¿¡Emergent Futures!?
Techno-politics and the uncertain frontiers between art and technology
by
Jaime del Val – Instituto REVERSO

Common discussions on the relationships between art and technology seem to ignore a relevant fact: that their implicit relationships go far beyond the means that serves the purpose (technology at the service of art) and that the uncertain frontiers between the two are inscribed in constitutive processes of power relationships: technology is producer and product of representations and languages, of forms and categories of discourse.

If we try to recreate the greek term *Technè*, in which there seem to be united aspects of what we now call technology and aspects of what we now call art we might be able to take a first step towards redefining the immanent relationship that regulates that unstable frontier. However in order to deeply understand its implications we should look into the implicit power mechanisms that constitute late capitalism and their genealogy through what Foucault has called the disciplinary society and the control-society(1). If we are but in the later developmentes of the control society, where technology, perversely incorporated in all the bodies easily reproduces the forms that are needed for the system to proliferate, technology becomes the key term of the processes of uniformation that the system needs. Uniformity not in ideas, but in forms, representations and languages.

We need to take a step further form the discourse of free software and propose an immanent critique of the languages and representations that are reproduced in technology. Which articulations of corporeality are reproduced in hardware? Which forms of writing are reproduced in software? Which forms and representations secure the strenghtening of late capitalist society at the expense of differences?

Characteristics of the system:

The Implicit status of power: as long as it hides its mechanisms its success is secured.

Uniformity: the prerequisite for the system to operate is the standard quality of the social body.

Anulation of politics: Inevitable consequence of uniformity: all extremes are incorporated into the standard field, thus denied. Behind the apparence of diversity there is a void that serves the purposes of the system: instrumentalisation at the service of the system beyond every ideology.

Neutrality and void: when something becomes a Logo, it is devoid of all sense safe for the remains that make it useful to the system. We all seem to have a certain space for freedom, protests become mostly redundant, causes are denied. We slip on the surfaces of logos.

Virtuality and spectacularity: the requisite for the uniformity: we seem to have access to information (in spite of explicit censorship), but it is strangely alien to us in its familiarity. How would we otherwise tolerate the horrendous spectacle of hunger and war in the media? The flow of news in one direction makes us free of fault... there is always someone up there, capable of doing something.

Speed and dissapearance: technological contamination has wiped out the sedimentation of old cultural traditions in a very short period of time: it's the empire of non verbal communication, imposed through TV, cinema, music, textiles, food, software and hardware... Speed reassures the victory of implicit power regimes, they don't allow other forms of sedimentation, they force upon us the specific language of speed, surface, the language of FX.

Capacity to assimilate: it is the condition of survival of the regime: every form must be assimilated, every subversive gesture neutralised, incorporated into the corporate field of logo-centric forms. Life escapes permanently from formalisation and must therefore e assimilated ever more speedily. Parody, performativity(2), resignification... such are the citational operations through which life is ever again incorporated into the field of the regime.

Single direction in technological production: How are the communication networks and architectures articulated? How is the possibility for an horizontal flux of information thus implicitly undermined? These, and not others, are the problems posed by *technopower*.

Radical strategies of representation and language find in digital media a space that is both promising and menaced: promising for its possibilities, menaced by the implicit mechanisms of the regime.

Mis-use technology, the software, the interfaces... yes, but lets go further than that, let's produce our instrument-languages-bodies-interfaces, our *metabodies*, our *metaware*. It is possible at last to overcome the postmodern paradigm of parody without returning to modernity, an uncertain horizon opens up: the *morphogenesis* of the subject.(3)

In contemporary music, dance, performance, abstract cinema, architecture and literature we find radical and thus marginal forms of language. And we find many open threads, synesthesias, associations that actually show the contingent and uncertain character of all disciplinary frontiers. It's about forms of *hybrid thought* that defy logocentric structures, that open up towards the outside...

But perhaps it is the metaphore of the instrument which can most powerfully help us redesign technology in terms of *language*. This radical turn into *metarepresentation* is perhaps the only possible form of resistance to techno-power in late capitalism. Technopositivists who defend the virtues of *connectivity* should ask themselves if it is good *a priori* or if it radically depends on its articulation. Is every *telecratic* articulation always and only democratic?

Notes:

1. Michel Foucault develops in *The History of Sexuality* his concept of ubiquitous, decentralized, productive and implicit power and defines the emergence of a *biopower*, characteristic of the so-called control society. Foucault describes the transition in the XIX Century of older disciplinary society to modern control society, a concept developed extensively by Gilles Deleuze, in which power becomes more and more implicit. Toni Negri and Michael Hardt, in their book *Empire*, situate the concept of biopolitics in the framework of a project that contests late capitalist forms of imperialism. (Foucault, M. *La Historia de la Sexualidad*, S.XXI Editores, México 1998. Negri, T. y Hardt, M.: *Imperio*, Paidós, Barcelona 2002)
2. Performativity in language was described by J.L.Austin in *How to do things with words* (Barcelona 1998, Paidós). Performative speech acts are those which produce what they say. Later Judith Butler developed the theory of the performativity of gender thus setting the grounds for queer theory and discourse.
3. Morphogenesis is a term used in biology to describe the processes of formation of organs in newborn organisms. Here we use it in a metaphoric sense in order to describe the process of formation of representation itself.