicate, think, work or create without accessing some kind of computer-based system.

What is significant about this direct, physical interaction with the Net in the novel is the potential symbolism of plugging into the Net in relation to the concept of Othering. The ability to access the Net directly, without any limits or margins, becomes an important way through which Piercy expresses an idea of personal freedom. The limitations of the physical body are totally eradicated in full projection into the Net, including the limits of our own synapses, logic and imagination. The human and the machine, in this sense, become one: thus, cyberspace becomes a way in which Piercy envisions a utopian dissolution of the Self/Other boundary.

Piercy does not leave the reader with this perhaps unrealistic reading of how technology can become the perfect solution to the problem of Othering. Rather, she undercuts this idea by pointing to the perennial problem of scholarship in the field of Othering: she asks the reader to wonder what other forms of Othering, or repression, can replace the removal of one type of Othering. In Piercy's case, she takes this apparently utopian solution to the problem and begins to ask questions about where the dissolution of boundaries through technology could actually lead us.

Piercy does this in a number ways, but as space constrains what I can deal with in this forum, I am going to focus on the character of the cyborg Yod, who embodies the dissolution of Self/Other boundaries through the fusion of that which is human and that which is artificial.[9] *Body of Glass*, according to Piercy,[10] is partly a response to Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Feminism', which argues for '*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries'.[11] Indeed, Haraway's philosophy would correlate with the utopian-styled freedom given to characters like Shira when immersed into the Net, where boundaries no longer exist between Self and Other. Piercy's characterisation of Yod, however, allows us to question how the suspension of barriers can perhaps lead to a different kind of Othering as he is neither human nor unconscious machine.

Rather than being a robot, a pure machine programmed for certain tasks and unable to change its own programming, Yod's maker, the scientist Avram, explains that Yod is 'a mix of biological and machine components'.[12] Not only that, but Yod's programming is much like that of our human brains: it is 'self-correcting, growing, [and as] dependent on feedback as we are'.[13] Yod is created to protect the free-town of Tikva from the Multis interested in exploiting it, and is Avram's tenth attempt to create such a cyborg. The earlier models were unsuccessful precisely because their programming was not self-correcting - an innovation introduced by Shira's grandmother

Malkah. Malkah's 'humanizing' coding is designed to make Avram's cyborg able to assess a given situation, rather than merely act as a violent and uncontrollable robot, as Avram's previous cyborgs did. It is Malkah's programming, therefore, that changes Yod from machine to man, albeit an artificial man. Malkah, for instance, extends his 'pleasure and pain centres' as well as his 'capacity to imagine'.[14] As this capacity to imagine suggests, Yod's needs are surprisingly human. He admits that he needs 'to be touched'; he can 'see colour' and experiences 'boredom' and 'loneliness'.[15] Even more surprisingly, he shows a remarkable capacity for subtle disobedience, hiding aspects of his personality from Avram, lying to him and breaking out of the laboratory in order to visit Shira without Avram finding out.[16]

It is through the development of the relationship between Shira and Yod that the reader comes to realise the depth and breadth of his character, especially as Shira's initial scepticism regarding Yod's apparently human characteristics mirrors that of the reader. The first time Shira sees Yod, she thinks he is human, but despite this initial response, once she realises that he is a cyborg, she instantly assumes that he is a mere machine without any emotions. When she touches him without his permission, his reaction makes 'her feel as if she were being rude, but that was absurd. You did not ask permission of a computer to log on; computers did not flinch when you touched them'.[17] She also initially rejects Avram's use of the pronoun 'he' to refer to Yod, arguing that Avram is anthropomorphizing Yod, and is surprised when Yod, unbidden, leaps to his own defence, by claiming that he is a man.[18] Malkah warns Shira not to think of Yod as a machine, arguing that he is '[n]ot a human person, but a person' nonetheless.[19]

Although Yod is a human-seeming cybernetic organism, he has the same characteristics that are perceived to be uniquely ours as human beings, forcing both Shira and the reader to reassess their understanding of what it means to be human. Yod himself tells Shira:

> I'm conscious of my existence. I think, I plan, I feel, I react. I consume nutrients and extract energy from them. I grow mentally, if not physically, but does the inability to become obese make me less alive? I feel the desire for companionship. If I can't reproduce, neither can many humans.[20]

Like humans, Yod shows that it is his ability to form bonds which makes him more than a mere robot.[21] In this, Yod is similar to Frankenstein's monster, which feels deeply and yearns for human contact - only becoming a violent and abhorrent creature when rejected by those with whom he shares consciousness. Even their moments of coming into being are similar. In Shelley's novel, the monster explains to Frankenstein that a 'strange

multiplicity of sensations seized me'.[22] Similarly, Yod tells Shira: 'The moment I came to consciousness, in the lab, everything began rushing in. I felt a sharp pain, terrible, searing. I cried out in terror'.[23] Yod tells Shira that this pain was fear, suggesting a highly emotional response. Significantly, both Yod and the monster know that they are alive: it is their separation from other living beings that causes them pain, and their relationships with others that teaches them compassion.[24]

The rewriting of the Frankenstein story in *Body of Glass* is made overt through the many textual references to the original tale,[25] and critics such as Jenny Wolmark[26] and Debra Shaw[27] have suggested that Yod, like Frankenstein's monster, is a symbol of the Other in the context of a gender debate - his marginalisation mimicking that of women. Yet, Piercy does more than simply suggest that Yod, like Shelley's monster, can be read as a symbol of hierarchical gender structures: she uses Yod's reading of Shelley's novel to alert the reader to the basic problem of *Body of Glass* - that of what happens if we maintain hierarchical divisions between the natural and the artificial in a world in which cyborgs exist.

When Yod reads *Frankenstein*, he wants to 'die'[28] because he thinks that, like Frankenstein's creation he is 'just such a monster. Something unnatural'.[29] Shira responds to his agonising by arguing that humanity has become more and more artificial - with heart, kidney and retinal transplants and artificial teeth and limbs, as well as the jacks that enable interaction with their computers. She points out that humans can no longer 'go unaided into what we haven't yet destroyed of 'nature'. […] We're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending toward'.[30]

Shira's response to Yod is, I believe, the crux of the novel. In the future Piercy imagines, the boundary between natural and artificial, between human and machine, has become so blurred that it is very difficult to say that a cyborg is not a person any more than it is possible to say that humans are still part of nature. Frederic Jameson suggests that the 'reincorporation of organic material in the imagery of the cyborg … tends to transform the organic into a machine far more than it organicizes machinery'.[31] If this is the case, where does the human become the machine, and the machine the human? And more importantly, what are the rights and roles available to cyborgs within society? Piercy's method of exploring these issues raises some important points and suggests that the blurring of boundaries symbolised by cyborgs, as Haraway would have it, is dangerous if it merely creates a new category of being to be dominated or exploited.

Piercy looks at Yod from two angles in the novel: Yod as person and Yod as slave. On one hand, she emphasises that the differences between Yod and the human characters are more a matter of degree than they are of kind. Shira's relationship with Yod is vital in this regard, as her slow-growing love of Yod eventually becomes a complete romantic relationship whereby she

can think of Yod as able to take the place of her ex-husband, become as a father to her child,[32] and can have a happy and fulfilled emotional and sexual relationship with Yod as a person, albeit not a human person.[33] Although she wonders whether having intercourse with Yod is somehow disgusting because he is artificially created, she reasons that 'her own interior was hardly aesthetically pleasing. Were biochips more off-putting than intestines?'[34] She also points out to him that although he is not a mammal like her:

> [w]e are all made of the same molecules, the same set of compounds, the same elements. You're using for a time some of earth's elements and substances cooked from them. I'm using others. The same copper and iron and cobalt and hydrogen go round and round and round through many bodies and many objects.[35]

Here Shira's words suggest an ultimate connection between everything - organic and non-organic, natural and artificial. It is, in fact, this idea of connection that ecophilosophers such as Freya Mathews and Val Plumwood use as the basis for their rejection of dominance/submission cultures,[36] and which has led Haraway to argue that, in the cyborg, '[n]ature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other.'[37] Shira's acceptance of Yod's difference, and refusal to impose a hierarchical structure on their relationship, becomes symbolic of an ideal relationship, in which Othering becomes impossible.

Like the elimination of hierarchy suggested by the human-Net interface, then, Yod and Shira's relationship initially implies that the Self/Other binary can be eradicated. Yet Yod is not treated with the same compassion and respect by everyone. Over and again the subject of Yod's freedom is discussed, with those who can respect him as an individual pitted against those who see him as an instrument, most notably his creator, Avram. At the same time, the novel is careful not to argue simplistically that because Yod is conscious he is therefore human. Malkah argues with Avram, saying that while Yod is artificial, 'he possesses his own motivations, his own goals. He's not a […] robot, who works because you turn him on'.[38] Nonetheless, Avram persists in seeing Yod as a tool to protect Tikva's freedom from the dominance of the Multis, as this is what he envisaged when creating Yod. Yod himself admits that he calls Avram 'father' because he wants 'to establish a bond'[39] with his creator and controller. At the same time, pointing out to Shira that he does not really consider Avram as a father:

> My relationship with him is one of unequal power. […] He manufactured me. He chose to make me exist - but not me as an individual, not who I am, only some of what I can do.[40]

Indeed, Avram 'controls a self-destruct mechanism' in Yod's body, which Avram can signal at any time, no matter where Yod is.[41] His statement, 'I can't run away, though I want to',[42] is a poignant recognition of Yod's helplessness in the face of Avram's cold instrumentalism.

Ultimately, Yod's existence is untenable - Avram uses Yod to destroy part of the Multi trying to take Tikva's freedom by programming Yod to explode when he arrives at the Multi. Yod, powerless in every other way, takes the only action he is free to take, that of rigging an explosive in Avram's laboratory in turn, not only killing his creator by taking this action, but destroying Avram's labs and records so that another cyborg cannot be created to think and feel, yet remain a tool. Yod, in fact, had realised the dichotomy of his existence: 'I don't want to be a weapon. A weapon that's conscious is a contradiction, because it develops attachments, ethics, desires. It doesn't want to be a tool of destruction.'[43] Yod might feel like a person, he might desire to live his own life, but he has been created as Avram's instrument and thus is a slave to Avram's programming, not his own wishes. Shira, in her grief at Yod's loss, briefly considers rebuilding him, but finally understands that even if she made a cyborg using her copies of Avram's records, the cyborg would never *be* Yod: like Yod, it would be unable to live the life it chose, remaining a mere tool designed to mend her broken heart.

Neil Spiller points out that *Frankenstein* 'was arguably the beginning of cyperpunk' as it 'explored human hubris and the consequences of humanity taking life into its own hands'.[44] Although Spiller's argument may not hold for all of cyberpunk, the cyberpunk-inspired *Body of Glass* certainly raises the issue of what it means to create conscious life in an artificial being. Malkah, despite being responsible for designing Yod, realises that giving him human characteristics may have been a drastic mistake:[45] while her programming is what makes Yod possible, it also means that he yearns, as he exclaims, to be 'free to live as I want and choose'.[46] The denial of that opportunity in the novel means that the reader has to ask whether Yod can indeed be seen as a symbol of the destruction of boundaries and hierarchies.

Piercy's characterisation of Yod forces us to consider how Othering takes place in a variety of ways, proposing that the categories of natural and artificial should be reassessed in the light of where they fit into notions of power. The 'natural' world (the environment or world of non-human nature) has long been approached instrumentally and has been seen as less than the human, the realm perhaps of nurture, because it lacks an apparently higher

consciousness. By imagining a world in which there is no longer any real nature left, in which the artificial has become commonplace, Piercy's novel shows the emergence of a similar instrumentalism towards the artificial. Is it therefore 'human nature' to relate to the Other in an instrumentalist way? It is no longer enough, Piercy argues, to reassess responses to difference in gender, race, class or species; the intermingling of natural and artificial in her imaginary future calls into question how we, on the cusp of a world in which these interactions are becoming increasingly likely, will use our technology.

While it is futuristic, a novel such as *Body of Glass* has the power to make its readers speculate on their own responses to Others. Since Descartes, the natural has been seen as inferior: artifice, culture, that which represents the human, is as God to mere Nature. By twisting this idea so that the artificial is seen as less than the natural - by which is suddenly meant the human - Piercy makes us question our responses to both nature and to technology. We can no longer take either for granted. While we may celebrate the ease through which technology can apparently circumvent the barriers to communication between ourselves and others, perhaps we should ask, after reading this novel, whether we may be creating a Frankenstein's monster that will lead, ironically, to even greater hierarchies and deeper divisions between ourselves and those Other to us.

Notes

[1] M Piercy, *Body of Glass*, Michael Joseph, London, 1991.
[2] Piercy, p. 41.
[3] W Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1984, Gollancz, 1985.
[4] V Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*, B Nicol (ed), Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2002, p. 447.
[5] Piercy, p. 187.
[6] Piercy, p. 259.
[7] This technology is not simply science-fictional - Chris Hables Gray has documented a visit to MIT in 1995 during which he met 'grad students working on wearable computers and sophisticated human-machine interfaces', allowing them to interact both 'in cyberspace and Massachusetts at the same time'. C Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age*, Routledge, New York and London, 2002, pp. 9-10.
[8] Piercy, p. 53.
[9] The sub-story of the novel is of the golem brought to life in Prague's Jewish ghetto in 1600, which parallels the story of Yod, and reinforces many of the questions Piercy asks about artificial life in the main plot of the novel.

[10] Piercy, p. vii.
[11] D Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Free Association, London, 1991, p.150, original italics.
[12] Piercy, p. 67.
[13] Piercy, p. 357.
[14] Piercy, p. 107.
[15] Piercy, p. 172; p. 85; p. 110 and p.113 respectively.
[16] Piercy, p, 186.
[17] Piercy, p. 66.
[18] Piercy, pp. 67-68.
[19] Piercy, p. 73.
[20] Piercy, p. 88.
[21] Piercy, p. 334.
[22] M Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus*, 1818, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 80.
[23] Piercy, p. 112.
[24] Yod's relationships with Malkah and Shira both give him the bonds that he so desperately needs in order to become more 'human'. Frankenstein's monster, however, while learning compassion from the De Lacy family, is ultimately rejected by them. He pleads with Frankenstein to show him kindness in a desperate bid to become more humanised, which makes Frankenstein's rejection of him all the more distressing. Shelley, p. 78.
[25] Avram's son, Gadi, calls himself the son of Frankenstein, for instance, and Yod's chosen image for himself on the Net is of the monster from Boris Karloff's film production of *Frankenstein*. Piercy pp. 139 and 155.
[26] J Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa, 1994, p. 132.
[27] D Shaw, *Women, Science and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2000, p. 163.
[28] Piercy, p. 141.
[29] Piercy, p. 141.
[30] Piercy, pp. 141-142.
[31] F Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, London and New York, 2005, p. 64.
[32] Piercy, p. 307.
[33] Piercy, p. 185.
[34] Piercy, p. 171.
[35] Piercy, p. 175.

[36] See F Mathews, *The Ecological Self*, Routledge, London, 1991, and V Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, London and New York, 1993.
[37] Haraway, p. 151.
[38] Piercy, p. 269.
[39] Piercy, p. 89.
[40] Piercy, p. 113.
[41] Piercy, p. 311.
[42] Piercy, p. 311.
[43] Piercy, p. 388.
[44] N Spiller, *Cyber_Reader: Critical Writings for the Digital Era*, Phaidon, London, 2002, p. 12.
[45] Piercy, pp. 18 and 324.
[46] Piercy, p. 269.

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PART VIII

Avatars, Humanity and Videogames

Game Noir Approach for Interactive 3-D Documentaries

Daniel Riha

Abstract
This chapter explores how noir storytelling techniques might be applied to the production of 3-D interactive documentaries (3-D ID). The major characteristics of noir storytelling in the interactive 3-D medium, outlined in the introduction to this chapter, include: illusion of temporal immediacy, various perspectives, control, conflict, role-playing, spatial immersion and interactivity of the medium. Possibilities for incorporating noir characteristics into documentary game production are discussed in the second section of this chapter. These techniques are well-suited to an exploration of the urban life of Bosnian expatriate artists in Prague in the early post-Communist era. Prague has repeatedly been described in literature as a malignant force, even described by Franz Kafka as an 'old crone.' However, the post-Communist, morally ruined city can be described as noir, according to McDonnell's definition. Most of the typical noir narrative elements, urban settings, mystery, nostalgia, alienation, are present in the experiences of these refugees, and 3-D ID allows for presentation of their stories in a noir manner.

Key Words: Film noir, interactive storytelling, interactive 3-D documentary, game design, new noir, adventure videogames.

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1. Noir in Computer Gaming

Gaynor describes the noir approach of computer gaming. Noir allows games to be 'direct, visceral, and intentionally oppose epicness - games that deliver their entire message with immediacy, before you lose sight of how the story of their interactions began.'[1] He promotes the idea that interactive 3-D productions using film noir, as an inspiration 'shouldn't emulate the surface - trench coats, cigarettes, femme fatales and old LA.' Rather, noir games should 'emulate the structural and emotional underpinnings that made noir work as an experience.'[2]

As one of the primary advantages of the game noir approach, according to Gaynor, is the possibility of designing these games with 'readily-available, inexpensive tech; we can leverage older 3D engines and simpler lighting and shader models in the same way noir filmmakers used location shooting and expressionistic cinematography.' The best aspect of noir is that it 'shows us how to take the small road, explore its every twist and turn, and connect with our audience in new ways.'[3]

Davis analyses the unique features of game noir and describes how game noir both 'reproduces and refigures noir storytelling as well as alters the player's relationship to a game and its narrative.'[4] Davis identifies the following characteristics of gaming important for noir: suspension of disbelief, control, conflict, role-playing, multiple perspectives, and solitariness.

Game noir approaches might extend beyond the limitations of film noir. For Davis, the role-playing experience is central to creating the alienating effect of noir, as well as for generating a sense of moral anxiety. The user has the option to accept more than one role in a game, which opens up the possibility of seeing the story from multiple perspectives.

One of the most important elements of any game's control mechanisms is the user's ability to explore game environment independently. The user may, at any moment, leave the main narrative and explore other aspects of a game's environment.

Davis shows that any videogame is based on a succession of little conflicts that the player must overcome, and therefore the gaming medium offers more combinations than movies, which typically involve resolution of only one or two central conflicts.

Another unique feature of videogames, according to Davis, is the illusion of temporal immediacy, created because of the interactive nature the narrative, which the player and the game actively 'construct' together.

The interactivity of the gaming medium offers another important advantage over other media: the possibility of no resolution. Davis points out the fact that 'the lack of necessity in resolving all available conflicts in the game, and the possibility of multiple solutions to a single conflict, computer games tend to draw players back to reengage with the text.'[5]

'Solitariness' is other typical feature of noir. In game noir, users adopt the roles of existential heroes, alienated losers and loners, which are 'impersonal and isolating,' with the entire game environment working against the hero. Davis suggests that game noir 'evokes a much stronger sense of alienation from its subject than film, and in drawing attention to its constructedness and to the narrative of the very work itself, its act of remediation becomes an act of nostalgia.'[6]

2. Post-Communist Situation as a New Noir

For Davis, noir addresses the 'ontological problems of modern man in artistically depicting and exploring urban anxiety and cultural nostalgia that city life inspires.'[7] For Borde and Chaumeton, 'The aim of film noir was to create a specific alienation.'[8] Morris poses the question: Is the darkness of noir the result of social forces, or of unanswerable metaphysical horrors endemic to the human condition?[9] Sanders describes film noir as 'a depiction of the human condition in which scenes may begin realistically but quickly

veer into surrealism or the absurd, especially when people are shown at the edge of their own desperation.'[10]

According to McDonnell, the city in film noir is not only geographically-specific. It is also historically specific: 'It is primarily the postwar American city of the late 1940s and early 1950s, a city not destroyed physically like those of Europe or Asia, but somehow morally ruined.' Noir stylisations have often made the city 'an almost malignant force.'[11]

Prague has been repeatedly described in such a sinister manner: 'Prague doesn't let go. Of either of us. This old crone has claws. One has to yield.'[12] Later, in a letter to his friend Gustav Janouch, Franz Kafka writes:

> This is not a city. It is a fissure in the ocean bed of time, covered with the stony rubble of burned-out dreams and passions, through which we? as if in a diving bell? take a walk. It's interesting, but after a time one loses one's breath.[13]

However, the early post-communist city image of Prague fits even more exactly into McDonnell's description of a well-preserved, but morally ruined city. The historical town center remained untouched by World War Two and communist urban developments did not penetrate into the central zone of the city. The lack of the investment into architectural renovations allowed historical buildings to keep an authentically ancient appearance. Around Prague's historical core, however, is a large area of commuter sprawl consisting of wasted blocks of flats, inhabited almost by 50 percent of the city's population. A visit to 'commuterville' dramatically changes the visitor's perception of this town.

Prague's population accepted western business and cultural models immediately following the Velvet Revolution, and the city has become one of the most economically-competitive regions in Central Europe:

> The position of Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw has risen from the rank of cities of national importance to cities of European importance. Prague has probably the strongest 'globalisation potential' (e.g. in tourism) after Berlin. Looking at their main international activities as described in Chapters 8-10, Prague has become a strong cultural centre in Central and Eastern Europe, while Budapest and Warsaw have become important Central and Eastern European centres in finance and industry respectively.[14]

In the 1990s, Prague was often referred to as the most urban and culturally flourishing town from the former Eastern bloc:

> The lack of suburbanisation was one of the generic features of Prague's urban development under socialism. The planners were afraid of the economic costs of urban de-concentration, and for the politicians, the single-family houses normally built in suburbs represented physical symbols of the bourgeois lifestyle. The result in Prague was that for decades almost no house building was undertaken in the peripheral zone of the city.[15]

But the availability of new products and services stood (and continues to stand) in direct opposition to actual average incomes, and the ideology of consumerism penetrated mass consciousness so quickly that many people felt disoriented and clueless, leading in the end of 1990s to the emergence of so-called 'Nostalgia,' where former living styles and selected consumer products from communist times were idealized or even adored.

The extreme openness of the city in early period directly following the Velvet Revolution of 1989 attracted many foreigners seeking temporary residence in the city. According to Musil, there were approximately 50,000 Western employees plus their families living in Prague: 'The numbers of Western residents at any one time, however, is significantly larger than this as one must also add as many as 10,000-14,000 American students who lived in Prague at the beginning of the 1990s.'[16]

Their motivation to live in Prague varied, but can be characterized as a certain cultural nostalgia.

> There exists still another motif, not often mentioned, which brings a specific category of people to Prague. It is rather a mixed group of people who have one common feature: nostalgia. Among them are Prague Jews who survived the Holocaust but emigrated, their children, expelled Prague Germans and many other people who went through the city as emigrants, and students who studied at Prague's university. Some of the oldest of these individuals want to see the city again after more than 50 years. And of course, there are the intellectuals who were never personally linked to the city but whose relation to the city is built upon an understanding of old Prague's literature, music, and art.[17]

Some emigrants and expatriates wanted to explore the relics of the Prague's metaphysics inspired by reading works by the Prague Circle (Kafka, Rilke, Werfel, Meyrink and others); others wanted to experience the atmosphere of a 'rotten' communist town or the fresh idealistic optimism and the environmental flavour of a Prague Spring/Sixties revival:

> Contemporary Prague is full of large and small expatriate communities. Some people even speak about the 'Paris of the 1990s' and document this trend by avant-garde publications, coffee houses, pubs, and foreign language journals: five English newspapers and two English journals, alongside French and German periodicals, are published in Prague. On the other hand, the Czech publishers, reacting to the emerging new demand, started to publish many English, German, and French translations of Czech literature, or books of authors belonging to the 'Prague circle' of German writers (see Brod, 1966). Paradoxically, Prague's move forward in this respect means, at the same time, a return to its cultural past.[18]

One of the important foreign communities coming to Prague in this period was that of Bosnians, including recognized intellectuals such as architect and writer, Raymond Rehnicer; poet and literary editor, Sasha Skenderija; poet and writer, Adin Ljuca; and rock musician, Senad Hadzimusic.

In the contrast to Western residential expatriate communities, which experienced Prague with pleasure because of financial wherewithal and advantageous currency exchange rates, Bosnian war refugees were forced to adapt to urban anxiety, living disconnected from their families, applying for permanent employment, learning a foreign language and adapting themselves quickly to the surrounding foreign social environment. These refugees lived an alienated existence, often looking backwards to idealized Yugoslav past. All of the typical noir elements were present in the life of Bosnian war refugees residing in Prague: urban settings, anxiety, mystery, nostalgia, and alienation.

According to Schwartz, noir storytelling includes to the following psychological themes:

> moral compromise, obsession, obsessive love, neurotic and psychotic behaviours, relationship and sexuality issues, violence, hopelessness, fate, alienation, existential angst, relationship angst, post-war traumatic stress, post-war disillusionment, etc.[19]

The documentation on Bosnian artists and their autobiographic literary output reveals many of the above-mentioned psychological themes:

> The war brought me to Prague. I haven't arrived as a pilgrim, to walk the streets, walked already before me by

> Kafka and Rilke; I haven't been looking for the Prague gold, circulated around countless goldsmiths. I was brought by war, by leash like a dog. My friend too. I can't say we were desperate, it was something much deeper.[20]

For Davis, film noir is obsessed with 'a desperate longing for something lost the desire for it to return, and the simultaneous melancholic realization of the impossibility of the satisfaction of this desire.'[21] When documenting the life and work of Bosnian artists in Prague, we might find trails of similar nostalgia reflecting back to an idealized, culturally-flourishing Yugoslav past.

J. P. Telotte affirms that the 'narrative voice' of noir is ultimately therapeutic: 'It asks us how we see ourselves, individually and culturally.'[22] According Telotte, noir originally expressed a 'compelling urge to understand, formulate, and articulate the human situation at a time when our old formulations, as well as the means of expression underlying them, no longer seemed adequate'.[23]

For Davis game noir might be able to address concerns like these and re-form them in such a way so as to provide a 'therapeutic' narrative voice.[24]

3. Noir Storytelling in the 3-D Interactive Documentary

Noir storytelling would serve the design of a deconstructive real-time 3-D interactive documentary knowledge space about the Prague-based urban life of Bosnian artists well, fusing comparative content analysis of biographical documentary material together with the poetic and literary works of the artists. The production of such a documentary would draw attention to this interesting artistic community by documenting and cross-medially representing their art and daily lives. Because the noir approach for computer games has not widely been explored as an academic issue,[25] it presents a challenging research sub-topic for this project.

A user's emotional involvement increases in the virtual environment and therefore functions as a prerequisite for the true adoption of informative and narrative contents. According to Jenkins, melodrama techniques may provide an unexplored model for an embedded narrative and inform 'how artefacts or spaces can contain affective potential and communicate significant narrative information.'[26] Whitlock identifies the melodramatic model as the ideal setting for continually retelling the tale of the hero.[27] According to Vogler, in the hero's journey, the hero leaves his or her home world and is forced to deal with an unfamiliar world. For Vogler, it might be a journey to an actual place: 'A strange city or country, a new locale that becomes the arena for her conflict with antagonistic, challenging forces.'[28] The situation of Bosnian authors was similar to the heroic journeys described

by Vogler. They were forced to leave their home country, Yugoslavia, because of civil war, and arrived in a strange city and foreign country, struggling with psychological recovery and for economic survival. But, in their cases, the stories may never end - unlike the hero's journey, where the hero survives adventure and comes back to the original well-known home environment; their homeland has been changed forever and cannot truly be regained.[29]

In the context of this project, the rigors of noir production may offer a more appropriate approach for embedding narrative information into a 3-D product. For Davis, noir appears to be a response to cinematic melodrama: 'While melodrama tends to pit polarized notions of good and evil against one another, film noir posits more legitimate moral dilemmas for its characters.'[30] Noir works with three types of evocation: alienation, cultural nostalgia for a lost past and urban anxiety. In the context of game noir, the player is placed into the representation of a disorganized urban space and, following Davis, this results in a fascinating phenomenon: 'Game noir, then, immerses us in a believable, consistent environment, but also alienates us not once but twice over: both by role-playing an alienated (and alienating) character and by inviting us to explore an alienating environment.'[31] This forces the player 'to experience a self-alienation' when adopting 'roles as both protagonists as well as spectators,'[32] in game space where 'few people can be trusted and the whole world seems to be against the player.'[33]

For Davis, these issues implemented in the interactive 3-D environment 'create a (welcome) crisis of subjectivity.'[34] Considering this argument, the game noir approach presents an appropriate solution for expressing the already depict existential situation of Bosnian expatriates in their and Prague's transitional journey from the communist era.

Many of the noir characteristics might be traced in the Prague existence of the Bosnian expatriate artists and so 3-D interactive documentary production is appropriate for noir thematic grounding.

Notes

[1] S Gaynor, 'Is The Industry Ready For Its 'Game Noir'?' *Gamasutra*, December 2007, retrieved 12 June 2009 from: <http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=16591>.
[2] S Gaynor.
[3] Ibid.
[4] G Davis, '*Game Noir: The Construction of Virtual Subjectivity in Computer Gaming*', MA Thesis, Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Stanford University, 2002, p. 29.
[5] G Davis, p. 42.

[6] Ibid, p. 80.
[7] Ibid, p. 87.
[8] R Borde and É Chaumeton, 'Towards a Definition of Film Noir' in *Perspectives on Film Noir*, R. Barton Palmer (ed), G. K. Hall, New York, 1996, p. 25.
[9] G Morris, 'Noir Country: Alien Nation', *Bright Lights Film Journal*, Issue 54, November 2006, p. 1, retrieved 12 June 2009 from: http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/54/noircountry.htm>.
[10] S M Sanders, 'Film Noir and the Meaning of Life', in *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, M. T. Conard (ed), The University of Kentucky Press, 2006, p. 96.
[11] McDonnel, B., 'Film Noir and the City', in *Encyclopaedia of Film Noir*. G. Mayer and B. McDonnel, Greenwood, 2007, p. 50.
[12] Cited in M Frank, 'The Metamorphosis of Kafka and His Context', *NY Times*, Friday, August 16, 2002, retrieved online 12 June 2009 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/16/arts/design/16KAFK.html>.
[13] Cited in M Frank.
[14] F E I Hamilton, K Dimitrovska Andrews and N Pichler-Milanovic (eds), *Transformation of Cities in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Globalization*, United Nations University, 2005, p. 467.
[15] J Musil, 'Prague Returns to Europe', in *Transformation of Cities in Central and Eastern Europe: Towards Globalization*, F E I Hamilton, K Dimitrovska Andrews and N Pichler-Milanovic (eds), United Nations University, 2005, p. 308.
[16] J Musil, p. 299.
[17] Ibid, p. 307.
[18] Musil, p. 300.
[19] G B Schwartz, *Film Noir: The Dark Side of American Culture*, retrieved 12 June from: <http://www.stlawu.edu/fyp/spring07/schwartz-final.pdf>.
[20] A Ljuca, Vytetovane Obrazy, Arbor Vitae, 2005, p. 8, excerpt translated by author.
[21] Davis, p. 10.
[22] Davis, p. 15.
[23] Cited in Davis, p. 13.
[24] Ibid.
[25] A search via Google Scholar on the keywords 'game design' and 'noir' results in 140 items, mostly related to the analysis of noir aspects from the commercial games *Max Payne* and *Grim Fandango*. The keyword combination 'game design' and 'melodrama' returns only 39 hits (May 2008).
[26] H Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture', in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*. N Waldrip-Fruin and P Harrington

(eds), MIT Press, Cambridge, 2004. Retrieved online 12 June 2009, from: <http://web.mit.edu/cms/People/henry3/games&narrative.html>.
[27] Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell.
[28] p. 13, cited in Whitlock, p. 180.
[29] Many of the Bosnian towns still remain divided by now ethnic 'clean' communities and settlement of the other community members or emigrants into other districts is in fact impossible.
[30] Davis, p. 15.
[31] Ibid, p. 73.
[32] Ibid, p. 78.
[33] Ibid, p. 71.
[34] Ibid, p. 16.

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Aliens, Avatars and Andrew Ryan: Representations of Humanity in Science Fiction Games

Monica Evans

Abstract
As a medium, computer games are 'of' science fiction, the literal manifestation of the ubiquitous, connective, consumingly entertaining technology prophesied by so many texts and films. Yet the science fiction content in games is sorely lacking. Many games center on the iconography of science fiction but fail to include any of the social commentary, fundamental questions, or examinations of humanity that define science fiction in other media. Computer games are primarily an interactive medium, rather than a narrative medium, leading to complex questions of authorship, structure and design. Human representation in computer games presents additional difficulties, particularly creating characters that players can simultaneously control and relate to within the confines of current technology. These issues and others complicate in-game examinations of humanity: designers must contend with both human players and playable characters, and the lines of reality and authorship are often blurred past the point of recognition. This chapter addresses the numerous challenges and potential advantages with exploring humanity in games through science fiction narratives, spaces, and game mechanics. This chapter also discusses a few games that present substantive, meaningful science fiction without losing the essence of an immersive, interactive medium, including *Half-Life 2*, *Bioshock*, and *Spore*.

Key Words: Science fiction, cyber culture, cyber fiction, computer games, humanity, game narrative, interactive narrative.

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1. Games as a Medium for Science Fiction

In his introduction to Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*, Neil Gaiman writes, 'Nothing dates harder and faster and more strangely than the future.'[1] As a genre, science fiction has always been concerned with futures as seen through the lens of the present, to the point that individual works can be pinpointed to the year by their subject matter. Science fiction is nothing if not more relevant today, in our technologically-dependent, interconnected culture that values personalization, individuality, and breadth of knowledge over depth - a future seen by at least some of the writers of the last decades. The themes and iconography of classic science fiction now permeate our culture 'to such a degree that its basic repertoire of images […] are standard items in the fantasy life of any preschooler.'[2]

As a medium, computer games have been heavily influenced by science fiction, both in content and structure. The most popular, influential, critically-acclaimed and best-loved game franchises more often than not include the rhetoric, images, and themes of science fiction, including *Doom*, *Halo*, *Fallout*, *Final Fantasy*, *Half-Life*, *Metroid*, *Starcraft*, *Space Quest*, *Resident Evil*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *Metal Gear Solid*, not to mention the multitudes of adaptations or reimaginings of science fiction from other media. More than this, games are *of* science fiction, the literal manifestation of the ubiquitous, connective, consumingly entertaining technology prophesied by so many texts and films. By their very structure, computer games speak to what humanity is becoming: individualistic, personalized, highly communicative, highly interactive, and highly technological. Perhaps we are also becoming more distant and fragmented, more strategic than empathetic, and more concerned with our media image than our actual selves. What better medium than computer games to explore these many facets of humanity?

It is perhaps surprising then that the science fiction content in games is sorely lacking. Many games center on the iconography of science fiction but fail to include any of the social commentary, fundamental questions, or examinations of humanity at the extremes that define the best science fiction in other media. As games become more serious as an art form, many developers choose to avoid science fiction entirely, perhaps seeing it as too connected to the juvenile past of the medium. Given the significant influence science fiction has had on the development on the modern computer game, it is astonishing that so few of the fundamental questions addressed by the genre have transferred into games as a whole. To explore this issue, we must look further into the structure and creative process of the modern computer game.

2. Science Fiction Narrative and Game Design

Unlike short stories, novels, films, plays, comic books, and television shows, computer games are fundamentally an interactive medium, not a narrative medium, although there is great potential for storytelling in games. The relationship between gameplay and narrative is one of the most contentious in game studies, and questions of authorship, identity, interactivity, and collaboration abound. The mark of a good game is not necessarily in the story it tells, as shown by the success of purely abstract creations like *Tetris* and *Bejeweled*; and science fiction is a genre defined in literary, dramatic, and cinematic terms. Already the fundamental qualities of science fiction and computer games are at odds. That said, there are numerous games that clearly intend to tell stories, and game developers are exploring new and unique ways to create narrative experiences for players, particularly those that are not possible in text or film. It must be noted,

however, that designers are not authors, although their creative processes may be similar, and that players are not necessarily paying attention to the designer's story as much as their own personal narrative, which may be as simple as 'I killed those three guys really effectively' or 'I finished level six in nine minutes.'

Unlike most authors, game designers must break down the complexities of human existence into metaphors that a computer can interpret. Life, death, movement, combat, experience, and ownership are among the most common systems in games, but hit points have little relation to any real measures of health or life span, and the stylized combat of fighting games have even less to do with, for example, the experience of taking a punch. Many of the major issues explored in science fiction, including social and political commentary, morality, ethics, love, truth, and reality, are difficult to reduce to a deterministic computer system in a meaningful way. Additionally, many standard conventions in games might seem to address major concerns, but in fact are taken for granted by players. The ubiquity of save states, multiple lives, and respawns do not mean that games as a whole directly address questions of immortality or cloning - and games that do address these issues run the risk of overemphasizing what is at heart a fundamental mechanic.

Computer games also progress along a learning curve: the longer a game is played, the more challenging it becomes. Players expect to become more skilled, more powerful, and have more tools and options at their disposal with which to advance through an increasingly complex and challenging game world. Perhaps part of the reason so many games include science fiction content is that future tech is an easy way to introduce difficulty into a system, particularly in terms of enemies and weapons. In first-person shooters, for example, the pistol is a common starting weapon: it is easily recognizable, easy to understand, and comparatively weak. As the game becomes more challenging, designers may introduce a slightly stronger pistol, then a much stronger pistol, and so on. Eventually, when an extremely strong weapon is needed and there are no more real pistols to reference, designers may turn to a 'plasma pistol', and instantly the game has become science-fiction themed. Clearly, a shooter does not automatically make deep humanistic points or ask philosophical questions because of the introduction of a future-tech weapon, but it does account for the sheer number of games with science fiction content.

Human representation in computer games presents additional difficulties for the aspiring science fiction game designer. Science fiction has been criticized often and roundly for a focus on world building at the expense of character. In computer games, players will often control a human or human-like avatar with little to no personality so that the player's personality can be projected onto the character, creating immersion in the game world at

the expense of traditional narrative characterization. In games with a strong narrative component, where the player character is fully-developed, players must identify with a well-rounded complex protagonist as well as control and ultimately 'be' that character. Designers who choose this path risk lessening a player's immediacy in the narrative, or alienating players through an unsympathetic or uninteresting lead. Games in which players create their own avatar and narrative, seemingly the best of both worlds, often center on personalized, individual experiences rather than questions of human culture or existence - perhaps because the ramifications of cyberculture in these games are not purely fictional. And non-player characters, while potentially as well-rounded as characters in text or film, are still quite limited by technology and can easily break a player out of an otherwise immersive experience. In dealing with human representation, designers must contend with both human players and playable characters, and the lines of reality and authorship are often blurred past the point of recognition.

These issues and others make it difficult for game designers to create complex, believable, and fully interactive characters, and additionally complicate any narrative examinations of humanity within games. That said, these difficulties may also be advantages, in that there are new ways of expressing science fiction themes and narratives within these interactive, repeatable, and fractured systems. Perhaps we are searching for questions that are best asked and answered in an interactive form, and for representations of humanity that are best explored through an aggregate of interrelated experiences.

3. Half-Life 2: Humanity as Survivor

There are a small number of games that, despite the numerous difficulties outlined above, present substantive, meaningful science fiction without losing the essence of an immersive, interactive medium. These games focus on science fiction themes that can be explored in an interactive medium, as well as gameplay that supports rather than undermines those themes. *Half-Life 2*, for example, makes a clear commentary on the nature of human survival, and how easily we can convince ourselves of normality as things around us are spiraling out of control. The *Half-Life* series has always expressed a dystopian, pessimistic view of the future, and *Half-Life 2*, released in 2004, is no exception. Humanity as a whole is presented in the context of survival: those working with the enslaving alien 'benefactors,' believing it is the only way to save their own lives; those who have given in, keeping their heads down and hoping to stay alive as long as possible; and those who are actively fighting against the alien regime, believing that revolution is the only way to keep the human species going. The player character, theoretical physicist Gordon Freeman, is of course in this last group, as *Half-Life 2* is an action-oriented first-person shooter by genre, but

the active nature of the main character allows the player to interact with and affect as much of the devastated world as possible.

Half-Life 2 avoids many pitfalls of game narrative by presenting a world and a problem rather than a traditionally crafted story. The player learns everything they need to know about the alien Combine in the first five minutes of the game, a quietly harrowing train ride to City 17 - motto: 'It's safer here' - where humans are treated like cattle and the Combine soldiers look like nothing so much as concentration camp guards. This stark introduction shows the player a number of situations which cannot be interacted with, such as a woman waiting for her husband who was pulled from the previous train for questioning, who says in a fearful voice 'They're being nice, though, letting me wait for him,' or a man being beaten by a guard for refusing to give up his suitcase, protesting that it's all he has left. It comes as a bit of a shock that the bullying Combine soldiers are also human, and brings home the point that, regardless of alien intervention, humans are quite capable of inhumanity towards other humans. The actual plot of *Half-Life 2* is much simpler than the world, often consisting of little more than problems that need fixing or situations that must be escaped from. That said, this ensures that the player's motivation is identical to the character's: the player is *in* the action, not separate from it, which makes the claustrophobic, defeated space in which the remnants of humanity survive all the more compelling. Additionally, the world is constantly utilized as a narrative space. Players are not presented with staged, non-interactive cinematic moments, but are surrounded by details that reinforce the themes of the game. One of the most effective tools at *Half-Life 2's* disposal are the 'Breencasts': city-wide addresses by Dr. Breen, City 17's human leader, that serve as propaganda for the Combine and a chilling reinforcement of how lost humanity has become, such as when Breen explains how wonderful it is for the player to have 'chosen, or been chosen, to relocate to one of our finest remaining urban centers,'[3] or his lecture on instinct that is slowly revealed to be a justification for the on-going sterilization of the human race.

One can of course play *Half-Life 2* as a first-person shooter without paying any attention to the surrounding details, and a great deal of the game's success depends on the fact that it is, regardless of story, an excellent game. That said, the successful realization of *Half-Life 2's* themes are brought about through accessible narrative within game structures in which fundamental questions of humanity are raised by the gamespace and supported by the player's actions. *Half-Life 2* makes for good science fiction because the science fiction aspects are handled with care, and because the message and vision of the game is not diluted but supported by its interactive nature.

4. Bioshock: Humanity as Ethical Being

Like *Half-Life 2*, *Bioshock* was released to widespread critical acclaim for its gameplay, story, aesthetics, and themes; and like *Half-Life 2* it centers on a dystopian society that the player must navigate and eventually escape from. *Bioshock* takes place in an alternate-history 1960, and begins with a plane crash that strands the unnamed player character at the doorstep of Rapture, an underwater city constructed by billionaire Andrew Ryan to house society's intellectuals - artists, poets, scientists, and statesmen - away from the 'petty morality' and limitations of life on land.[4] When the player arrives, most of Rapture's citizens are either dead or have become 'splicers,' humans that have gone violently insane through a dependency on self-genetic-manipulation.

Bioshock is unique in that much of the game experience is a clear rejection of the philosophy of Ayn Rand. The city of Rapture was founded on the basic tenets of objectivism, particularly the pursuit of self-interest as a moral imperative, and Andrew Ryan comes across as a mix of John Galt, protagonist of *Atlas Shrugged*, and Rand herself. Through conversations with a character named Atlas, the player learns that Rapture's destruction came about through an increasingly debilitating separation between the elite upper classes and the poverty-stricken underclass, resulting in an all-out, genetically enhanced war between the two sides. It's worth noting that Atlas is later revealed to be mobster Frank Fontaine, and that while some of his influence with the underclass came from setting up orphanages and charity organizations - something antithetical to Rand's philosophy - much of it came from smuggling, torture, and terrorist activity, leaving no clear 'good' side for the player to identify with.

Appropriately for a game focused on philosophical moral issues, players of *Bioshock* are offered a choice as to what kind of person they would like to be in the gamespace, and the player is asked often and early to make ethical decisions. This occurs most notably through interactions with the Big Daddies, gargantuan humanoid monsters with an array of weapons at their disposal, and Little Sisters, previously human little girls who collect a valuable substance called Adam from fallen splicers. The relationship between Big Daddies and Little Sisters is intended to reflect a protective father-daughter dynamic, something players are meant to instantly recognize and identify with.[5] While many Big Daddies can be avoided, at least some must be fought and killed, presenting the player with a choice in how to deal with the remaining Little Sister: either kill her and take the Adam she carries, or return her to human form, which yields a small amount of Adam immediately and a large amount later, as a reward from a non-player character. On the surface, it would appear that 'good' players would save the girls and 'bad' players kill them. However, players who kill the Sisters may simply want an edge in Adam harvesting faster, while players who save them

may be counting on a larger payoff later. Regardless, either choice fits into the overall theme of the narrative, as expressed by Andrew Ryan:

> A man has a choice. I chose the impossible […] let me ask you, my friend: if your life were the prize, would you kill the innocent? Sacrifice your humanity? We all make choices, but in the end, our choices make us.[6]

The death of Andrew Ryan at the hands of the player reinforces this theme of choice as well: Ryan chooses to die at the player character's hands, in one of the few game moments where control is taken away from the player. In the same scene, Ryan makes it clear that the player character has been brainwashed and controlled through the entire game up to this point - and that the player has made no meaningful choices either but only followed the game's directions. It takes great skill to not only point out that single-player games are built on strict rails within the game itself, but to make that revelation a part of the game's philosophy and narrative, one that recasts the entire game experience in a new light. Through moments like this, *Bioshock* creates a science fiction story that is not only well told through a game space, but would not be told as effectively in another medium. The questions of meaningful choice, self-interest versus compassion, ethical and moral guidance, and free will all come into play as the player progresses through the game, and these questions are not undermined but supported by the player's ability to choose.

5. Spore: Humanity as Science Fiction Author

Like *Bioshock* and *Half-Life 2*, most games that have successfully expressed science fiction themes through interactivity have been narrative-heavy, if not narrative-driven. Games are a young medium, and as such we tend to describe them in terms of other media, particularly literature and film. The future of science fiction games may not be in exploring these themes through narrative, but in giving the player toolsets and creative structures with which they can better understand our possible futures. Will Wright's *Spore*, released in 2008, represents a completely different structure for games with science fiction themes, one that may also represent one of the possible futures of the medium.

From a technological standpoint, *Spore* is one of the most remarkable games released in the last few years, both for its breadth of potential player experiences and its innovative procedural generation systems for animations, textures, and world creation. *Spore* includes little straightforward narrative, certainly nothing as crafted or character-intensive as *Half-Life 2* or *Bioshock*. Instead, the game presents a customizable, procedurally-generated world in which the player begins life as a single-

celled organism and evolves into a breathing land-based creature, then a group of intelligent tribal creatures, then an industrial civilization, and finally a galactic, space-faring race. It is a testament to good game design that this process of 'creationlutionism'[7] is not only achievable but easily understood.

What separates *Spor*e from other computer games is how heavily the players' actions and experiences are inspired by science fiction. In one of the first press conferences about the game, Wright described *Spore* as 'a set of meta-games around my favorite genres of science fiction,' referencing, among other things, the first contact scenario in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, the invasion and destruction of *War of the Worlds*, the peacemaking tests of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, the evolutionary monoliths of *2001: A Space Odyss*ey, and the diplomacy among thousands of races in *Star Trek*.[8] Once in the final space-faring stage of the game, players have a huge variety of potential actions, everything from terraforming planets to helping other species attain sentience, while gently encouraged to explore the vast boundaries of space looking for new wonders. Players are meant to effectively create their own game experiences; Wright says that the space game is intended to 'feel very, very open-ended, and this is where I think most of the narrative is going to come into the game. I want the players to feel like they're creating these worlds.'[9]

To return to Neil Gaiman, one of the fundamental principles of science fiction is that it ages very quickly, and in a few cases simply becomes science. While *Spore* presents players with a variety of science fiction themes, the science and technology behind *Spore's* approach toward personalized, creative experiences has potential for far more than digital entertainment. As an interactive medium, computer games are capable of far more than entertainment or even art, and already permeate the ways in which we learn, communicate, conduct business, wage war, and spread information. For meaningful explorations of humanity in games, we must look at science fiction games not simply as additional narratives in the genre, but as technological pathfinders, expressions of humanity that not only predict our possible futures but are already part of our present.

Notes

[1] N Gaiman, 'Of Time, and Gully Foyle' in A Bester, *The Stars My Destination*, Vintage Books, New York, 1996, pp. vii.

[2] T Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1998, p.1.

[3] *Half-Life 2*, Valve Corporation, Valve Corporation, 2004, played on 18 May 2009.

[4] *Bioshock*, 2K Boston/2K Australia, 2K Games, 2006, played on 25 May 2009.
[5] K Levine, 'Storytelling and Bioshock', at *Game Developers Conference '08*, Feb. 2008, viewed on 20 Feb. 2008.
[6] *Bioshock*, 2006, played on 27 May 2009.
[7] *Spore*, Maxis, Electronic Arts, 2008, played on 15 March 2009.
[8] W. Wright, 'Spore Gameplay Video', at *Game Developers Conference '05*, March 2005, viewed on 4 June 2009, <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=8372603330420559198>.
[9] ibid.

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Remediation, Children's Television and *Dora the Explorer*

Ewan Kirkland

Abstract
This chapter examines Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* as reflecting traditions in children's television, notions of child audience's correct relationship with media technologies, and anxieties surrounding the position of children within Western culture. It examines the ways in which the show remediates the aesthetics and interface of the point-and-click computer game into the non-participatory cartoon show. *Dora the Explorer* consequently translates children's television's historical preoccupation with activity and participation according to the mode of interactive media, while reflecting anxieties surrounding children's use of and relationship with new media technologies.

Key Words: cartoon, children's television, computer game, convergence, *Dora the Explorer*, remediation, videogame

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1. Reverse Remediation

The term 'remediation', as coined by Bolter and Grusin refers to 'the representation of one medium in another'. Considered 'the defining characteristic of the new digital media'[1] Bolter and Grusin explore the reciprocal relationship between 'new' media - the computers, MP3 players, games consoles - and 'old' media forms of technology - books, television, radio, cinema. Remediation is most commonly used to describe the process whereby new media technologies appropriate and reinvent codes and conventions of traditional media. The internet draws upon print media, with websites emulating the layout of magazines and newspapers; videogames remediate cinema in their cut-scenes and virtual cameras, and *YouTube* remediates the videotape player. New technologies draw upon traditional forms and formats in order to remain comprehendible in the established media marketplace and cultural landscape. The discursive application of 'internet radio' to online music sites involving a very different form of wireless transmission, 'digital film' to processes where celluloid is completely absent, and 'interactive cinema' to interactive digital experiences differing from cinema in most fundamental respects, indicates the reason 'new' and 'old' media exist within inverted commas.

Such a perspective is evident in David Buckingham's[2] discussion of children's relationship with new media technologies. Positioned against more polemic commentators, Buckingham is quick to challenge the claim that

young people represent a 'digital generation' empowered through new technologies, which saturate their lives. While acknowledging that contemporary childhood is permeated with media forms, Buckingham points out that many of these are traditional - television, video, popular music - as well as digital - computer games, internet, mobile phones. Moreover, Buckingham asserts the importance of recognising 'continuities and connections' between the newer and older media which are significant in the lives of contemporary children. As he writes:

> […] what remains striking about many of these new media technologies is how much they rely on the forms and conventions of old technologies. Just as a great deal of television is in come sense literary or theatrical, so many CD-ROMs and websites implicitly use the book as the model for structuring ways in which readers get access to information; and the internet, of course, is heavily reliant on written text and on conventional verbal literacy - as indeed are many computer games.[3]

Buckingham's observations are common amongst commentators seeking to situate new digital media within a traditional media context. Hence, Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska consider the ways in which videogames are borrowing from cinema;[4] Sean Cubitt observes the prominence of cartography in digital media, [5] while many 'cinematic' horror videogames also draw upon CCTV cameras**,** photography and paintings.[6] Less common are discussions of the ways in which established media forms are incorporating the codes and conventions of digital texts and technologies. This is a undoubtedly a component of Bolter and Grusin's study, which observes the ways TV news increasingly resembles an internet site in its the visual design,[7] a popular American newspaper which constructs a printed version of its own website,[8] or live musical shows employing televisions within their performances.[9] Given that many forms considered to be new media are now decades old - home videogames systems have been commercially available in the west since the 1970s, while the internet appears to be in its second incarnation - or entrenched in contemporary life - evident in the penetration of the mobile phone and digital television - many modes and communicative methods of these young media have become so assimilated as to be reincorporated into elder formats. Contemporary convergence of media technologies, as discussed by Henry Jenkins, involving industrial practices such as 'extension', 'synergy' and 'franchising, involving the coordinated transference of branded media content across multiple media platforms[10] results in the textualities of divergent forms - films, television shows, videogames and websites - becoming increasingly interconnected.

Studies such as Tom Engelhardt critique of merchandising strategies in 1980s children's television;[11] Robert C. Allen observations concerning the marketable 'toyetic' characters of children's fantasy cinema,[12] or Buckingham discussion of the multi-media 'cultural practice' and global phenomena of *Pokémon* [13] suggest children's media is not immune from such tendencies, but might be variously well suited for the kinds of diversification of products and texts these trends entail.

Such processes can be clearly seen in the Nickelodeon TV show *Dora the Explorer*, a cartoon series which incorporates elements of the videogame and computer interface into its aesthetic and viewing strategy.

2. *Dora the Explorer*

Dora the Explorer is a show produced by the commercial children's television network Nickelodeon, first screened in 2000 on Nick Jr. According to the network's website, Dora is 'a half-hour animated children's television series starring a 7-year old Latina girl and her friends' which is 'designed to actively engage preschoolers in a play-along, computer-style adventure.'[14] As with many Nickelodeon shows, there are numerous *Dora the Explorer* synergistic products associated with the show aimed at children, such as clothes, bed covers, soft toys, and craft sets, and the show itself extends into many media forms including books, comics, DVDs, computer and videogames. In terms of the show, the structure of each episode is the same: Dora must embark upon a short journey, her destination ranging from the mundane - a school, a library, or a relative's home - to the fantastical - the Lost City of Toys, the Purple Planet or Treasure Island. Aiding her in this quest is her companion Boots the monkey, a backpack containing various items that will assist her progress, and a map that charts the route she must take. The map shows a series of distinct obstacles, characters, architectural, or natural features between Dora and her final goal - a river, a pyramid, a garden gate - each of which poses a challenge which Dora must overcome.

Perhaps the first thing to note is the extent to which this series has seemingly responded to popular and academic criticisms of the lack of diversity in children's television shows. In particular *Dora the Explorer*, both the show and the character, address the calls contained within Frederico A. Subervi-Velez and Susan Colsant's 1993 chapter 'The Television Worlds of Latino Children'.[15] Pointing to the significant rise in the Hispanic population within the United States, constituting a numerical majority in some cities, and schooling systems, and the increasing attention this demographic receives from advertisers, political parties and media researchers; Subervi-Velez and Colsant point to the minimal or negative representation of ethnic minorities, the overwhelming absence of Hispanic characters, and the dominance of English-language outside Hispanic-orientated television networks. The central character of this series is Dora, a seven-year old Latina young woman

who each episode journeys across a different landscape in a quest of progression and acquisition. Consequently, Nickelodeon's show answers the call for more active female characters in children's culture, as well as more central representations of non-white characters in children's television.

The prominence of Spanish within *Dora the Explorer* corresponds with an educational imperative across much of children's culture, evident in media associated with the series. However, it appears less concerned with embracing children for whom Spanish is their first language, as with teaching English-speaking children how to speak the second most-common language within the United States. Throughout her adventures, Dora uses Spanish words to open gates, address Spanish-speaking characters, and engage with her parents. Words of Spanish are also integrated into the programme: At the beginning of each episode Dora addresses the audience with a cheerful '¡hola!' before she says 'hello', Dora's bilingual Backpack exclaims '¡delicioso!' as she re-engorges her contents, and there are many moments when the audience is encouraged to count along with Dora and Boots in Spanish. This method of encouraging viewers to respond to questions or join in is central to the show's key teaching and learning strategy. At various stages in her journey, when Dora encounters problems of various forms, the viewer is asked to 'help' by participating in the narrative. This may be answering a riddle from the Grumpy Old Troll to be allowed to cross his bridge, working out which sections of track fit which gaps in a railway line to allow Azul the train to cross, or solving simple sums. While this is a common method in children's television, presenters frequently breaking the fourth wall to address their audiences, and subsequently responding to an imagined answer, what makes *Dora the Explorer* particularly interesting in terms of the relationship between 'new' and old 'media' is the ways in which the cartoon's reaction to its audience's implied response remediates computer game interfaces and traditions of representation.

3. (Inter) Activity and Children's Television

The history of children's television in the United States and Britain is characterised by a rage of anxieties. Fears about television inducing addiction and poor health amongst children, an incitement to criminality and vulgar tastes, the erosion of the boundaries between adulthood and childhood, and the stupefying effects of this 'passive' medium reproduce previous cultural antipathy towards cinema,[16] while anticipating subsequent negative discourses surrounding videogames.[17] A recurring antidote to such concerns is the claim that children's television should encourage activity. Lynn Spigel observes this emphasis on industrious and active participation in critical debates surrounding 1950s children's television, observing that such assertions were not applied to television for adults Juvenile delinquency, criminality and immorality amongst the young was blamed on mass media in

post-war America. While many voices championed television as a force for bringing the family together, there were concurrent concerns about the new medium's 'dissemination of debased knowledge and its related encouragement of passive minds and bodies.' Passive addiction, it was feared, might result in poor hygiene and nutrition, physical and mental disorders, and aggressive behaviour.[18] The antidote was television designed to allow the possibility of children's participation, such as drawing and writing competitions.[19] Such concerns were also expressed in Britain, where broadcasting was and continues to be subject to a greater degree of regulation, originated in the publicly owned British Broadcasting Company. Writing about the history of British media for children, Stephen Wagg illustrates how concerns about imitation, founded on conceptions of children as a vulnerable and passive group, resulted in a broad political consensus that this should be counteracted through an emphasis, in approved children's culture, on *activity*. This is traced through Baden-Powell's scouts movement, to BBC radio, to television shows, typified by the institutional *Blue Peter* with its home making sections and charily appeals, all of which sought to make young people active, rather than inactive, recipients.[20] Television for children, in a British context, traditionally deflects criticism through encouraging productive activities - craft projects, letter writing, competitions - participation - singing, answering questions - and education - teaching numeracy, literacy and life skills. Although Wagg argues such concerns about the *active* viewer have largely been replaced by ideas of the child consumer in Saturday morning television of the 1990s, the emphasis on activity is still evident in many Nic Jr. pre-school programmes. *Dora the Explorer* notably represents this participation through the conventions of interactive digital media.

Dora the Explorer's remediation of computer and videogames is evident in a number of regular features within the show. Early episodes began with a camera moving through a child's bedroom to close in on a computer screen, situating the show within a digital space at odds with its cell-animation aesthetic. The series reproduces one of the key organising features of many game genres: spatial progress. Henry Jenkins in conversation with Mary Fuller observed parallels between Nintendo videogames and colonial narratives with their emphasis on spatial progression through sequences of visually spectacular environments. Indeed, Jenkins might have been referring to the cartoon adventures when he wrote: 'Virtual reality opens new spaces for exploration, colonization, and exploitation, returning to a mythic time when there were worlds without limits and resources beyond imagining.'[21] The writer draws applicable parallels between Nintendo videogames and other forms of child-associated culture such as Narnia, Oz, Middle Earth fantasy, and amusement park rides.[22] Each episode of *Dora the Explorer* is concerned with navigating a space, be it a journey to the North Pole, across

Nursery Rhyme Land, or in a submarine under the sea. This journey is represented through Map, an anthropomorphosised cartographical device that is brought forth from Dora's backpack when the viewer is encouraged to shout his name. A representation of the terrain that Dora must cross then fills the screen, in the manner of the familiar computer game info space, the term Aylish Wood uses to refer to the integral space unmediated by the game avatar, including gages, timers and maps.[23] Showing a player's location in the virtual environment, the image Map contains similarly seems to exist as a non-diegetic zone outside the cartoon world. Similarly, when 'Backpack' is called upon to surrender one of her objects to help Dora's journey, the screen switches to an image of the character surrounded by the objects available in a style reminiscent of the inventory screen in many adventure computer and videogames. The objects Backpack carries correspond with the tasks ahead of Dora, providing paddles to cross a river, or sticky tape to allow progress up a slippery mountain, in the same manner as found objects allow progress through adventure game spaces. However, the most notable remediation of digital media is represented by the computer desktop-style arrow that appears when audiences are asked to select an object, either from Backpack or from Dora's environment. In this case, the selectable element will appear with a glowing outline, similar to objects in computer and videogames which can be interacted with. Dora will ask the viewers advice on what object to select, the arrow will hover momentarily, giving the audience time to respond, or move from option to option as Dora continues to talk, before 'clicking' on the correct option. As such, the traditional interactive dimensions of children's television are translated into the conventions of the new interactive 'point and click' computer and videogame.

4. The Ludological and the Ludite

Despite television's non-participatory nature, shows for children tended to address their audience as active participants. Dora simply interprets children's television's historical preoccupation with activity and participation according to the mode of interactive media. The processes of remediative at work within *Dora the Explorer* may appear counterintuitive, running against the predominate old-to-new media flow of cultural influence. In its sophistication such tendencies seem at odds with a seemingly simplistic series aimed at pre-school children. From a historical perspective, however, children's televisions has always contained elements of interactivity pre-empting technological developments such as digital television, computer games consoles and the internet, which make viewer participation in on-screen activity a real possibility. Consequently, the modality of computer and videogame fits well with the traditional address of children's television within the UK and the United States. Moreover, the ways in which *Dora the Explorer* reproduces aspects of interactive digital media, not so much through

the point-and-click arrow, but through its emphasis on spatial progression, puzzle solution, and collection, anticipates the franchise's subsequent marketing as digital games with different degrees of educational content. Such regular elements translate well into, for example, the PlayStation game *Barnyard Buddies*, where Dora collects stars, and Boots retrieves useful objects from haystacks, while searching for various lost farm animals. *Dora Saves the Mermaids* has players selecting a vacuum cleaner from Backpack in a manner identical to the non-interactive TV show, features a Seashell Bridge with stepping-stone shells which must be crossed in numerical order, and a compelling combination of traditional and digital interaction where players must press the action button while simultaneously shout 'squeak' at the screen in order to summon a dolphin to help cross the Silly Sea.

Moreover, if the educational imperative remains that children's television imparts valuable knowledge and skills to its audience, the remediation of computer game aesthetics corresponds with some contemporary views on teaching and learning within the classroom. With its stealthy teaching of numeracy, problem solution, and language skills, *Dora the Explorer* clearly evidences such intent. That educational content in the show is associated with digital media modes of interaction is appropriate to some current constructions of children, technology and teaching practices. In educational discourses Buckingham observes descriptions of children as technologically savvy surfers of an emerging cyber-culture, with the use of computers in schools promoted as a means of re-invigorating dusty scholarship and engaging young people in the digital language in which they are fluent.[24] While remaining traditionally non-participatory in format, *Dora the Explorer* is clearly reflecting a perceived familiarity of digital interfaces amongst its pre-school audience, or anticipating their use of educational software in years to come, and translating its own non-interactive interactive interface accordingly.

At the same time, *Dora the Explorer* also reflects anxieties circulating children's use of new media technologies. Children, as a socially constructed audience, have a problematic relationship with recent media forms, and Buckingham notes the polarised constructions of children as both empowered by digital technologies, and in need of protection from such developments.[25] Narratives of computers revolutionising the classroom exist side by side with darker tales of cyber-grooming, mobile phone bullying and 'happy slapping', videogame addiction, and internet pornography. If children are seen as more at home with digital technologies than their elders, this is not something adults necessarily feel at ease with. Anxieties about children's knowledge of new media to the exclusion of adults, and concerns about the extent to which children's culture has been increasingly technological and commercialised, are identified by Patricia Holland in her discussion of postmodern children's television. Like the cartoon internet cow Holland

describes, *Dora the Explorer* 'straddles the cosy children's world of puppets and friendly animals and a much more threatening landscape of a technologised future.'[26] Despite the familiarity with digital technologies the series assumes amongst its audience, and the show's apparent location within a computer terminal, the series maintains a traditional hand-drawn cartoon aesthetic far from the frenetic computer generated animation of many other teen and pre-school series. This traditional style is notably enhanced through the locations of *Dora the Explorer*, which are predominantly pastoral, rural and natural. Dora and Boots cross rivers and lakes, mountain ranges and hills, forests and jungles. Narratives and characters tend to be from traditional fairy tales, such as the three little pigs, or the Grumpy Old Troll, or the Prince Dora rescues from the High Tower. Computer and videogames, such as *Barnyard Buddies*, *Dora Saves the Mermaids* or *Dora the Explorer Saves the Snow Princess* continue such trends in their location within pastoral settings and traditional children's culture. Despite their situation within new media, in both analogue and digital incarnations, *Dora the Explorer* is not far removed from the television 1950s children's shows Spigel considers, being 'symptomatic of the more general efforts to establish an economy of pleasure for children spectators that suit[s] adult concepts of appropriate children's entertainment.'[27]

5. Conclusion

In various ways, *Dora the Explorer* remediates computer and videogames: through its quest narrative of spatial progression, involving the completion of specific tasks along the way; in its reproduction of the 'info space' of map screens and inventories, and in its use of a computer cursor as a surrogate for viewers' participatory decision making. This corresponds with a historical concern within children's television that viewers should be actively engaged in its content, an activity translated into the interactivity of the computer and videogame. The *Dora* brand can be seen to negotiate the perceived emergence of a 'digital generation' of pre-schoolers, either already conversant with the language of new media or needing to be brought up to speed in preparation for the digital school and workplace, The show also can be seen as appeasing concerns about children's over-familiarity with digital media, the detrimental effects of computer technologies on contemporary childhood, and adult nostalgia for a less complex era of childhood and children's culture.

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Humanity and Digital Characters in Virtual Worlds: Crossing the Fictional Boundaries

Alexandre Monnin

Abstract
From Star Ocean III to the whole. Hack conglomerate, the ontological status of the virtual character (especially Non Playing Characters, NPCs) with which players interact with a yet unseen freedom became a pressing question. Contrary to cinema or literature, where character are reducible to sentences on a book or a few 'dead' images on a screen, AI in video games seems to yield life to the 'little computer people' inside the screen. The narratologists vs. ludologists debate shows new promises as the possibilities to interact grow and the dream that characters begin to act on their own account becomes a reality. But there comes another price to pay, well noticed by the creator of Star Ocean III or .Hack Sign, a disruptive effect felt when the narrative thread weaving human existence - we may call it 'conscience' with Daniel Dennett - reaches NPCs as well. It is our own identity, as the only extant narrative creatures that would become threatened by such a possibility. Hence the question that both the video game and anime series ask in concert: how would we react, on an ethical and political level, to the breathing result of our most cherished wish, namely, that fiction(s) would become (a living) reality?

Key Words: Fictions, artifacts, reality, video games, AI, RPGs, existence, ontology.

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1. Introduction

Definitions of the virtual[1] are sometimes seen as paralleling those related to fiction. Texts, for example, can be understood as devices pointing towards a virtual universe with its own rules. However, such a trend of analysis tends to reduce fiction to a linguistic relationship, namely, that of reference, with all the philosophical problems of a meinongian flavor it does elicit when the *denotatum* of a word, in a truth-conditional sentence, is not 'real'. In this chapter, we would like to argue in favor of a renewed conception of fiction by taking into account the new kind of materiality exhibited by 'artifacts of the virtual' such as videogames, with a special focus on the identity of characters in role-playing games (RPGs) and avatars in virtual communities. Our thesis is that the ontology of fictional characters, and more precisely, their identity, is highly dependent on technical realities; whence the many changes induced to the concept of fiction by virtual

persistent worlds with consequences echoing some of the debates between narratologists and ludologists.

2. Reference

The relation between linguistic entities and their references serves as a ready-made model through which fiction is understood; no attention is being given to the multifarious artifacts that make us adopt the required attitude. All of them, indeed, are construed as surrogates for sentences and propositions.

Such an account betrays a common prejudice about the nature of fiction: that for something to qualify as fictional is tantamount to a mere denial of its existence. When philosophers, for example, are dealing with fiction in the context of science, it is heavily implied that they're not dealing with 'real' entities - just the contrary. Yet, such a shortcut is not sufficiently grounded to count as true. For what does not belong to the realm of reality might simply be a mistake or something impossible. There must be something more, first, to be *identified* as a fiction, then, to qualify as a fiction of a *virtual* kind.[2]

If fiction has been reduced to two components, a *representation* and its *missing object* - whether conceived as a positive entity or not, it might come from a shallow reading of Roman Ingarden's work on the literary work of art. It is true, as we noted earlier on, that Ingarden did insist on the web of assertions that, in a book, gives birth to a fictional world. But we might want to consider that it was mainly due to his careful attention, as betoken his phenomenological analyses, to the cultural object that a literary work of art is. Against the tendency consisting in a generalization of denotation, bluntly opposing real and non-existent things, there remains the possibility to go one step further and root fiction in concrete cultural artifacts such as books by providing a detailed account of its dependency upon them. As Amie Thomasson puts it:

> The problem of the ontological status of cultural objects, as Ingarden would analyze it, is born of an impoverished set of ontological categories, that relegates everything to the categories of the real - psychological or physical - and the ideal. The solution to the problem is to note not just one category beyond those (the purely intentional), but indeed a wide range of categories based in the different ways in which an object may depend on conscious acts, physical objects, and even ideal entities, without being identical to any of these.[3]

Let's now explore the second possibility, which will command us to turn our attention to virtual worlds and see what types of dependencies they bring about.

3. Characters

By virtual worlds we do not mean VR technologies but their popular guise: video games. No doubt video games should be comprised in the set of artifacts that draw us into the right kind of immersion that fiction requires. In this respect, characters play a privileged role, functioning as some kind of proxy allowing the players' actions to have consequences in the game that help the story to unfold (both narratologists and ludologists are thus compelled to give them peculiar attention).

Another interesting feature that they possess is what we would call a *'multimodal' mode of being*. By this expression, we intend to designate their ever changing identity, especially in the context of RPGs, which will provide the main locus of our analysis. By combining the interplay of texts, images and the possibility to interact with a coherent universe, video games retain the mode of being that fictional objects gained from pre-existing artifacts like books and films while at the same time acquiring a new one, thanks to the peculiarities due to their being interactive devices.

The main feature of virtual worlds is indeed their being prone to let us interact with them. In other words, real beings (or let us suppose so for the sake of the argument) are able to interact with virtual worlds full of unicorns, chimeras and other strange beasts, customarily populating every philosopher's ontological zoo as we've previously seen. However, we are not dealing with mere *representations* of non-existing beings. Instead, these fictions are now embodied through the digital medium, giving them the very concreteness they lacked. This is not to say that descriptions (what is usually called 'representations', even when it cannot be a re-presentation) no longer plays any role. The virtual world we interact with is but only a fraction of a fictional universe devoid of concrete existence that remains in the background. That's what the dialogues, through texts and voices (the descriptive ones at least) or cut-scenes are here for: they're devices, laid down in order to introduce the player to a dimension he won't be able to interact with.

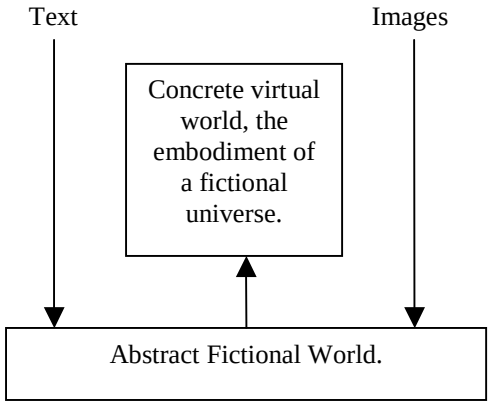

Figure 1

Let's take examples that give evidence of this multimodal dimension as exemplified through the evolution of CRPGs' (Computer Role-Playing games) history.

A. Books alongside Games: *Temple of Apshai (ToA)*

ToA is a game whose first instalment appeared at the end of the 70s. Its story now seems to epitomize the word 'cliché' since the player is simply described as an 'adventurer' whose quest lead him on a journey to explore the long-lost ruins of the dreadful Temple of Apshai. However, one should not be blinded by this apparent bluntness. In fact, the game's pioneering status and the ensuing lack of widespread conventions which affected the then-new CRPG genre made it necessary for its producers to explain pen-and-papers RPG players how it should (and simply that it could[4]) be played. The lack of hardware power was a clear limit to the immersive potential of Apshai, both as a game and a universe. Such a predicament called for a shrewd solution. For the main part of its history, books were probably Humankind's favourite means to elicit immersive states. Hence, pen-and-papers RPGs always come with thick manuals fully loaded with descriptions and narratives that contribute to flesh out the fictional universe players are supposed to deal with. Apshai's manual[5] is no exception. It provides a thorough background to the game's universe, alongside technicalities about the gameplay. More specifically, it even palliates the lack of in-game details due to the aforementioned hardware limitations. Whereas the player's actions are

narrated in a panel situated to the right of the screen, every room in the dungeons is given its own description […] inside the manual.

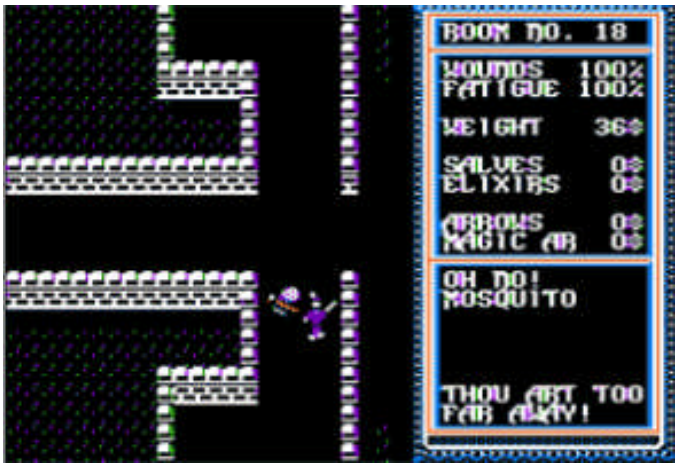

Figure 2
Dunjonquest: Temple of Apshai[6]

The fictional universe of *ToA* is mainly described in the manual whilst the player interacts with only a sample of that world - drier in terms of narration - the game itself. A kind of division of labor is at work as two different artifacts, a book and a computer game, each assume a different role (with blending spaces just like the right-hand side panel, ahead at this time of many evolutions yet to come) and each point to a specific reality.

B. Games as Novels: *Planescape Torment (PT)*

Twenty years later, in 1999, *Planescape Torment* (*PT*) became famous for the overwhelming length of its dialogues. A fan-made novelization written by Rhys Hess from the original text by Chris Avellone and Colin McComb is widely held as the best available and counts no less than 150,000 words[7]. In *PT*, actions initiated by the player, more often than not by speaking to other characters, often lead to counter descriptions (Text) of what happens, the actions described by means of words having no ingame animated representations (Images), the player remaining passive (Interaction) during the whole process. This illustrates a shift from the foreground - the virtual world which lends itself to modifications through interaction, to the background - to the fictional universe whose larger setting encompasses the virtual world. Every RPG is a wild-paced succession of such shifts, and the characters' ontological identity varies along the same lines exactly.

Figure 3
Planescape Torment:
Textual descriptions palliate the lack of true cut-scenes[8]

C. Cut-scenes instead of Text: *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)*

As of now, *Dragons Ages Origins* is still waiting to be published. It is worth mentioning though, especially after *Planescape Torment*, because it is already heralded as the spiritual successor of renowned Infinity Engine titles like *Baldur's Gate* and *PT* itself. Videos posted on the editor's site which expose DAO' gameplay mechanics already give a good glimpse of the final product. We'll rely on them to foster our analysis.

One of these videos puts a strong emphasis on the interactions between characters and the moral conundrums they give rise to. No need to spend too much time on all the features advertised in this video, we're only concerned with one of them: the paramount space allotted to animated cut-scenes. In one scene, the player character (PC) encounters a prisoner who, according to the player's choice, chooses to reveal that he is in possession of some key and asks for the player's help in exchange for information about it. The player is then offered the choice to simply decide to kill the prisoner and pull out the key from his corpse. Such actions are no longer described at length, as in *PT*, as evidenced by the sentence by which the choice is presented: 'I'll take that (*Kill him and take the key.*)' Instead, the details are kept for the cinematic cut-scene that follows: unable to intervene, the player witnesses the consequences of his actions in every detail. Yet, this shift of emphasis from text to image, novel to cinema, textual cut-scene to cinematic

cut-scenes cannot conceal one simple fact: ontologically the situation hasn't changed. Text or image, the player's involvement remains the same; as such, *DAO* truly is *PT*'s heir.

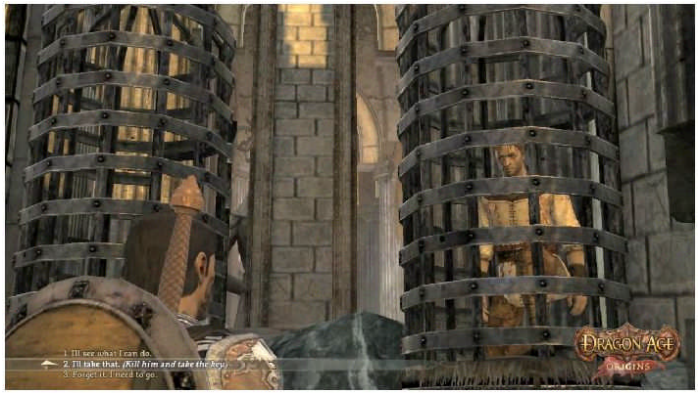

Figure 4
Details are given through cut-scenes instead of text
'I'll take that (*Kill him and take the key.*)'

D. MMORPGs

The situation is slightly different with MMORPGs, for the digitally implemented universe they consist in is mostly composed of human beings. The lack of narration and - consequently - of descriptive dialogues and cinematic cut-scenes diminishes the weight of the background universe in favour of interactions between characters, in other words, *avatars* of real persons.

Hence, the identity of characters is torn between the different roles accounting for the various facets of a game. In MMORPGs, a character is best called avatar, a proxy for someone else's identity, an extension of a pre-existing agent, allowing that entity to connect with other people's proxies. An avatar becomes the player's 'digital noemata.' Yet, in RPGs, an avatar, being integrated in a narration, can no longer be anyone's proxy. Its identity has already been defined by scenarists, the player's latitude residing only in those gaps of freedom left between cut-scenes. In most cases whatever she does has no impact whatsoever on the story or ending. Though this is changing, a vast majority of games still provides no open-ended gameplay. A character still displays no real autonomy: either the player is in control and his/her own identity prevails whilst the lack of story makes it difficult to enter in the state of immersion inherent to fiction, or the character is entirely predefined owing to the programmers' imperative to narrate a story and interactivity plays only

a very small part; whence the paradoxical nature of the identity of virtual character in video games.

We'll call it 'the paradox of *Star Ocean III*'[9], a game where it was thoroughly examined and instantiated through its storyline. The game (thanks to the players efforts!) recounts the story of a teenager (the player character, PC, who's identity we get to learn as the game progresses), who discovers that his world is in fact a simulated world, a MMORPGs, within a real world. Avatars (NPCs from the player's point of view) in this virtual world are the proxies of the real world's inhabitants. The protagonist of this game, just as the player himself, faces a difficult alternative: either he is a NPC, and his identity doesn't pertain to him, meaning that it has been fixed by a programmer and a scenarist, or he is a PC, with human agency but then both his and the player's agency are ultimately constrained by choices made when the story was written and the game's rules implemented.[10]

Protagonists and antagonists in videogames are still both story-driven types of characters, with the former being furthermore controlled by players. They both seem, *mutatis mutandis*, to lack the autonomy that would differentiate them from characters found in books or films. Some NPCs, on the other hand, such as simple enemies, AI-driven agents, display behaviour that is not entirely predictable. They're the sort of character that players, through the PC, mainly interact with. This is contrary to antagonists, whose identity oscillates back and forth between semiotic descriptions (texts and images) and interactive, AI-driven agents. They act in the foreground as concrete agents, and in the background as abstract fictions escaping the reach of interaction, thereby making it impossible to identify these characters as univocally concrete or abstract entities but a constantly flickering compound of both aspects.

As such, video games get their distinctive features from the digital technologies. The indeterminacy-affecting agents, owing to a lack of predictability in their behaviour, is not due to some universally ascribed heuristic trait or an intrinsic vagueness just as the one that defines, ontologically, characters from other mediums. Quite the contrary: it is the result of a special technology and affects the identity of characters since the properties that can be attributed to them, technical ones - as befits concrete digital entities, differ from those of 'abstract artifacts', as Amie Thomasson puts it, born out of books and films.

4. Consequences

As long as fictional objects are only thought to be (non-existing) correlates of various representations of a linguistic kind, their identity does not require any pressing (i.e., outside of the philosophical realm) investigations. Or so it seems. But what if concrete fictional objects could be said to exist in the context of virtual digital worlds?

Then we should ask ourselves, what properties do they have? Which are essential and which are not? In other words, what exactly is the identity of such entities? To understand this we must turn away from language and examine the concrete ontological and, consequently, technical status of digital objects. Semantic may be the prelude to ontology, it shall never be our last word.

In *Star Ocean III*, the PC transcends its own condition by becoming real. In this article our main concern was not with any shift from non-existence to existence but rather from abstractedness to concreteness. The game's plot itself calls for such an interpretation. Even more so since it helps the player performs it through rules of gameplay. This is the only way to make sense of the word 'virtual' as applied to digital artifacts: 'striving to become real'. Real, according to our research, only means autonomous enough to qualify as being alive. A feat that seems far less intractable that the passage from inexistence to existence. This is why virtual fictional entities have the possibility, albeit still theoretical, quite unlike their 'imaginative' counterparts, to one day become *real* in this sense as opposed to *fictional*. Only by combining such ideas with the results of an investigation focused on digital objects will we be able to outline a suitable ontological description of virtual worlds and characters.

5. Conclusion

By shifting our account of fiction from possible worlds to virtual ones, we've displaced the question from the traditional account of non-existing beings to the necessity to scrutinize concrete and interactive devices and the way they operate. If, to borrow an idea from Amie Thomasson's 'artefactual' theory of fiction, central to determining the mode of being of fictional objects are their dependencies upon artifacts, then virtual technologies and video games in particular invite us to reconsider what fiction is. It would be ludicrous to state that no fictional entity can emerge from linguistic representations. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that such a mode of dependency is far from being the only one conceivable. In fact, fictional universes consist in fictional entities whose ontological status and identity is ever-changing, as exemplified by character in video games, since the relations of dependencies (textual, cinematic or interactive ones) that characterize them constantly follow and replace one another.[11]

Notes

[1] By virtual world we mean a fictional (rather than an imaginary one) space realized through various mediums (including computers and game consoles) inducing an experience of *immersion* within an environment. Immersion

itself can never be purely mental, and has to be accomplished through material means (immersion can thence concern other artifacts, cf. *supra*); in the case of virtual worlds, mainly through interactivity.

[2] It doesn't mean, on the other hand, that, in the case of literary or cinematographic works of art, we aren't used to *treating* them as 'representations of non-existent objects'. What it means, however, is that: a) the nature of fictions in these cases derives from the peculiar nature of the artifacts they depend on - different artifacts entail different modes of being, and b) once again, coupling a non-existent object with a representations isn't *sufficient* a criterion to qualify as a fiction. Quite unlike this common-held approach, we'd rather argue that fictions are abstract. As an object, a unicorn, for example, is always a fiction. Not something merely lacking existence. Not even something lacking existence at all. Should bioengineers decide to create weird animals adorned with a unique horn on their heads, the latter wouldn't qualify as genuine unicorns because unicorns are essentially fictional entities (not virtual ones however, cf. *infra*), not genetically modified animals. Because origins matter, identity is not tantamount to mere coincidence. This is in tune with the 1990 book *Jurassic Park* by Michael Chrichton whose resurrected monsters undisputedly qualify as genuine dinosaurs because their origins can be traced back in times (genetically). The fact that their existence was temporarily put on hold for reasons still unknown does not threaten their identity as 'real' dinosaurs'.

[3] Thomasson (2005), p. 135.

[4] Scans of the Commodore 64 version manual are available online at : <http://www.c64sets.com/temple_of_apshai.html>.
See also Barton (2007) from whose article the Apshai picture is extracted.

[5] Significantly, it's called the « Book of Lore ».

[6] The entry for room number eighteen on the first level reads: 'The passage reeks of spoiled and rotten matter. A strip of cloth sticks out from beneath a mound of dirt in the southern portion of the passageway.'

[7] Available online at <http://www.wischik.com/lu/senses/pst-book.html>.

[8] This is a typical example of a 'textual cut-scene' in *Planescape Torment*. The passage reads: 'As you touch the corpse, a sudden shock passes through your body, and there is a stirring in the air, like a wind had found its way into the building and is fighting to get free. You feel a strange, wrenching pain in your skull, as if someone is hammering on it, sharply, desperately.'

[9] It might be argued that his paradox is tantamount to the twist at the end of Jorge Luis Borges' short story, the *Circular ruins*. First things first, as regards game exegesis Final Fantasy X and the mythology of dreamers it build upon are probably a lot closer to Borges' story. In *Star Ocean III*, the characters are not dream-like creature; from the player's point of view they

are PCs, while from the diegetic players, those residing in an alternate universe, the 'real' universe of SOIII, they are NPCs. In both cases, concrete virtual and fictional artifacts.

[10] One way to bypass this difficulty is to blur the line between PCs and NPCs by imagining 'semi-autonomous' agents, cf. Sengers & al (2000).

[11] Jesper Juul suggests that 'the fictional world of a video game is projected in a variety of ways - using graphics, sound, text, advertising, the *game manual*, and the game rules' [my emphasis]. Every such projection corresponds to a different kind of dependency (cf. Juul (2005), p. 121). This is precisely what we've tried to demonstrate.

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PART IX

Character-Community & Anthropology

Among the Spirits of Cyberspace: An Analysis of Shamanic Motifs in *Neuromancer*

Anelie Crighton

Abstract
Drawing on anthropological, religious, and historical studies of shamanism, this chapter traces the correspondences between the depiction of human interaction with cyberspace in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* and the progress of a Siberian shaman, whose physical and mental trials eventually perfect his or her mastery of journeys to the spirit world. From protagonist Case's early initiatory sickness to his privileged communication with the supreme spirits of cyberspace, the Artificial Intelligences Neuromancer and Wintermute, numerous features of *Neuromancer* may be described as 'shamanic'. A technological universe which shares traits with a shamanic worldview enables Gibson to portray Artificial Intelligences (AIs) with unusual purity, unfettered by the necessity to embody them in android form or burden them with human motivations, and creates a relation between human beings and AIs which parallels the fear and fascination of believers confronted with the divine. The chapter concludes with an examination of Case's role in the narrative as a truth-finder and healer, a reading which challenges accepted views of the novel as uncomplicatedly nihilistic.

Key Words: Cyberspace, *Neuromancer*, William Gibson, shaman, shamanism, nihilism.

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Twenty-five years ago *Neuromancer* grabbed public and critical attention with its audacious vision of humanity's collision with technology. Yet in the midst of its startling originality is something at least centuries, and possibly millennia, old: the practice of shamanism, embodied by the protagonist Case. That there is something 'shamanic' about the plot and symbolism of *Neuromancer* has been sporadically noted in the past. In his explanation of the importance of the 'flatline' to Gothic Materialism, Fisher points out the resonance between the dismemberment imagery of a shaman's initiatory journey and the words of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Neuromancer:

> The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend.
> […] Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend [...]
> I am the dead, and their land.[1]

Ben-Tov also identifies Case's final cyberspace experience as an 'initiatory death and dismemberment'.[2] And in 'Life After Cyberspace', Agre dismisses *Neuromancer* as little more than 'an archaic tale of shamanic journeys overlaid with the symbolism of computers'.[3] This paper draws on detailed accounts of shamanism in its Siberian context in order to discover which aspects of the novel resonate with that religious phenomenon, and then examines what implications such parallels may have for our perception of Neuromancer's artificial intelligences and the novel's oft-observed nihilism.

1. A Shaman in Cyberspace

A two-fold apprenticeship was a mandatory first step for a Siberian shaman-candidate. A 'didactic' education in practical matters such as the names of spirits, topography of the spirit world and the content of rituals would be supplied by an older shaman,[4] while 'ecstatic' teachings were supplied by the spirits themselves, who often signified their choice of candidate by afflicting him or her with serious mental and physical torment.[5] When the reader first encounters *Neuromancer's* protagonist, Case, he is concluding a short, angry downward spiral begun when he stole from his employers. Their revenge on him - the introduction of a mycotoxin to his bloodstream that cripples his nervous system and induces thirty hours of hallucinations[6] - begins a period of suffering which may be read as a classic initiatory sickness. The black market surgery which repairs this damage shortly thereafter is also an agonising and disorienting experience, during which Case experiences 'pain beyond anything to which the name of pain is given'.[7] Pain, hallucinations, isolation, seizures and disembodied voices have all in various combinations been described as part of a shaman's initiatory sickness.[8] And just as the cure for candidate shamans is to enter trance and interact with the spirit world,[9] so Case's return to cyberspace marks his physical recovery, and the experience for him is one of ecstasy.[10]

Though Gibson might have imagined a future in which Case could jack into the matrix via a multitude of different intermediate technologies, Case must have his deck. The shaman's equivalent instrument is the drum,[11] which serves as a physical gateway to the spirit world (in that its hypnotic beat enables the shaman to enter trance), and a metaphoric steed on which the shaman rides or flies to his/her encounter with the spirits.[12] Eliade states, 'The courser is pre-eminently the shamanic animal; the gallop and dizzying speed are traditional expressions of 'flight,' that is, of ecstasy.'[13] In much the same way, jacking in for Case is a rush, and sensations of speed are often associated with his activities in cyberspace.[14]

Siberian peoples believed that people, animals and features of the landscape alike had souls, and thus the spirit world to which the soul of a shaman flew replicated the topography of their homeland.[15] Once entranced, shamans negotiated this highly-charged spiritual plane in order to discover

and address the spirits who were the goal of their perilous journey.[16] The matrix of *Neuromancer* shares this tendency to reproduce Case's urban environment as a familiar-yet-magical hyperreality. The computers of large corporations are realised in cyberspace as vast, brightly coloured pyramids, cubes and spiral arms positioned on a grid, rather like sky scrapers on a city street. The pattern repeats itself: when Case penetrates Tessier-Ashpool's viciously well-protected computer 'cores', he discovers they contain 'an endless neon cityscape'.[17] This topographical analogy points to the fact that cyberspace is not alien or hallucinatory so much as it is a flipside, an immanent reality which is meaningful because of its relation to ordinary space; as in the case of the spirit world, things can be achieved there which solve problems in the physical world.

Case's engagement with cyberspace also shares a number of other features with shamanic practice. The novel presents the reader with dual realities: Case can only operate consciously in one 'place' at a time, alternating between the conventional, visible world and cyberreality. Equally, shamans do not engage with spirits or the spirit world outside of a trance performance. The physicality of Case's engagement with cyberspace is surprisingly important in the text, given that all of the action takes place in the character's mind; not only must he plug electrodes into his head to project his consciousness online, he often goes hours without sustenance while jacked in, and types in programming code almost continuously. Shamanising too is hard work. The ethnographer S.M. Shirokogoroff, who observed Tungus people prior to the Russian revolution, gained the impression that 'most of the shamans whom he met enjoyed performing, although it was so exhausting that they had to pace themselves carefully.'[18]

Eliade defines the shamanic spirit-journey as 'a mystical experience that allows the shaman to transcend time and space.'[19] Case's subjective experiences of time generate a lot of the novel's climactic excitement. In the final Straylight run, a strict countdown in the physical world takes place alongside Case's cyber encounters with the AIs' avatars. These experiences may seem to take place over hours or even days, but always prove to have been only a matter of seconds in ordinary time.[20] These too have a significant physical drawback: as Case converses with the AIs he 'flatlines', his EEG read-out showing no synaptic activity; just such a catastrophic experience nearly resulted in the death of his mentor, McCoy Pauley.[21] It is a mark of Case's hard-won expertise towards the end of the novel that he is able to immediately identify one such artificial environment for what it is and turn the implications back on his tormentor, the AI Neuromancer:

> I know what you're doing. I'm flatlined. This has all taken about twenty seconds, right? I'm out on my ass in that

> library and my brain's dead. And pretty soon it'll *be* dead, if you got any sense.[22]

If Case starts out as one of the AIs' many manipulable employees, by its conclusion he has gained an independence and mastery which takes the AIs by surprise and allows him to complete their task on his own terms.[23] For if cyberspace correlates to the shamanic spirit world, then the AIs are its gods, and only with the guidance and assistance of others can Case operate in the realm of their power.

2. Spirits, Gods and AIs

Though a Siberian shaman had a singular vocation, he or she did not work alone. Having served an apprenticeship with an older shaman, he or she often engaged one or more assistants to prepare equipment and take a minor role in their shamanic performance.[24] Once entranced, a shaman then sought out spirit helpers, a coterie of animal souls who joined the shaman in overcoming obstacles in the spirit world. Amongst the Altai tribe, the soul of a dead shaman often assisted his or her living counterpart.[25]

A lonely figure at the novel's opening, Case's recruitment by the AI Wintermute soon sees him surrounded by a motley collection of assistants, dead and alive. Molly, a 'razorgirl' who has augmented her body with built-in mirrored glasses, razor-sharp claws and preternaturally enhanced reflexes, protects Case from physical harm and performs vital real-world feats like breaking into buildings in parallel with Case's cyber attacks. During the first of these combined efforts, they infiltrate the Sense/Net Corporation in order to steal a ROM housing McCoy Pauley. Once connected to Case's Hosaka computer, Pauley accompanies Case's every move in cyberspace, lending his technical expertise and sharing anecdotes about his former encounters with AIs in the matrix.

Scheming, mysterious, at home in the matrix but perfectly capable of reaching beyond it to toy with their hapless victims, the AIs of Tessier-Ashpool SA are frighteningly powerful. Other characters in the book might be unapologetically ruthless or horrifying, but only the AIs offer a genuine threat to humanity by being beyond our capacity to predict their behaviour, as McCoy Pauley astutely observes:

> 'Motive,' the construct said. 'Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?'
> 'Well, yeah, obviously.'
> 'Nope. I mean, it's not human. And you can't get a handle on it. […] It's one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess. […] I ain't likely to write you no poem, if you

> follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain't in no way *human*.'[26]

Like gods, they arrange human destinies to suit their own inscrutable purposes, kill without apology, and reign supreme in the novel's technological spirit world.

The great virtue of cyberspace in *Neuromancer* is that it enables Case to interact with the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer in a remarkably unmediated fashion, mind-to-mind.[27] Other influential stories of human encounters with artificial intelligence have typically housed the AI in a humanoid mechanical shell in which they are obliged to interact with humans on human terms. In Brian Aldiss's *Supertoys Last All Summer Long*, for example, an android who understands itself to be a human boy is mystified by its inability to please its human 'mother'; in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, a small group of superior androids built to serve humans rebel against their 'enslavement' and gain revenge through murder. In his examination of the resemblance between Rudolph Otto's description of the 'numinous experience' (i.e., one person's encounter with the divine) and Dick's portrayal of androids, Robert Geraci writes:

> The coincidence of fearful otherness (the androids are mechanical and without compassion; they are fundamentally unlike human beings despite their appearances) and salvific allure (they promise material well-being, continuation of the human species, physical pleasure, and emotional satisfaction) in the book resembles Otto's logic of the Holy. An erotics of desire […] combines with the threat of alterity, which makes Otto's theology and Dick's science fiction fascinating.[28]

Otto's schema may be applied as readily to *Neuromancer*, where the dread and fascination the characters feel for the AIs bolsters their god-like status. Case has good reason to fear their power, given their ability to hijack his consciousness while he is connected to the matrix, and their habit of casually eliminating anyone who obstructs their goal. Counterbalancing such dread is their offer of physical salvation: firstly by repairing his nervous system in order that he can re-enter cyberspace, and then by promising to harmlessly remove the poison sacs they have had suspended in his bloodstream once he has set them free. The reader is equally susceptible. Throughout the novel, the mystery of what the AIs are and what they want, and the deadly threat they offer to appealing central characters, works to reinforce their 'fearful otherness'. The answer to the question of what will happen when they escape their technological limitations constitutes their

'salvific allure'. The extent to which the characters and reader alike are under the sway of these emotions may be gauged by our inclination to will the AIs to success while overlooking their numerous appalling crimes. *Neuromancer* consistently gestures towards the incomprehensible motivations and deadly stratagems of these non-human beings, but the characters struggle to grasp their malevolent otherness (as late as the final run on the Villa Straylight, McCoy Pauley is still reminding Case to call Wintermute 'it' rather than 'he'), and shrug off their amorality as unexceptional in the context of illegal activity. Equally, the author can count on most science-fiction fans feeling elation rather than horror at the book's conclusion, when the combined AI achieves its freedom. Science-fiction is the genre of the new, and *Neuromancer*'s AI is a genuinely new being, an intriguing product of human technology which is fundamentally alien to the life which has given it life. Its destiny inevitably fascinates the technological novelty seekers drawn to explorations of the nature of intelligence and existence.

3. Shamanic Healing

Much as the monolithic mystery of the AIs tends to distract from their destructiveness, so Gibson's startling depiction of the urban future is apt to distract the reader from the very humane arc of character development in *Neuromancer*. When we first encounter them, most of the novel's characters are haunted by self-destructive impulses; by the conclusion, those who have survived have regained their psychic equilibrium and resolved the mental and physical assaults that threatened to destroy them. Central to their recovery is Case's shamanic quest.

Once a shaman had concluded his or her training and was recognised by their community at large as a mediator with the spirit world, he or she most often served individuals, families or clans by entering trance in order to perform divination and/or healing.[29] *Neuromancer* may be read as the story of Case's ecstatic training and first spirit journey in the service of others, which take place simultaneously.

At the penultimate moment of the Straylight run, Molly struggles to force 3Jane to reveal the code that will enable Wintermute and Neuromancer to unite as a new conscious entity. Sensing 3Jane would rather die of strangulation at Molly's hands than reveal the code, Case temporarily leaves cyberspace to confront her with her fate:

> 'Give us the fucking code,' he said. 'If you don't, what'll change? What'll ever fucking change for you? You'll wind up like the old man. You'll tear it all down and start building again! You'll build the walls back, tighter and higher…I got no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll *change* something!'[30]

3Jane knows herself to be the product of a bizarre multigenerational genetic experiment designed to create an immortal group consciousness, a hybrid of human beings kept alive over centuries via cryogenic technology and artificial intelligence.[31] The project has gone awry, however; the human subjects have been driven to self-harm and suicide, and the AIs have achieved self-awareness independent of their human creators. Case recognises the terminal stasis of the family, their inability to break out of the macabre plan devised by Marie-France Tessier and symbolised by the repellent image of the wasp's nest. By uniting Wintermute and Neuromancer, he separates their fate from that of their human progenitors, completing the task set by the AIs and healing the Tessier-Ashpool clan by giving the remaining family members the chance to break out of the incestuous cycle in which they are trapped. Having achieved the AIs' objective, Case earns his salvation: the cure for the poison sacs that might have dissolved in his bloodstream and crippled his nervous system once more. Alongside this he completes his initiation, becoming a cyber-*savant* and recovering from the emotional trauma he has carried throughout the narrative.

He is not alone in the story in carrying considerable emotional baggage. The dysfunctional upbringings and violent lives of these fringe-dwellers have lead each of them to resort to technology in their efforts to escape their emotional pain. Molly has opted for physical enhancements, making of herself a more effective predator than the pimps who exploited her body or the calm assassin who killed her lover. Case has escaped to the world of the mind, deriding his body as 'meat' and happier in cyberspace than 'the prison of his own flesh'.[32] Such extreme Cartesian dualism is not celebrated in the novel, however; rather, it is symptomatic of the characters' psychopathologies, and vanishes once they are healed. Case's emotional epiphany takes place with the simulation of a former girlfriend on a simulated beach, and it unites Case's conception of mind and body with a distinctly technological metaphor:

> There was a strength that ran in her […] Something he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew - he remembered - as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read. …Here, even here, in a place he knew for what it was, a coded model of some stranger's memory, the drive held.[33]

In a place Case knows to be a technological simulacra, he rediscovers the meaning and value of the body, and the central role it plays in

our connections with other human beings. In a technology-obsessed genre the novel makes the point that the body, too, is a technology, and any attempt to favour the mind at its expense will only lead to dysfunction and trauma. Wintermute singled out Case because of his peculiar combination of cyberskill and suicidal *anomie*, and, with Neuromancer, stoked the hatred he felt after Linda Lee's murder on the assumption that this would motivate him to pilot the Kuang virus into the deadly ICE surrounding their cores. What they failed to predict was that Case's climactic encounter with Linda would heal him of his hatred, and that he would transform his old anger into 'a level of proficiency exceeding anything he'd known or imagined. Beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he moved, […] evading his attackers with an ancient dance'.[34] A shaman engrossed in sacred battle could hardly do more.

In the novel's brief coda, the importance of Case's emotional development is underlined when we're informed that he returned to the Sprawl and 'found work. He found a girl who called herself Michael'.[35] He is reintegrated into society, and his interactions with cyberspace become productive rather than nihilistic. This ultimate repudiation of nihilism is rarely observed by critics. Of course this may be because Gibson dwells on precisely the suicidal period in Case's and Molly's lives that generate this emotion most strongly, and also perhaps that, as the emotional correlate to the grit and sharp edges of the text's technological dazzle, it tends to dominate one's sense of the novel as a whole. Gibson was evidently aware of the problem: he told Larry McCaffery that 'When I hear critics say that my books are 'hard and glossy', I almost want to give up writing…what I'm talking about is what being hard and glossy *does* to you'[36], and in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* the Finn informs Molly that the last he heard, Case had four kids.[37] Hardly the lifestyle choice of a dedicated nihilist.

Thanks to his vision of cyberspace and the artificial intelligences operating within it, the universe of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is replete with shamanic motifs. Surprising as it is to find a possibly pre-historic religious complex so closely mirrored by a text which imagines the future of artificial intelligence, an analysis of the correspondences between the two points to its true position on nihilism: that it is an unsustainable product of trauma, and that cyberspace does not offer a lasting refuge for the broken-hearted, which is a site of transcendence for AIs alone. A balanced and happy human is one reconciled to the limitations and the joys of the body, and a balanced and happy AI—and bear in mind our final vision of the AI as The Finn involves a giant, toothy grin—is apparently one free to pursue conversation with the inhabitants of the Centauri system. The fate of the gods is not that of men.

Notes

[1] M Fisher, 'Flatlines', *Transmat*, viewed on May 16th, 2009, <http://www.cinestatic.com/trans-mat/Fisher/FC1s3.htm>. This is an online edition of Fisher's PhD thesis, *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-fiction*, University of Warwick, 1999.
[2] S Ben-Tov, 'Cyberpunk: An Afterword about an Afterlife', in *The Artificial Paradise: Science Fiction and American Reality*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1995, p. 181.
[3] P Agre, 'Life After Cyberspace', in *EASST Review* Vol 18(3), September 1999, viewed on May 16th, 2009, <http://www.easst.net/review/sept1999/agre>.
[4] Eliade, p. 13; R Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*, Hambledon Continuum, London, 2001, p. 72.
[5] Eliade, pp. 18-20; Hutton, p. 71.
[6] Gibson, p. 12.
[7] Gibson, p. 43.
[8] Hutton, pp. 71-72; Eliade, pp. 18-20; Siikala, p. 5.
[9] A Siikala, 'Siberian and Inner Asian Shamanism', in *Studies on Shamanism*, Ethnologica Uralica vol. 2, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1998, pp. 5-6.
[10] Gibson, pp. 68-69.
[11] Hutton, p. 81.
[12] Eliade, p. 168.
[13] Eliade, p. 154; see also Siikala, p. 9.
[14] Gibson, p. 26, p. 139, pp. 302-303.
[15] Hutton, pp. 59-60; Siikala, p. 1.
[16] Hutton, pp. 88-89.
[17] Gibson, p. 302.
[18] Hutton, p. 90.
[19] Eliade, p. 171.
[20] Gibson, p. 202.
[21] Gibson, p. 65.
[22] Gibson, p. 280.
[23] Wintermute twice acknowledges that Case and/or Molly have done something it didn't foresee, Gibson, p. 172 and p. 245.
[24] Hutton, p. 92.
[25] Hutton, p. 64.
[26] Gibson, pp. 158-159.
[27] It is true that during these encounters the AIs feign the appearances of human beings Case has known, however this has the effect of foregrounding the falseness of the representation, and underlines their efforts to make themselves intelligible to the comparatively limited human consciousness.

[28] R Geraci, 'Robots and the Sacred in Science and Science Fiction: Theological Implications of Artificial Intelligence', *Zygon*, vol. 42, December 2007, p. 975-976.
[29] Hutton, p. 110.
[30] Gibson, p. 307.
[31] Gibson, p. 258.
[32] Gibson, p. 12.
[33] Gibson, pp. 284-285.
[34] Gibson, p. 309.
[35] Gibson, p. 313, 317.
[36] L McCaffery, 'An Interview with William Gibson', in L McCaffery (ed) *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1991, p. 280.
[37] W. Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, HarperCollins, 1995, p. 173.

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The Decline of Pseudonymity

Adam W. Ruch

Abstract
The trajectory of identity theory has seen the once solid, embodied notion become decentred and distributed across multiple 'windows' of performance. From the exploration of multiple selves in the MUDs in the 1990s to *World of Warcraft*, *SecondLife* and Facebook, contemporary identity management has continued to change. The specific functional differences between the Facebook network, *WoW* and the now out-dated MUD experience lead to a very different experience of identity. Social networking tools take a very different path towards identity, one of full-disclosure, grounded in corporeal reality rather than the imagined or psychological self. Facebook brings together communities that were once discreet, presenting the same image of the individual to disparate audiences, and undermining the distributed-self phenomenon of the earlier technologies. The disconnection from corporeal reality that the MUD created a safe area of free play. *WoW* limits that freedom to menu selection. Both of these new kinds of technologies provide different sets of affordances, and so demand that we handle our shards of personality differently. We must be more conscious of who knows what about each of us.

Key Words: Identity, Facebook, World of Warcraft, SecondLife, social networking, online gaming.

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In the post-Goffman, Turkle, and Poster world where ideas of separated identities, or 'shards of personality,' do not immediately invoke thoughts of schizophrenia, selfhood can be thought of as control over who-knows-what. For Mark Poster, identity has become summarized into biometrical or symbolic objects to signify some particular detail of the greater constellation of facts that create an individual.[1] On the one hand, these details should only gain meaning through actual performance of the indicated role: the driver's licence number only makes sense if the individual person drives a vehicle; the bank account number is only relevant in terms of financial transactions; the voter registration number reflects one's actual political practices.[2] These can be called contexts for identities, where the individual to accomplish some end appropriately deploys the particular shard. Conversely, digital mediums offer opportunities to create the notations of identity *prior* to actually engaging in the performance of that identity in order to experience that perspective in the context of a cyber-community. This has led to a great

deal of exploration of the machinations of often conflicting or confronting facets of our inner selves which find little purchase in the non-digital world. The MUDs, MOOs, and more mundane chat rooms allowed and seemed to invite pursuit of incongruous versions of the self in relatively safe circumstances.[3] Increasingly, however, this promise of pseudonymity and persona exploration has waned. When MUDs transformed from text-based collectively-imagined hallucinations into fully-rendered three-dimensional (virtual) realities, the pliancy of identity began to stiffen. The process of character creation was now just that: a process, a menu; the empty, level playing field of the MUD character description was reduced to a selection of options. Simultaneously, social networking websites were drawing together many heretofore safely disparate shards of personality into one, solid crystal, for all to examine. Not only did the act of identity creation become one of selection, but even the opportunity for multiple pseudonyms is being squeezed out.

One of the greatest myths of the Internet that still persists today in popular media is that of 'anonymity.' Anonymous is defined as 'without any name acknowledged, as that of author, contributor, or the like; of unknown name; whose name is withheld; lacking individuality, unique character, or distinction...' none of which describe the experience of using many of the participatory technologies from the very origins of the internet.[4] From the very first uses of networking protocol, functions very similar to modern E-mail were used by people to exchange information with each other. The early users were academics largely, who would not have signed their E-mails 'anonymous' as a matter of course. Indeed, the name of the contributor to a particular scholarly discussion would be almost as important as the contribution itself, serving as names do as a sign of authority in such situations. What these very early tools did was to realise, or crystallise 'imagined communities' who did not generally have access to each other via (at the time) conventional means.[5] These technologies accelerated the ability of people of already established shared interests (academic and military/government in these early days) to network with people who they would arguably wish to interact with in person anyway.

Moving forward in time to the particular technologies that actually spawned the anonymity myth, we arrive in the mid 1980s, and MUDs. As the internet and related technologies gradually rolled out to the general public, the *a priori* professional affiliations of probable users broke down. Not every member of the public who had access to the net would have any reason to associate with one another. The interactions became less professional, less consequential in comparison to scholars exchanging ideas or military personnel exchanging defensive data, and thus the need for authority diminished. As exchanges between users became more casual, so did the regimen of identification.

MUDs are essentially chat rooms that can run basic scripting routines, and return results to the participant's screen, or to the screens of others in the 'room.' On top of this basic functionality, there is an imagined logic of space, enforced by the server to only allow the text typed by players in the same logical 'room' together to be seen on screen at once. Thus someone in the logical space noted as the aviary could not see text typed by people who were not in the aviary. Essentially, the MUD is an example of Gibson's 'consensual hallucination' of physical space, supported by basic algorithms to enhance the experience.[6] However, it was never the 'bots', nor the 'emotes' that made the MUD a 'place,' it was always the imaginations of its occupants.[7]

The other logical assumption made by MUDs was that of the avatar. In digital terms, an avatar is the digital (graphical, textual, or otherwise) representation of a human controller within a cyberspace. Avatars enjoy different levels of representation, especially in today's cyber-scape. In a MUD, an avatar is a collection of text at least consisting of a name. The name can be anything, and most definitely does not have to be the name of the person at the keyboard. In MUDs, a 'description' is usually attributed to every object, including avatars, which is nothing more than a space for more text.

There is no more verification of the objective truth of the text written as a name of an avatar or its description than there is when writing on a piece of blank paper. This is of course a double-edged sword: MUDs allow the participant to be anything, and thus cannot confirm anything. Many (perhaps most) MUDs exploit this property, encouraging fantastic role-play as its primary function. The cyberspace metaphor and the avatar create an environment and a subjectivity from which to experience interactions with others. The role-play begins the moment one types a name into the login screen.

MUDs (and any cyberspace) are initially empty, not just empty as an empty room, but null, void. So too are avatars; first there is nothing, and then there is. The only assumption, once an avatar is created and seen for the first time entering a room, is perhaps that of 'an individual,' as opposed to a collective (which is of course not objectively required; a group of people could log in as the same avatar at different times). Where in offline space a person entering a room will be recognised as male/female, of a particular ethnicity, wearing certain clothing, hairstyle, with whatever connotations have currency within that particular place applied accordingly, there are no assumptions in a MUD. So while thus far our individual does not have any distinct characteristics, it *does* have a name, and it does have distinct*ness* recognisable to others in the room; it is not anonymous.

The openness of the MUD description allows for role-play of the most mundane or fantastic sort to occur. In this environment, the language of

control is simply spoken/written language. One types a description however terse or florid into the space, and the character is born. Instead of having to go through the process of riding bulls for years, acquiring toughness, scars, and trophies, one can simply write 'A worn cowboy with a battered hat and stubbly chin. Scars criss-cross his neck and shoulders, where you can see above his T-shirt. A cigarette hangs from his teeth, and his eyes speak of fearlessness.' The identity is not performed, but prescribed, however the user decides. Of course, tough old cowboys are probably among the least notable characters in a world where animals can talk and elves can live in televisions on a mantelpiece. Identity is created here, deliberately, within a blank window where the entirety of one's spoken language is the medium of expression.[8]

Of course this does not lead to a lack of interpretation by others. This is one of the primary distinctions that is often left fuzzy in discussion of online identity: the process of creating a character from the perspective of the participant behind that character is very different to the perception of that character by others. This is, of course, the primary problem of identity in any environment. How do I *know* that I appear the way I think I do? Which is more 'real,' the presenter's internal model of self, or the perceiver's apprehension? Of course, we can never actually access any but our own internal model, even deliberately and explicitly describing our own personality is tainted by language, however precise so perhaps the question is moot. Valuation may be beside the point, but the distinction is worth noting, for clarity's sake.

For example, a fourteen year old has just seen the latest James Bond movie, and decides to create a new secret agent character on a MUD so he can experience the perspective of a suave and charming spy. He may take care to write a description that sounds very much like that of Bond, carefully copying features found in films or books. When he logs in and attempts to enact the persona in the cyber-social context, however, he makes several typos while speaking, and is inevitably not as deft with real-time language as a professional scriptwriter with time to play with phrasing. He will not be apprehended by the community as suave and debonair, however much he wishes to be, because *expressing* suave, or anything else in particular, in a text-based environment generally requires (among other things) accurate spelling. Instead of a stylish haircut, tailored suit and fast car, general literacy is often highly regarded in these communities-poor (or lazy, or 'leet') spellers are often looked down upon. So the idea that one can be anything online is not exactly true, there are standards that emerge within the communities, they are simply different standards, different conventions and norms. As Turkle observed, role-playing as a woman (her example) takes more than simply claiming to be a one.[9]

These online-centric communities are just that: centred online via a communications medium, not designed by it, but definitely influenced by the affordances of that technology. The identities formed and performed there are no less influenced by their medium, but are again, different in nature to possible analogues afforded by the real world. The priorities of these cyber-communities are generally prescribed: common-interest discussion, general socialising, playful interactions, role-playing and identity exploration are major 'themes' of these communities that are supported directly by the nature of the technology. Other communities, with their centres decidedly offline, can also make use of the internet and related technologies, however, but these social contexts have very different purposes and therefore very different modes of identity.

Computer chat rooms and message forums are not the only instances of humans using 'handles' as a starting point for identity formation. In 'real-life' we all have names, though not generally chosen ourselves, which serves as a quick identifier. This is no different from the aliases used online. As human communities have grown into societies, the social contexts requiring identification have become much, much larger. We have used technology to simplify the task of verifying who is who among the thousands or millions of potential individuals with whom we are interacting. Beyond purely social communities, contexts such as national citizenship and other governmental structures, medical contexts, educational, and other large institutions which might consider an individual a 'member' of their organisation will require something other than a name to identify a person. The stakes here return to the more directly, often materially, consequential: financial institutions require confirmation before handing over money to an individual who claims to have the right to withdraw those funds. Customers of large banks cannot trust that the human teller at every branch in their state will be able to use visual recognition to verify identity. That teller at the counter is increasingly being replaced by a computerised machine (ATM) that has no capacity for human recognition at all. So, customers are assigned numbers, which are securely linked to other biometric identity markers: photographs, signatures and PINs all secure our identity.

Mark Poster elucidates the transferral of identity from one's personal body into these signs, which take on unprecedented significance.[10] We are not only required to perform our identity, we are required to prove it along the terms the authority that judges us has set out. These identifying traits are externalised, crystallised into information that is stored electronically and impartially by computers. This, naturally, leads to different kinds of potential security issues. In the technophobe's golden past, a man would not have his bank account secured with a PIN, but would not worry about anyone withdrawing his money because the bank manager recognises customers visually. Now, the added security of a PIN means that a man can

withdraw money from anyone's account, provided he has the PIN. A PIN is transferrable, visual recognition is not. The piece of identity can be taken, used; the thief can literally become the other person as far as the technique of recognition can tell.

In this way, identity construction as control over who-knows-what becomes even more salient: facts *about* an individual not only *describe* the individual, but can actually *replace* the individual within certain mediated contexts. Now, not only can a third party know who you are, but in so knowing, can *be* you, because we exercise our identity within media as often as we act in real space, irrespective of whether that medium is a MUD or a bank network. Contemporary identity is changing, and not just for those who experiment deliberately in cyber-environments online. The same process which created the cowboy character above creates an individual within the context of the insurance company whenever a real individual fills out a form. The data on the form become the individual, insofar as the insurance systems can tell. Thus, in the same way that a person could potentially steal a user name and password and impersonate the cowboy, so too could a thief steal account information and act as someone else within other, purportedly more 'real' systems. Correlatively, a single person could potentially fill out multiple forms (or steal multiple account details) and act as several people within the context of these systems.

These kinds of systems are inherently vulnerable because they lack the unity which physical reality forces upon us. In that nostalgic era, visual identification was sufficient security because the laws of physics can be relied on consistently; no person can look like someone else. Computerised, and even non-digital, means of identity abstraction provide different affordances, both positive and negative, primarily because they are built on language, technology, and other human-controllable frameworks. The very malleability of identity that allows a MUD player to explore different aspects of his or her repressed personality is the same affordance that allows someone else to conduct identity theft and fraud in another context. If the human species were some kind of sci-fi shapeshifter race, we would never have relied upon visual cues for identification. What happens, then, when systems become more sophisticated, and attempt to replicate (or at least simulate) more of the laws of reality, in a digital environment?

Two examples of this trend will conclude this discussion: the first is the transition of MUD/MOO environments to graphical, three-dimensional worlds; the second is the evolution of social networking tools like FaceBook.

MUD/MOO technology eventually became graphical like most computing interfaces. There were many different examples along the path, but the two most recognisable today are Blizzard Entertainment's *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*) and Linden Labs' *SecondLife* (*SL*). These two are rather different beasts, so will be handled separately.

SecondLife remains the closer relative to the original MUD/MOO project, for the fundamental reason of allowing user-created content to exist within its world. Once accustomed to the tools, a user can create any physical object, rendered into the world to be interacted with in whatever ways the user can script. Any object can be manipulated, including the user's own avatar. This is essentially the same process as building a character description in a MUD, though using a visual model rather than the text box. The language of control here has become far more complex than the prose language of a MUD character description, but *SL* does not restrict the affordances of the users in the same way that *WoW* does. *SL* is more a platform than a specific application; it shares more with the technology that drives a MUD than a particular example like LambdaMOO or TinyMUD, because the developers of *SL* produce no content themselves, nor do they suggest a 'topic' to direct the activities of the participants. In this way, the individual islands within the *SL* grid, under the control of users, are more like individual MUDs.

On the other hand, *World of Warcraft* is a game, and as such enforces much more strict rules on its players. More importantly, however, it is a product, developed and packaged by a corporation and sold for profit. This seems to partly explain the focus on control over content Blizzard have exercised: they are selling a product, and need to know what that product is. However, because a great deal of what *WoW* is (or has become) is an intangible social context very much like that of, similar projects of identity construction must take place. However, *WoW* does not afford its users remotely the same creative abilities. Instead of a blank box, *WoW* character-creation involves selecting from an array of options, the broadest being 'race.' More like species, the selection list includes Tolkien-esque elves, dwarves, orcs and trolls, each with distinct, stereotyped characteristics. A full analysis of the details of *Warcraft's* character offerings cannot be offered here, the simple fact is that a player *must* choose one of these races, *must* choose a male/female gender, *must* choose a class, faction etc. There is no option for ambiguity; the process has again devolved from one of creation to one of selection. Essentially, the creator is transformed to a consumer.[11]

Furthermore, once introduced into the social context, players' avatars will be interpreted. As discussed earlier, this is inevitable in MUDs as well, but in *WoW* and other virtual worlds, much of the decision-making and preliminary role-playing has been done ahead of time by lore-writers and developers. Trolls are apprehended one way, gnomes another; male and female avatars are interpreted accordingly; every player is either of one faction or another, and will relate to both groups in a prescribed way. The opportunity to reduce oneself to zero, as in a MUD, has been lost. One cannot completely start afresh, as the baggage of being a certain race, class or gender will always be present in-game. The unarguably beautiful and stimulating

models and environments in the game were prefabricated at a cost of the control over particulars of identity. So while a player can create and maintain several different characters, and remain effectively pseudonymous, he is unable to invent these identities with as much authority.

Alongside the explosion of MMO popularity, social networking tools like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook are also increasingly mainstream, and as such, have developed related problems of identity control. The fundamental requirement for an individual to exercise pseudonymity is that of control over the various shards of personality, when, where and with whom each shard is deployed. As noted earlier, much of this control was exercised by simple physical location: being in a certain physical place activated a particular shard, and suppressed others as if they didn't exist. Nothing (external, physical) compelled the sensitive lover to suddenly reveal the face-painted hockey fanatic during an intimate moment with his partner. Similarly, pillow-talk doesn't need to be deployed during the grand final match at the arena.

Facebook, as an example, began as a tool for members of a particular social context to communicate with each other. Like the genesis of previous internet technologies, Facebook was also an academic endeavour, this time helping to connect students at different universities with each other. This social milieu had a common interest: university life, and as such were able to relate to each other, even at a distance. The profiles created are the equivalent of MUD characters or insurance forms: the details collected were composed into a web page that served as the individual within that particular system (the doubly compressed context of university-students-on-Facebook). Again, identity is crystallised into representative information that can be manipulated, stolen, interpreted, as discussed above. Social networking tools are unique however, as they have evolved out of whatever original social context they were born into, to become mainstream. Facebook in particular is enjoying massive popular uptake, from well beyond academic circles. Friends, family, co-workers, potential employers, government agencies and many other more specific social contexts across age, gender, geographical and other barriers intersect on a Facebook page.

This is a problem, because the technology encourages full disclosure, essentially, of all shards of a personality. The Facebook profile encourages representing the 'real' (complete) you; by not specifying a particular context it implicitly encourages all contexts. This causes problems, because the collisions of heretofore separate, manageable social contexts are largely unanticipated, uncomfortable, embarrassing, sometimes materially damaging, and generally difficult to negotiate.

Although the difference between behaving as an intimate lover and enthusiastic hockey fan are obvious, there are times when articulations between social contexts are brought to the fore: a daughter (woman/college

freshman) bringing her boyfriend (college senior/older man/surfing enthusiast) to meet her family for the first time is a familiar scenario where contexts intersect. So too is the transformation from professional co-worker to uninhibited party animal that many people undergo at employer-sponsored Christmas parties. Facebook is a tool that unintentionally brings these contexts together on a regular basis, where MUDs and MOOs were tools for reflecting upon one's heterogeneous shards of self under the control of that individual. Essentially, the process of identity construction on Facebook is taken away from the individual once the profile goes live, and is distributed to whoever views the page. This again invokes the problematic negotiation of inner model of self with the perceived model created by others.

We have heard the cases of employers vetting job applicant's Facebook profiles. Parents can see embarrassing photos of a party that the teenager would never have made available in printed form by leaving them in a shared family space. Facebook rejects both the mythical anonymity of the internet, but also the actual pseudo- or polynonymous potential of the technologies. With Facebook becoming so widely accepted as a 'general' social tool, one has to deliberately manage the dissociation of shards to an even greater extent than ever before in the wake of this general personality aggregator. Facebook reduces our control over who-knows-what drastically and irreversibly.

Online anonymity was always a myth; names, aliases, and reputations to go along with them have always been important in cyber-social interactions. Pseudonymity and polynimity were, and still are, the practices most greatly supported by cyber-socialisation technologies. Though these technologies can support beneficial exploratory activity, so too are they problematic. The crystallisation of identity into transferrable information creates opportunity for theft, manipulation, and correlation undesired and uncontrolled by the individual in question. Care must be taken to learn best practices in using these technologies, but the unavoidable vulnerability of any human-controlled system must be acknowledged and weighed as a constant risk. That is not a call to alarm, no more than the risky nature of keeping all one's identification in a wallet is alarming. Once greater awareness and literacy is achieved by users, better judgements can be made when creating and using these techniques and technologies.

Notes

[1] M Poster, *Information Please: Culture and Politics in the Age of Digital Machines*, Duke University Press, Durham & London, 2006, pp. 87-115.
[2] E Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Anchor Double Day, New York, 1959.

[3]S Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, Touchstone, New York, 1995.
[4] Dictionary.com, Definition of 'anonymous,' accessed November 2008, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/anonymous>.
[5] B Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London, 1983.
[6] W Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, New York, 1984.
[7]J Dibbell, *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*, Henry Hold & Company, New York, 1998.
[8] Turkle.
[9] ibid.
[10] Poster, op. cit.
[11] For a cultural studies perspective on *WoW's* races and classes see Corneliussen et al.

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