

Arthur Kroker intervenio a x media conference

WHAT, THEN, REALLY IS OUR TECHNOLOGICAL DESTINY?

Consider the following remarks by Bill Joy, chief scientist of Sun Microsystems:

"The twenty-first century technologies-genetics, nano-technology and robotics are so powerful because they spawn whole new classes of accidents and abuses. While replication in a computer or a computer network can be a nuisance, at worst it disables a machine or takes down a network service, uncontrolled self- replication in these newer technologies runs a much greater risk: a risk of substantial damage to the physical world."  
It's the same with Jean Baudrillard who in The Vital Illusion prophecies:

" The specter that haunts genetic manipulation is the genetic ideal, a perfect model obtained through the elimination of all negative traits: no viruses, no germs, no defects... The worst of it is that living beings engendered by their own genetic formulate will not survive this process of reduction. That which lives and survives by the codes will die by them."

What is then the transgenic future? Are we on the way to the superhuman or to the subhuman? Recreating, redoubling, genetically twinning ourselves? What is the ethical future foretold by chimeras hybrids and clones? By 'nuclear transplantation', by new recombinant technologies of blastomere separation?

Baudrillard again:

"The question concerning cloning is the question of immortality. We all want immortality. It is our ultimate fantasy. What if we forgot to die?"

WHAT IS THE FATE OF THE HUMAN IN THE AGE OF POST -BIOLOGICS?

WHAT IS THE ACTUAL DESTINY OF WIRED CUL TURE?

Ironically, in a culture intentionally stripped of the language of myth, we may be living in the most mythological of all times: the future of the DATA BODY, THE POST-HUMAN BODY, also mingles NOW with mythic stories forgotten of minotaurs and monsters and aboriginal prophecies of the punishment exacted by the gods for transgressing the language of limits.

But remember:

THAT WHICH IS MOST ANALOGICALLY REPRESSED ALWAYS RETURNS AS THE PHANTOM ABSENCE WHICH HAUNTS THE COLD OPERATIONS OF THE DIGITAL SYSTEM.

THAT WHICH IS EXCLUDED WILL NOT BE DENIED .

THAT WHICH IS MADE INVISIBLE ALWAYS RETURNS AS THE ERRANT IMPULSE OF THE HUMAN HEART, THE forbidden IMAGINATION OF THE ARTIST.

WITHOUT THIS RETURN OF REANIMATED MEMORY AND CREATIVE IMAGINATION, wired culture WILL DIE OF ITS OWN STERILITY.

Data is a natural cynic. Knowing no codes other than the software ordinals of its own artificial universe, signifying nothing other than its own telemetry, data streams in a weightless medium of zero-intensity.

Flowing invisibly, but no less violently, through the light-arrays of the wireless world, data is the

elemental material of the will to technology. Pooled in gigantic vats of cybernetic information, databasing is what we mean now by history. Our electronically traceable past, our digitally monitored present, empty data is the destiny of our artificial future. THIS WIRED FUTURE DESPERATELY REQUIRES FOR ITS SURVIVAL ARTISTIC DNA.

## BODY AND CODES

In his book, *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford said that fundamental shifts in the direction of technology are often preceded, sometimes by centuries, by prior transformations in culture, that history as in life, culture anticipates technology. For example, in Mumford's view, the industrial revolution did not really begin with the modern age, but was actually set in place by major cultural transformations in the medieval age. Not just the mechanization of time and changes in property relations, but, more decisively, the model of the factory was anticipated centuries in advance by the model of the monastery, with its routinization of time, careful regulation of daily activity, disciplining of labour time, specialization of function.

Now while Lewis Mumford wrote a brilliant cultural history of the technological past, what of the technological future? We are transitioning between the end of the modern age and the beginning of a technoculture which has two dynamic spearheads: utopian dreams of a wireless future and radical experiments in biotechnology. In the 60s, McLuhan could only think protectively about a world organized like a "global brain", but for us data bodies, networked intelligence, streamed music, wireless communication, business at the speed of the database are the culture of the digital everyday. In the same way, dramatic bio-genetic experiments in cloning, somatic cell therapy, xenotransplantation, organ harvesting, this whole redeployment of Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* in the new language of the Human Genome Project will migrate rapidly from the periphery of human attention to its center. The creation of Transgenics-beings part-human/part-animal/maybe part plant-like eyes that all see the sky in terms of pattern gravitational waves like migrating birds, with genetically modified hearing at the level of previously invisible sounds, are the likely new order of values of the 21st century. The ethical consequences of this cultural change are almost complex and decisive since what is challenged today is not simply the goals of technology but what it means to be human, to be post-human, to literally have the mind interfaced to the speed of digital networks, to live at the lip of the net, to have the body subject to a future of genetic modification.

In terms of a strict technological determinism, we are probably already living in a cloner culture in which dreams of xenotransplantation- cloning animals for organ harvesting- biopharmacology (those vast pharmaceutical factories of artificially bred animals for the manufacturing of new drugs), of creating transgenic is the dynamic momentum pushing technology forward? But are we ethically prepared for this? Are we suiciding ourselves to virtual life? The law of eternal recurrence will not be denied. We do not have a special exemption. The harvesting of other species will inevitably have its reverse side: the harvesting of the human species at the lip of the net. Maybe the larger cultural discourse that we are presently caught up in is that digitality and biotech are the chosen mechanisms by which human beings will be interfaced to data world, genetically modified for more perfect system transparency? A culture of Disappearances.

Have we really thought the relationship between first wave eugenics (Darwinian naturalism, Spencer's social theory of the survival of the fittest), second wave eugenics (those theories of racial improvement through selective breeding which was practiced in most western countries, including Canada, the United States, and most traumatically, in Nazi Germany), and third wave eugenics which is popularized today under the sign of the Human Genome Project, and other big science experiments in the field of biotechnology and bio- pharmacology with their delirious schemes for the post-human body in a post- evolutionary time. Are we really ready for the culture of the double? Do we really understand the fate of the transgenic body?

The actual situation today may be that we are living in a culture of 23rd century engineering and 19th century ethics. We experience a new media culturallag in which the speed and intensity of technological change seemingly overwhelm human perception and ethical reflection. But if Lewis Mumford is correct that culture always anticipates and actually outstrips in imagination the hardwired realities of the technological future, then it's probably the case that the biotech future is already being "worked through" in the human mind by those brilliant outriders of the future: the artistic imagination. Their imagination reverse engineers the future. It is the basis of a new ethics equal to the incommensurable changes precipitated by technology.

#### An Eye that Hears

What if technology, digital technology, bio-technology does something fundamentally different than previous technologies, not simply disturbing the ratio of the senses, but reconfiguring the senses, creating mutations and hybridities of the previously separated ratio of the senses. Not just the human ear acoustically augmented to the enhanced hearing of a cat or the nose with the smelling power of a sniffing dog, but the human eye as a digital eye scanning the sky like a migrating bird, washing out the sun and the moon in favor of suddenly visible lines of magnetic polarities across the horizon or the human nervous system jacked up to such a point of receptivity that, like cattle before it, the body's nerve net sets off early warning systems for approaching earthquakes.

An eye that hears. Skin that speaks. An ear that sees with upgraded 20/20 vision. A recombinant body with tactile smell, touch that arcs across the color spectrum, chromatic sound, muffled sweat, talking retinas and noise that bleeds, lasix eyes, eyes that see but have no vision.

#### Of Mermaids and Werewolves

To speak of a future of hybrid organs of perception is, of course, to return to a deeper anxiety in the human spirit, an "anxious object" expressed most eloquently and hauntingly in tales from classical antiquity of other hybridities, other mutants – of mermaids and werewolves and minotaurs and centaurs, of mutant beings half-man/half-bull, half-flesh/half-machine.

But why the anxiety over mutant flesh? Perhaps because of a more primitive fear of the inevitable mythic punishment that follows this challenge to the gods for such a radical transgression of the language of species difference. Icarus may have been doomed not for his hubris in seeking to escape the gravity of the earth's downward pressure on human skin and bone and blood, but for his revolt of the restless heart on behalf of a new species being: part-bird/ part-human. Transgressing species difference is the limit experience of classical mythology-the in-between, the third interval, the eye that turns upward into the white soft mass and hovering dark orbit of the skull's cavity. It is to be feared with a frenzy of anxiety, and desired, secretly desired, but desired nonetheless with the passion of finally transgressing the forbidden limit.

A strange movement of desire to be the forbidden limit and beyond: being wolf, being cat, being strange, being hybrid, being cloner, being splice, being fish swarm and animal pack and cougars in the soaring mountains of the electronic fields, being sun skin and photosynthetic eyes and G4 memory and flash talk and streaming vision. An imam personality with a vrmil smile and a tasteless tongue cut with lynx ears and a feline software profile turned to the speed of light.

Perhaps the mythic past with its fables heroic and tragic and ambivalent of the meeting of gods and man and history is our recombinant future. A Digital Achilles. A Flash Art Ulysses. A Homer

for all the technological fundamentalists. After the long sleep of a radically divided and radically rationalist modernism which repressed the eternal validity of myth with cynicism and self-hate, we can hear again the first intimations of other travellers at future's gate. Minotaurs and werewolves and centaurs and mermaids and ravens and eagles begin to stir again from the sleep of repression, stories forbidden of the Taquesta Indlans at mouth of the Miami River begin to circulate again with their haunting insight that the soul is to be found in the shadow I the reflection and the eye, the Heida story from the Queen Charlotte Islands of the clam shell as the beginning of the life of the people, Hopi prophecies of an age that is doomed without the sheltering sky of mythology,

the modem ratio of the senses that refuses its divisions and equilibriums, and goes directly for the language of transgression-transgressing the ratio of the senses with strange hybridities- disturbing the eye, cloning the ear, shockwaving the real.

#### The Biotech Eye

The eye of the future is the biotech eye. The matrix machine. The mirror moon becoming trash. A slow eye in a fast zone – a data catcher. The eye of forgetting- the sun shattered eye- slips through the code and captures light.

The eugenic eye opens up into a universe of artificial flesh, chip nerves, laser lips, cloned organs, mutant DNA, vector images and virtual dreams.

The wired universe grows an eye and we become travellers of the digital iris.

#### Soul Catcher

A mind machine code named the "soul catcher" is being developed by British Telecom. In the future the soul catcher will be implanted into the brain to "complement" human computational skills. The soul catcher would enable the gathering of extra sensory data by the human brain, in this case - data transmitted directly by wireless networks.

Scientists predict that once in place, the soul catcher will serve a double function. Not only acting as a superconductive medium linking the human brain with neural networks of data, but also an internal surveillance function-- signalling chip manufacturers from its privileged position within the human brain about the human central nervous system. A researcher at British Telecom stated that the "future of the human species depends on our continuing ability to process information."

So, you become the machine.

The machine becomes you.

The brain of the Soul Catcher

As a neural network skull

Fast Processing Fast Data

Waiting finally to see with its biotech eye.

The matrix machine. The mirror moon becoming trash. A slow eye in fast zone-a data catcher.

The eye of forgetting - the sun shattered eye - slips through the code and captures light.

#### TONGUE TALK

The tasteless tongue

Imagine the eye

But taste the

Tasteless tongue

Empty in the mouth

Opening wide and

Speaking in waves

Of hybrid sounds

No bitter, No sweet

To dilute

The no-taste taste

An artificial tongue has been designed by researchers in Texas. Eventually the virtual tastebud

tongue will be able to distinguish bitter, sour, salty, and all possible variations. According to the Texas engineers, the electronic tongue relies on compounds that act as sensors, changing color in the presence of certain chemicals. The Texas scientists found a way to attach the sensors to tiny beads, which are then placed in microscopic cavities machined into a silicon chip. Tastebuds on a chip.

An artificial tongue, then, for an artificial universe.

Perhaps not just an electronic tongue for the food and beverage industries to taste their products, but the artificial tongue as the first biotech sign of our deep immersion in a new media universe of tongue talk.

Tongue talk for a universe of artificial taste, where the tongue grows the electronic noosphere for lips, rips itself free from the liquid prison-house of the mouth, abandons the painful history of speech and slurs and stutters all day spit

and silences, and grows a universe, a tongue universe, for an horizon. An horizon of the tasteless tongue. The data tongue.

When the data tongue begins to speak it's always in the baby talk of the binary code. But the data tongue doesn't stay a baby for long. It licks flesh. It licks genes. It's curious. Tastes good. Tastes bad. Tastes no-taste. The tasteless tongue Da Da binary soon goes Da Da. The tasteless tongue seeks out the borderlands. The tongue spits out the data machine.

It smacks its lips recombinant with a slurping sound. Tasted have codes. Tastes have colors. Tastes have sensors. Algorithmic codes for a tasteless tongue suddenly gone aesthetic. The tasteless tongue is born with a mission to perform. It's created as a taste machine in the service of a virtual capitalism without imagination. Code Taste: steamed data where the universe begins to taste itself, to lick itself, to kiss and suck and color and code its tasted recombinant. The planet grows wet lips of cold data and artificial tongue of hot codes.

The chrome tongue. The silicon tongue. The chip tongue. The mirror tongue. The vision tongue. The tongue with distended virtual eyes for better licking the digital future.