Situated Tékhne. Beyond the performative: metaformative bodies and the politics of technology in post-postmodernism

Jaime del Val

Abstract

Communication technology is a key in the articulation of global standardisation in late capitalism. The biopolitical paradigm of social control is shifting towards new forms of technological embeddedness through new technologies of the body. Logocentric and discrete representations of the body are a key to the articulation of the standard model of technology and its constructions of corporeality. In dance and technology and other disciplines there is a potential to generate technological models that defy the logos and propose a paradigm open to multiple and changing specificities, going beyond the postmodern paradigm of performativity and parody into a new realm of metaformativity as both aesthetic and political paradigm.

Being exceeds its representations

The following will be an attempt to situate this sentence in a specific context: I will not be assuming a universal subject position, one that claims the title of speaking for an era, but rather one that attempts to be conscious of its uncertainty, of its endless limitations and contingencies, which are its necessary and ever-changing richness as well. The politics of the specific will thus be an underlying motive for this essay, and indeed there will be some arguments for considering the very issue of specificity as a key one, for the articulation of a political site in changing geographies of resistance.

The scope of the criticism I will propose is not tracing an apocalyptical landscape of technology and digital culture, nor a naïvely enthusiastic one, but rather to speak from an ambiguous position of both critical enthusiasm and uncertainty that traces certain threads within post-structuralism and the politics of the body and situates the issue of technology, media art, and more particularly dance and technology at a very specific crossroads, and a key one within digital culture and late capitalism.[1]

Tékhne

Traditional discussions on the relations between art and technology tend to overlook an important argument: that the implicit relations between one and the other go well beyond the tool that serves its goal, that their diffuse frontiers are inscribed in constitutive relations of power: technology is producer

and product of representations and languages, of forms and categories of thought and discourse.

If we attempt to reread the Greek term *tékhne*, in which there seem to be aspects of what we call technology and aspects of what we call art, we may take a first step towards recuperating the immanent relationship that permeates that uncertain frontier. Yet to understand deeply its implications we need to delve into the mechanisms of implicit power and what Foucault calls the society of control.

Biopolitics – Implicit power

Foucault identified the formation of the society of control from the former disciplinary society. In the society of control the mechanisms of power are not at the service of reproducing a hegemonic cultural paradigm as in the disciplinary society, but rather in assimilating life as a whole into the apparatus of production and consumption.

This biopolitical paradigm is based in what Foucault identifies as implicit, ubiquitous, decentralized, productive power (Foucault 1998: 112–119). Judith Butler associates this with the notion of implicit censorship: the performative reproduction of hegemonic categories that have sedimented as universal, natural and essential, which outline the circle of the 'speakable' and therefore the boundaries of the unspeakable, the abject (Butler 1997: 127–163).

Gender, sexuality, race, class, disability, health, age and other categories for the stratification and production of subjectivity and its margins of abjection are thus reproduced through the reiteration of the forms and representations (words, images, gestures, etc.) that actually constitute any such category, through which it is identified as a *body*. In late capitalism the *forms* that constitute the categorisations of the subject-body are no longer immobile and essential categories of a cultural paradigm, but rather illusions and instruments at the service of assimilation into the standard plateau of the market.

Implicit power: as opposed to the explicit exercise of power of totalitarian regimes of the past, the new empires, which develop under the sign of modern democracy, base their success in the degree to which their mechanisms are hidden. The capacity to assimilate every new form that emerges in the margins, and the capacity to conceal the implicit mechanisms of assimilation are the keystones for the success of the 'system'.

However, can we speak of hegemony in the sense of a regime or system? How is Foucault's notion of ubiquitous power to be redeployed in the context of global standardisation? Is it still possible to speak of hegemony and margin, of obverse and reverse, of inside and outside? How are multiple marginality and multiple centricity exploded in late capitalism? How many centres and lines of escape, how many yet unthinkable perspectives conform our changing landscape?

Assimilation – The mechanisms of form

Standardisation occurs through the *parodic assimilation* of forms into a plateau that is constituted through the invisible flattening of differences.

Jaime del Val

Key to this concealment is the mechanism of implicit censorship (Butler 1997: 127–163), as the performative reiteration of naturalized categories, such as gender and sex. Key to its development in late capitalism is the façade of democracy, which hides complex and specific forms of hegemony; and its perverse imbrications with the notions of technological development.

The capacity of the system to secretly assimilate all forms is the safeguard of its success. It is no longer to do with assimilating ideas, but rather and only forms (of non-verbal as well as verbal communication): almost any form, any representation, any image, gesture, sound or word can be made into a logo and assimilated into the system. The consequences are its more or less immediate emptiness of meaning, while it only apparently retains its original essence, as a blinking instrument of seduction on its surface. This is the way in which most of the originally radical or alternative movements like gay, punk, hippy, perhaps even queer, have long been assimilated into the system (in some ways at least, never fully, always contradictorily and according to the territories that the maps cannot contain).

Technopolitics and the serialisation of bodies

How are bodies/subjects discursively and technologically produced in contemporary late capitalist societies? Hardware and software, media and communication technology are culturally embedded forms of writing and representation, of language and communication. They produce and reproduce specific *forms* of subjectivity and corporeality. Software, as a form of *écriture*, conforms specific constructions of materiality and defines specific boundaries and relations for the lowest strata of matter (Frabetti, forthcoming).

The biopolitical paradigm has shifted towards new forms of technological embeddedness, what we could call *technopolitics*. With the arrival of new technologies new territories of the bodies are taken into consideration by the biopolitical system. These imply the formalization and the discrete representation of formerly undescribed, unthought, unarticulated aspects of non-verbal communication, of life and being.

The way in which such technologies are distributed, as instruments of a supposed modernisation and democratisation, of leisure and fun, make their implantation terrifically simple, and make it difficult to develop any serious criticism of its mechanisms, partly due to the naïve and perverse technopositivist enthusiasm that permeates not only digital culture in general but also some of the more critical domains of media art and theory.

Essentialisms of digital culture. Virtualisation and discrete representations

I am here referring to the concept of the virtual in the general sense in which it is used within digital culture, as the world of immaterial representations. The notion of virtuality gets its meaning from the attempt to reproduce a supposedly objective world. Yet this objective world is nothing but a discrete, contingent, mostly Cartesian representation of reality.

Discrete representations are the discrete, embedded, contingent *forms* of our thinking. They permeate our every discourse. Every representation is

discrete and contingent. Virtuality also has to do with the specific formalization of reality in communication, which can be traced in particular in relation to the logos and verbal communication. The identification of these with the distinctiveness and superiority of mankind and the construction of the logos as paradigm of universality, has given rise to the different paradigms of communication that inform our culture. Digital culture represents a massive production of such logocentric paradigms which are still hidden behind the promise of universality, where the universal has long been substituted by the standard.

Communication technologies articulate a whole series of ways of formalizing communication and the body. Categories of ubiquity, telepresence and telecommunication altogether rely exclusively on such formalizations and their appearance of universality.

What is presence after all? The answer will vary according to the body and the territory. Presence mediated by the camera and the microphone for instance is dependent on specific ways of using these within specific frameworks of representation of the subject and its lines of intelligibility.

'Never confuse the map with the territory' (Ballard 1984: 128). Never confuse the anatomy with the body. The global is a fiction because it confuses the map with the territory, the anatomy with the body. The idea of nomadism itself is perhaps part of that very fiction. When we go along the pathways of the global sphere, are we really travelling, or are we not in fact fixed in the standard channels of virtuality, of the hyperreal and globalized representations? Travelling is truly a complex mixture of virtuality and reality, of embodiment and disembodiment.

The virtual allows for the fiction of the global to take shape, and thus the fiction of real time. It is the antithesis of the local body that defies categorisations. Subsuming the body more and more to the virtual spheres of time and space, with bodies assimilated into the fiction of real time and ubiquity, the attempt to virtualize existence generates complex negotiations between embodiment and disembodiment, complex collisions of the formalized virtuality and the immeasurable reality, and thus conflictive branchings of the body-rhizome in multiple dislocated spaces and times.

The global is a map, yet the map itself becomes a territory. Standardisation is never complete, everywhere life is escaping control in different ways, being is exceeding ever again its representations, the reverse landscapes of standardisation are generating new unexpected realities. . . . and these are again assimilated *as soon as they become relevant to the system*.

What we confront in the coming decades is an extraordinary increase in the formalization of territories of the body: intelligent textiles will allow to recognize the emotional state of the person who wears them, ambient intelligence will be capable of analysing your mood of the day and so on. Microsoft has developed a gadget called Personal Lifetime Store, which you wear hanging from your neck while it captures automatically hundreds or thousands of images per day: It is a perverse example of such standardized technologies of being, in this case of an archive and representation of personal life, indeed the production of specific standard notions of personal life.

Jaime del Val

One of the key questions is: how are the territories of the body, whether in the fields of emotion or in other spheres, represented, categorized, on what assumptions are the representations based? what is the genealogy of the *mappings*? The other key question is: how are these implanted, reproduced and distributed to become normative, interiorized and naturalized, and therefore hegemonic? Interface design and creative industries, communication and language design, are part of a very broad system of technologies of existence that induce a serialisation of bodies and territories within the spheres of the global fiction.

Democratisation/inclusion or colonisation/assimilation?

The fiction of technology as a blank sheet on which we inscribe our generative selves from nothing is closely related to the idea of democratisation through inclusion. If we consider how deeply and quickly digital inclusion (with the aid of television) can erase the specificity of whole cultures, the case for democratisation runs short and the scope of inclusion turns out to be, again, the spreading of the global standard market. It is indeed doubtlessly one of the main instruments of colonisation of the new empire.[2]

The reverse of colonisation is the diversifications of the standard that happen in fact, because *being exceeds its representations*. Just like on the outskirts of urban speculation new realities emerge, also in the outskirts of body-speculation there appear forms of resistance to the system, yet it should be noted that this happens always a posteriori: inclusion is a priori assimilation into the system. The ubiquitous architecture of commercial music, the global spreading of dance trends or even of walking and moving, through musical videos, films and video games, are all part of this process. How many forms of thinking are thus erased? How many forms of nonverbal communication have disappeared though the globalisation of media and technology? In their place appear the globalized gestures, sounds, languages and forms of the *western global standard*, the 'style' and parody of our time. For a specific technology carries and is made of, and implicitly and explicitly reproduces, specific forms of thinking and representation.

Indeed ethnology should concentrate in rescuing the diverse forms of non-verbal communication of the different cultures, which are so significant to the articulation of specificity, and so easy to erase, because the transmission is implicit and they are mostly not archived or even recognized explicitly. What I propose is the need to develop specific technologies according to the forms of thinking, the cultural, implicit, non-verbal *forms* of every specificity. This does not seem to be possible in the framework of the global standard market.

The language of effect. The culture of erasure

The filter is ready, you just have to press the key and the work is done. It's so cool, isn't it? *Effect* is perhaps the predominant feature of the audiovisual language of digital culture, in musical videos, film, videogames, publicity, etc., and often in media art as well. Effect is in some ways the lack of language, it is pure surface: the materials used, whether narrative or

2   The well known book *Empire* (Negri and Hardt 2002) puts together a compelling vision of the new empire in critical relation to the biopolitical paradigm of Foucault and Deleuze, yet it doesn't take into consideration the specific role of technology and the paradigm shifts that have happened during the last decades with the production of new technologies of the body. Indeed, in its postmarxist approach it lacks perhaps an insight into the implicit forms of power that are produced thorough non-verbal communication and their bodily articulation in terms of standardisation and processes of assimilation.

abstract, have no specific meaning, they are just a surface for the effect to operate. The language of effect is a language of pure, non-critical parody, a parody of parody for that sake.

The fact that the language of effect is characteristic not only of the more commercial domains of digital culture but that it can be felt also in the minority domains of media art partly has to do with the instruments we use: they are generally produced for the commercial design industry. And even when we use more specific tools, the style is already there, it's difficult to take distance from its influence.

The exceedingly quick transformation of the digital instruments makes it impossible for languages to sediment. How many centuries has it taken for the sedimentation of musical language along with the slow transformation of traditional musical instruments? Software and hardware are changing permanently, and often in such ways that it is hardly possible to reproduce older works with new technologies. Producing artwork, as a highly specific form of communicating, and also communication in a more general sense, is dealing with very complex contexts of signification, with *specific* languages and styles. To assume a general, standard context, language and style is to assume the erasure of all specific contexts in favour of a certain emptiness where speed can operate blinding us with effects.

Technologies of reality and objectivity – The camera

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 (Flusser 2001: 17). The genealogy of objectivity has become entangled in the paths of the technical image, more precisely of the camera and the lens: from the appearance of realistic painting and perspective through the use of lenses and the camera obscura in the fifteenth century, to photographic camera, cinema, video, TV and the digital domain, certain languages and uses of the camera have sedimented as the equivalence of objective representation.

I suggest that indeed the category of materiality is related to this genealogy of the technical image, perhaps even that it is an effect of this genealogy, and indeed how we understand the body *as* matter in western and globalized cultures is compelled and defined through the technology of the lens and the camera, and through its hegemonic uses and languages.

Technologies of the body

The technologies of the body are the specific forms of thinking and articulating the experiences, practices and representations of the body. These relate both to notions of reflexivity (Foucault 1990: 48) and sedimented processes of becoming, as in the arts, and to political technologies of control. However, we are reminded of the productive character of technology and its capacity not to regulate, but to produce specific constructions of body and subject.

Non-verbal communication gives us interesting tools to analyze the continuum of communication in an open and changing set of interrelated

Jaime del Val

parameters. The language of space and time, of 'inarticulate' sound, of gesture and movement, of somatics and the relations of all these to verbal language, are discrete parameters for the analysis of the continuum of communication, of the body and the world *as* communication (to other bodies, to other parts of the same body).

In non-verbal communication studies it is assumed that in a normal interpersonal conversation only seven per cent of the meaning is conveyed strictly through verbal language per se. The resulting 93 per cent of the meaning is related to paralanguage (the sounds) and kinesthetics and other body messages such as somatics (García 2000: 28).

One could argue whether this 93 per cent is only underscoring the meaning of the words, or whether it is conveying completely new realms of signification, that are not totally defined, that verbal language itself cannot contain. After all if we try to imagine the morphogenesis of language, how do new words emerge? Is it not by a complex sedimentation and crossover of sounds and gestures, and least of all a conscious transformation of syntax, grammar and morphology?

Non-verbal communication is being massively formalized in media culture without major criticism to the paradigms and frameworks that underscore it. It is all too often analyzed through the paradigms used for verbal language, with its universalist essentialism and logocentric structures. So for instance a certain position of my eyebrows will have a certain specific meaning, like a word would do; all my somatics will be interpreted in the strict sense of a body grammar, morphology and syntax. Yet perhaps the forms of thinking and communicating of the body exceed any logocentric framework of analysis. The technology of dance as a specific way of thinking, and as a form of articulating, understanding, developing and structuring the moving body offers different approaches to the issue of non-verbal language that defy the logos.

Technologies of thinking

As the sedimented effect of the improvisation of the *forces that think in me*, language and the arts are strata of a communicating field. Dance, music, the visual arts, architecture, drama, etc., are specific forms of articulating many of the parameters of communication. As such they constitute specific forms of thinking and *tékhne*, of reflexivity and self-reflection. The disciplinary divide is linked to a specific conception of corporeality and the senses, to a specific anatomy of the body. Many other divides, many other anatomies, many other discrete representations are surely possible. In their sedimentation as *tékhne* these disciplines have constituted forms of thinking that obey rules other than the logos. One may attempt to translate them to the logos, though always imperfectly.

One can analyze any such disciplines, any such forms of thinking as a *tékhne* with diverse and changing parameters. How is the subject defined as a listening subject in terms of rhythm, timbre, form, melody, harmony, registers and densities, spatialisation? How is the dancing body defined in terms of its parameters?

Territorialisations of the body are maps of the virtual body: in its anatomy, and its senses, in its disciplines and *tékhne*, its technologies of thinking, in its recognisable landscapes and forms, in its forbidden surfaces. The given boundaries of the body-as-language, the frontiers of intelligibility, the legibility and concretion of the body can be redefined in multiple ways. Change the use of the camera and the representation of the body changes, unknown landscapes emerge, nameless forms. Change the relations between the disciplines, the senses, the languages, and the divide shifts again in unpredictable directions.

If, according to Freud, anatomy is destiny, *perhaps we can change the destiny of the body through redesigning its anatomy*. Every map we draw of the body generates a discrete representation of it. The body as such cannot be thought and will always exceed its representations. Yet the map becomes itself a territory, the anatomy becomes a body.

Post-posthuman. Beyond prosthetics

The preoccupation I propose is not around the material boundaries of the body and its obsoleteness. Obsolete it can only be in relation to the technologies/representations that attempt to subsume it. Yet the body exceeds these just like any other discrete representation. The materialist account of the body assumes materiality and form, and thus a logocentric framework of representation. In posthuman performance the emphasis is on the sheer concept of the material augmentation, not on the languages through which the body emerges and transforms, signifies and communicates.

The materiality of the body is the effect of certain technologies of representation (the camera) which are themselves an effect of texts. To transform the body no material operations are required, just change its representations or its languages, shift the angle of the camera. Understood as an *instrument*, the body acquires meaning through its intelligible frontiers of language and representation. Prosthetics is no longer to do with material extensions, but with multiple and changing organs of an instrument.

Post-postqueer. Beyond performativity

Queer theory attempts to define the body and more specifically gender in terms of textual processes of signification. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler outlines the theory of the performativity of gender (Butler 1990). Performativity accounts for the productive character of speech acts which re-invoke and produce the very category it pronounces (Austin 1998) so that the category in itself turns out to be a repetition of a repetition, or a parody with no original, as in the case of gender. It also accounts for the subversive speech acts that through a decontextualized reiteration may put into question the categories invoked by the speech act, subverting their meaning and revealing their constructed nature.

Performativity, being a textual/verbal process of reiteration, does not account for the vast field of non-verbal signifying processes through which the body and gender are signified. Performativity accounts partly for the signification of gender and the analysis of the *technologies of gender* but it fails

in its attempt to fully define the signification and morphogenesis of the body, or of the possibilities to redefine it.

Attempts have been made to go beyond the issue of gender and question the discursive construction of sex, and of the body itself, however in my view one of the handicaps of most scholarly research around this issue is precisely the textual approach to the body and the lack of concern or knowledge for other forms of thinking and communicating that do not belong to the realm of the logos.

Contingency

Every communicating act is subject to contingency: anything I may say here and now will suffer endless shifts and transformations in whichever receptors it arrives. Such is the case even with verbal language: if '. . . *the body rhetorically exceeds the speech act it also performs*' (Butler 1997: 155), the supposed universality of language is challenged every time we speak. The non-verbal opens up a permanent gap around verbal language reminding it of its permanent failures and uncertain success. The verbal turns out to be a contingent territorialisation, a representation of the continuum.

In spite of the many essentialisms that pervade art traditions in the west, one could generally say that in the arts meaning is never assumed to be universal in a strict sense, there is a certain openness about *interpretation* of meaning in music, painting, dance, etc.

Metaformativity and morphogenesis. The politics of fluid form

I propose to understand the body not in its fixed materiality, nor as pure intensity of forces, but rather as a multidimensional, open, contingent field of communication, a process of becoming that can be approached in terms of the signifying processes through which the body itself is made intelligible, or challenges its intelligibility. A frontier of multiple signifying processes.

I call this a *metaformative* process. Metaformativity, as different to performativity, is not based in the logos of the text, in its parodic possibilities of resignification; rather it accounts for the multiple and changing crossovers of the strata of communication (non-verbal, yet also verbal) in which new forms emerge. It accounts for the morphogenesis of representation and language. How does a sound affect the outline of a gesture? How do these two influence the emergence of a word? Which infinite in-betweens of the senses that we know of are central to the process of communicating and generating meaning? How can a gesture suddenly transform itself so that the parts we identify in it are no longer intelligible and new structures can be recognized? How does the constant interplay of the visual, aural, gestural and other, generate a changing flux of communication? How does this flux sediment in a changing language? And finally how is the morphogenesis of language constantly exposed and influenced by contingency, by the here and now of multiple interpretations and silences?

How are these changing plateaux of communication formalized in universalist patterns within contemporary standard media and technologies of communication? The map has become a territory, the virtual has become

part of reality. After all cyberspace is not only a fiction of the global, it has become reality as well, it relates to our physical bodies. How are bodies actually categorized in usual online interaction? What kind of body is being produced through the standard interfaces of the mouse and the keyboard, the flatness of the screen and the virtual desktop? What kind of logocentric relations are established? Click, drag, press . . . it's a one to one relation of possibilities, a strict sequence of cause and effect. How very far away from a gesture in dance, that swings its potential of meaning around in infinite directions, before it is incorporated in the receptor?

Perhaps the mirror neurons could partly account for the many forms of relations between bodies, the many possibilities of inhabiting other bodies, which we experience in different forms, in the arts or in everyday life, which cannot be thought in terms of materiality. How do I experience that dancing body, or that sounding body in music, or the dance of the body that has sedimented in a painting? How do I enact its forms of thinking, understand its language? It certainly is an open process. It is metaformative. I recreate and reinvent in every enactment, every 'perception' is a generative process, a creation, an interpretation and a translation.

I propose a paradigm of the body that seeks to reflect upon this field of forces as a *communicating field*, exploring the complex and changing feedbacks between the forces, and the ways these sediment as *tékhne*, as thinking forces, as languages, also the way we discursively and *politically* articulate the paradigms for the field, how we understand its genealogies. I propose to think a body capable of walking along the multiple frontiers and lines on which its very construction is drawn or challenged at every moment.

Embodiment and logos

Disembodiment is possibly related to the forms of exclusion that conform to a certain paradigm: how do we embody prohibitions and norms? How do we experience these as disembodiment? Disembodiment is perhaps embodied exclusion, embodied norm, embodied territorialisation. Disembodiment is also the 'error' in incorporating norms. The norm is never imposed in an absolute way: something resists and exceeds the process of incorporation. *Disembodiment is never complete*.

Embodiment is both the successful incorporation of norms and the emergence and sedimentation of emerging forms. However, no incorporation is ever complete, no form becomes concrete forever. *Embodiment is never complete*.

Embodiment is improvisation, repetition and variation, it is the sedimentation of improvisation, thus it is an *écriture* and an architecture. It is the trail of multiple incorporations. It is sedimented practice and experience, sedimented communication, therefore language. There are thus different temporalities and strata to embodiment: the immediate ones of multiple improvisations, and the long-term ones of multiple sedimentations.

Virtuality and telematics can be analyzed as forms of disembodiment because of the universalist formalizations of the communicating body that articulate the technological model: they implicitly convey the incorporation

of the norms that articulate a specific logocentric paradigm. By embodied technologies I will refer to models open to the contingency and complexity of the communicating field of the bodies-instruments: open models of communication.

How does the *logocentric mediation* work through the prosthesis of technology? How can we build interfaces in the field of new media that generate new forms of embodiment? Does it have to do with articulating systems that are open to contingency, rather than subject to the logos? What can we learn from dance and traditional embodied practices for that purpose? How can the notion of presence be reinvented once the universalist and reductionist assumption of telepresence has been challenged?

One specificity I would note of dance-tech: it is noticeable how different the concern for the body is in other performance-technology domains, where the approach is more conceptual, at times more materialistic in the posthumanist fashion. One promising aspect of dance and technology is the existing concern for the language of the interface, for the body as language, for an open and *fluid* concept of language and body. Media artists, in particular dance-technologists, occupy a crucial strategic place to redefine technology, to generate a culture of specificity as opposed to the standard culture of the empire: not to generate a new model, but an open multiplicity.

Essentialisms in interface design and movement analysis

The instrument we create is the language we create. How do the tools of the design industry and the speed of their transformation affect our languages? How far do we need to generate a culture of the instrument according to our languages, in such a way that these may sediment?

Most research into motion capture systems shows a basic lack of criticism towards the discrete representations of the body that underlie the research. The attempt to reproduce a supposed reality fails to recognize the fact that *what is being synthesized is not reality itself but an already discrete representation of it*.

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. Every system we develop will always be incomplete in that respect, for our own mental representations are always incomplete. 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.

So, does anything get 'lost' in motion mapping, capture and synthesis? This depends on the kind of representations we want to articulate or reproduce. If we dismiss the idea of reproducing a supposed reality in favour of generating new representations a lot can be done with very few elements: in

fact for the sake of producing work and of research itself the less elements you work with the better, generally speaking. For what is at stake is the emergence of a language, and this needs a long time of sedimentation.

So, as Scott deLahunta proposed during the Digital Cultures Lab in Nottingham, *important is what gets made*, not what gets lost. The instrument generates reality, *produces world*. We can choose between reproducing existing and standard models of the world and producing new and diverse forms of reality.

Specificity and frontier as politics of resistance. Reverse landscapes

Specificities are implicitly reverse landscapes of standardisation. Specificities are contingency, they exist, they grow in every corner, like the grass between the stones. However, what I propose is a certain definition of specificity relating to *how we generate knowledge and cultural practice through the articulation of specific technologies and how we think theses technologies as our specific language*. Furthermore, *how we create a culture or subculture of critical interaction in which the generation of tools, of work and communication, and the systematizsed knowledge of the spheres of critical theory work together, generating* minor *archives of knowledge and practice as opposed to hegemonic universalist models of knowledge and practice*.

As paradigm of resistance the proliferation of specificities implies something different to the concept of multitude (Negri and Hardt 2004), which seems to be difficult to separate from the concept of mass in the late capitalist context of implicit assimilations. Specificity differs from identity: it is not a solid construction but a changing field of forces, a multidimensional field of unstable strata. It also differs from identification: one may choose to identify or disidentify with aspects of one's specificity, or of other specificities. Identification and disidentification are political actualisations of specificity in context.

Specificity implies not only the convergence of multiple genealogies and their sedimented structures, but also of the fluid forces that will account for the new shapes. Each form of transdisciplinarity and hybridity generates a form of specificity. Its genealogy is crucial, it cannot grow from nothing, it is rather a consciousness of the different and often contradictory forces that converge here in this body. Let each body develop its *tékhne*, its technologies-instruments-languages, let each body develop its territory of knowledge and its minor archive. Let each body relate to other bodies and their specificities in a critical and open framework of uncertainty.

Beyond freeware: Hackers, learn to dance!

There is a need to transcend the discourse on freeware, for of little use is freeware if it is reproducing the paradigms of hegemony, in the forms of thinking and embodiment. There is indeed little concern for the body, even less for dance, in the hacker world. Generating a critical culture to the paradigms implicit in technology means to rethink the body, to open up technology to the swift forces of contingency. Indeed it means learning to dance.

Jaime del Val

Abstraction: Antibodies

The discourse on abstraction is permeated by feminist criticism on the masculinist 'ejaculations' of the male artist impersonated by Pollock and other abstract expressionists (Jones 1998: 53). I will try to offer a positive rereading of abstraction free though not unconscious of such criticism: abstraction as process of negotiation between the concrete and the abstract, as shifting of the frontiers of materialisation and dematerialisation. The morphogenesis of an *antibody* that never materializes completely.

'A subject who speaks at the border of the speakable takes the risk of redrawing the distinction between what is and is not speakable:, the risk of being cast out into the unspeakable' (Butler 1997: 139). Exploring the frontiers between the abstract and the concrete is to explore the border between the speakable and the unspeakable, the thinkable and the unthinkable. Exploring the frontiers between the territories of the speakable (in the disciplines, in the anatomy, in the maps of reality) is to explore their shifting genealogy and contingency, the thousand in-betweens, bridges and gaps on which the frontiers barely sustain and move.

Reverso: Specificities

Metaformativity isn't a new dogma but rather an attempt to counteract many of the dogmas of contemporary arts and culture. It is more like a malleable lens through which one can analyze and produce, rather than a specific direction to take. It is also a *product* of practice, of hybridizations and contradictions, of specificity and conflict. Where are the open multiplicities of being and thinking forms that are not to be framed within the logos? They are everywhere, but we need to renew our critical paradigms to counteract the effects of assimilation more effectively. Which software, dance, installation is metaformative and which isn't? It's not possible to trace a neat and clear divide between empire and antibody. Yet I will attempt to refer to the lens of metaformativity in arts practice or in technological production. The following description of my work in the context of the project *Reverso* should not be taken for a paradigm or an example to follow, but just the opening of possible articulations.

The work I am interested in developing is one that takes into account the multiplicities and contradictions of this body, that confronts *old and new technologies*, that is concerned with languages, *écritures* and forms, that is highly conscious of the cultural specificity and heritage within every of the disciplines involved, a process of working *in between* the given territories: practice and theory, music and dance, visual arts and music and so on.

Reverso is the name for a metaproject, a sort of project of specificity, in which I develop most of my work (not all) in particular all that concerns new media. It is a mixture of independent laboratory and company that approaches different projects at the crossroads of production, research, education, diffusion and activism, in the fields of critical theory, dance and technology, electroacoustics, virtual generative architecture, video and other disciplines and media. Production concentrates on instruments (software and hardware) and interactive dance performances and installations. The

Body Technologies Workshop is the education initiative that brings together the different technical, artistic, and theoretical concerns of the project for a hybrid community of students, artists, theorists and technologists.

The main project that I have been developing inside *Reverso* in the past years is entitled *Frontier Bodies*. Its two main outputs are an ongoing interactive dance performance project called *Morphogenesis*, and an ongoing interactive dance installation project called *Thresholds*. Both the installation and the performance are divided into three different parts that are each a project in itself: *Dissolution of the Multiple Body*; *Microdances* and the *Generative Architecture* project. I will now focus on the last three.

Dissolution of the multiple body

Dissolution of the multiple body is a photography, video, installation, performance and generative film project that explores two interrelated aspects: the representation of the body as sedimented time (the trail of the image and sound of the body), and secondly the transformation in body perception that happens when you relate in 'real time' with this trail that the body itself is producing (Figure 1).

The photographs are pure analogue images with no digital processing, sheer long exposures that capture the trail of the body in the infinite gradations of light. The camera, the technology of objectivity par excellence, is being used to produce an immaterial, fluid, dissolving body of light and time. It is perhaps an *homage* to Bacon, an expression of the unformed and the nameless in ourselves, and at the same time it can't help relating in a strange manner to action painting on the one hand, and dance on the other, for the body is generating an abstract image with the movement and the image is thus the trail of a choreography, the imprint and *écriture*, the hieroglyph of gesture. The project explores the zone close to abstraction, the frontier, where you still can hardly recognize forms, expressions, gestures, times and intensities of the body.

In the performance and the installation, the performer or public-interactor is producing the visual trail through the life processing of his/her image and at the same time a sound trail through the processing of his/her voice. The image becomes an evanescent wash, an abstract or nearly abstract visual composition projected onto transparent screens, while the voice, spatialized and transformed, becomes a musical composition that surrounds you. Both the processing of the image and of the voice happen through 'full body interaction', the movements are captured through a video camera and analyzed in one of the networked computers. The body is a threshold of light not only regarding its processed image, but also the motion analysis. There is a fluid and intuitive interaction in which you feel the immediate effect of almost every movement and at the same time there are many layers of events, like in an *orchestra*, where some are more immediate and present while others are more unpredictable or have less presence. This approach seems to be important in interaction design (what one could call the 'orchestral approach') where too often you find straightforward, one to one relations of events, that due to the simplicity turn out to

Jaime del Val

Figure 1: Dissolution of the Multiple Body, photography – 2002, – copyright: Jaime del Val.

look like effects (i.e. the Sony Playstation). Also I seek a very fluid, organic kind of 'full body contact' with the audiovisual landscape you are generating, so that you may feel it as a subtle extension of your body that suddenly *speaks* in new ways in which it could not before.

How do you experience the translation of a movement into certain sounds and images? There is no universal set of relations: rather one must establish these partly in the mappings of the software and leave place for contingency to finish the work. Since the three basic elements (movement, image, sound) have already got very charged contexts of signification in our respective traditions, there is a certain inevitable collision of potential meanings in the process. How is the meaning of a movement transformed through new relations that are established with the sounds it produces? The crossover of *écritures* brings along the emergence of new language. It is however a very long and slow process if it is not to stay on the level of effects.

Proprioception transforms when you are relating to this trail that is like an excess of the body, something that relates to it and at the same time is independent from it. This transformation together with the new relations to the sound and the image bring along a transformation of the body language altogether: after all how far is it possible to separate the 'purely choreographic' from the visual and aural? The continuum of the body is redesigned into new discreet territories, yet these are open. Finally, the computer captures the processed image that can be edited as a (generative) film, thus emphasizing the way in which the output acquires a life of its own.

Microdances

Microdances is a photography, video, installation and performance project concerned with two related aspects: the transformation of the form of the body, of its landscapes and languages, its intelligibility as a body through the proximity of the camera and the precise framing; and secondly the transformation of the perception of the body that happens when you improvize *through* the fragmented *image* of the body (Figure 2).
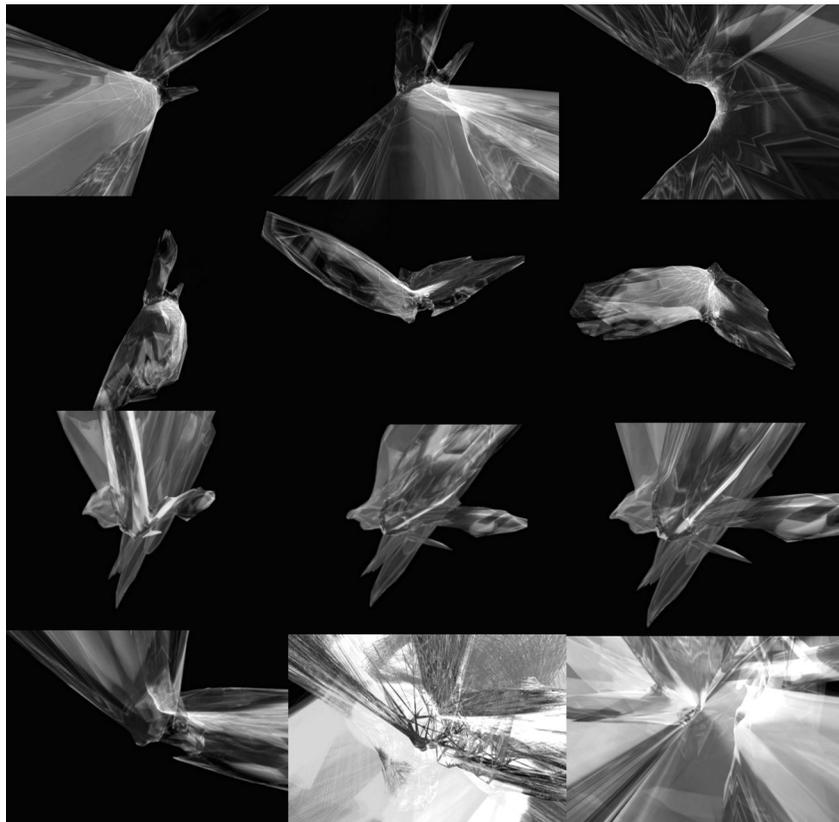

Figure 2: Microdances, - photography – 2003–2005, – copyright: Jaime del Val.

Jaime del Val

In the photography series the concern is purely with framing, proximity and focus. The black and white images have no digital processing but the photographic medium is explored in directions that challenge the notion of objectivity. A question is posed: is this a body? what part of the body is it? It is alien and yet so near, its excess is engulfing, it absorbs you in every direction, it cannot be contained. It is an exploration of unknown landscapes and forms that may or may not sediment and enter the realm of the concrete.

In the video series (both videodance and abstract film) similar framings are explored but the time dimension is crucial now. A new layer comes in: the abstraction of the movement, of the body as time, of gesture, the exploration of minute movements that evolve, in a minimalist manner, like phonemes and syllables of an entirely new language. Any movement, thus amplified and framed, acquires suddenly an enormous and open signification that explores all the uncertainties and contingencies of your understanding. Yet the most interesting part of the process is not the finished video pieces and the time editing, but the *process of improvizing* in front of the camera: I move watching the image of the body fragment in a monitor or projection. It is my body yet at some point I start to perceive it as something other, the amplified scale induces the discovery of totally new realms of movement, sensation and time, I suddenly lose contact with the body from within . . . only to recover it thorough the embodiment of the amplified fragment that has become another body. I become another body that is itself my own. It is a thrilling sensation of rediscovering embodiment, and the more you practice, the more you explore the new realm of language, the more the improvisation sediments in a language and a technique. There is an interval[3] that is created with this 'other' body that becomes yourself.

It's also a deterritorialisation of the body: any part of the body, and any movement it may do can be performed in front of the camera, and it becomes something other. It is not a parody of the body's actions, but an open redefinition into an unknown field, for example, you may find it hard to distinguish the organs (are they not discrete representations after all?) and take a hand for a sexual organ that palpitates, but then who cares; it's not about erotisizing the whole body (or perhaps yes) but rather the territory of sex itself is put into question: it can't quite be pornographic or post-pornographic,[4] for the actions and the parts of the body are always at the frontier of the intelligible. They could be many different things. It is no longer so relevant whether it is a body or something other, for it speaks by itself, as pure excess of language. Yet I try to explore the disturbing threshold where you are not sure any longer of what it is that you are seeing: the threshold of the morphogenesis of representation.

Finally, I also do this improvizing or micro-choreographing in live performance with the naked body moving in front of the camera while the amplified image, projected onto transparent screens, becomes like a huge architecture, a landscape I inhabit. The voice is sampled live and processed through the camera-based interaction of the body fragments, becoming also a dense, low sound-landscape where the original voice is hardly recognized any longer.

3 The notion of interval (Manning, forthcoming) refers to the relation that is established between two or more bodies in terms of pre-acceleration, where 'movement has always already begun', where one can anticipate the movement of the other, when the two or more bodies become actually one, something I relate also to music making and communication in a more general sense. Perhaps the specific articulation of the interval in interaction design is one of the keys for the development of embodied technologies.

4 Theorists and practitioners of post-pornography, who have Annie Sprinkle as their goddess, propose to redefine pornography as a specific territory *outside* representation, and to bring it into the realm of the speakable. Yet seldom is the question posed to the specific languages of the camera through which the body is represented in porn and post-porn. Objectivist, materialist approaches recur once and again in what seems yet another parodic reification of the narrative.

Generative architecture

In the *Generative Architecture* project concepts from both of the above projects converge with a more explicit reflection on the concept of space. All three projects deal with 'spaces of the body', not only in so far as there are landscapes that react to your movement, that are embodied in different ways, that are 'physical' in their 'virtuality', but also in the way in which they are intended and perceived as subtle extensions of the body, not in terms of materiality, but of language. There is a language of sound spatialisation that is being created, and of relating to visual notions of space. Both in the performance and the installation the only visible space is the projection on the transparent screens (a low tech simulation of immersion) (Figure 3).

In *Generative Architecture* the body interacts with fluid, organic shapes that remind us both of the abstract trail of the moving body and of the fluid shape of the fragmented landscapes and *anti-organs* of the *Microdances*. Furthermore, the ways in which the 3D structures evolve and transform through the interaction are similar to the minimalist evolutions of the *Microdances*, like emerging organs of a 'virtual' body that dances and speaks. The concept of theses generative architectures defy the notion of virtual reality since they are not about the exploration of Cartesian representations of space, but rather like evolving musical compositions, generative and morphing spaces that never become totally concrete, highly pictorial in their translucent qualities, thus relating to abstract film. It's not
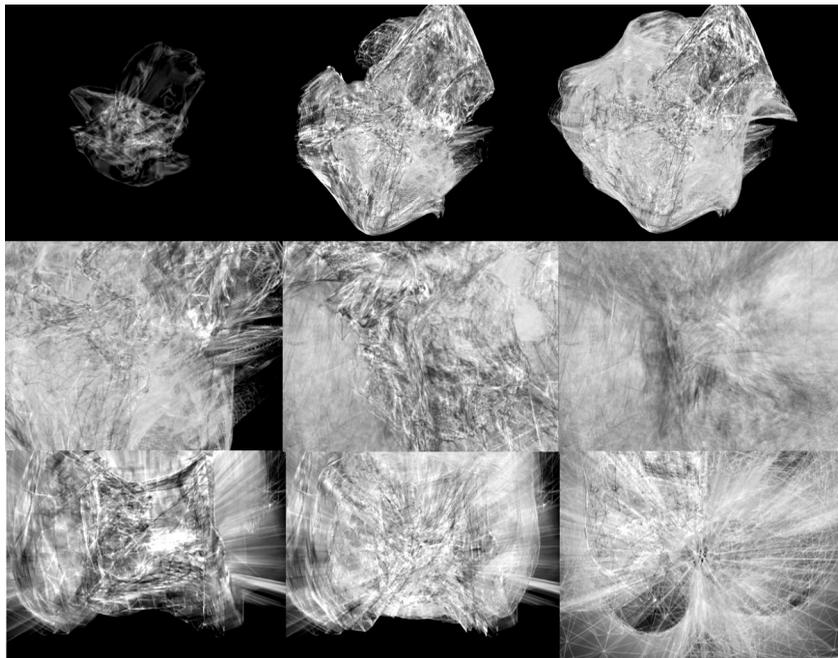

Figure. 3: Virtual interactive and generative architecture – 2005, Copyright: Jaime del Val.

about generating effects of simulation but rather of creating languages, intervals with the body-space, new concepts of space and of relating to it, of 'speaking through' space. The work is about the slow sedimentation of improvisations, the building up of language from cross-breedings and simple elements. It is a dance of the space (Figure 4).

As an embryo and work in progress *Reverso* is but at its starting point. Its life started six years ago with the publication of the first journal of queer theory in Spanish, more recent endeavours deal with environmental issues and the fight against urban speculation (standardisation of the territory) in different regions of Spain. Its future is uncertain and open. Yet perhaps some of its more ambitious projects head in the direction of the open communication models outlined briefly in this essay. How do new conceptions of language in the spectre of non-verbal communication emerge in the context of digital media technologies where the possibilities of establishing relations between the different disciplines and languages have exploded to unthinkable regions? How do we invest these technologies with, and transform them through language in the context of multiple specifities? Finally how can we organize a consistent community and a culture of the instrument that may sediment into specific cultures of resistance or even of new stratifications of the social?

How far are we already generating such a community and culture? Many of these issues came out in the debates of the Digital Cultures Lab. It is symptomatic that it is in the context of dance and technology where such theoretical proposals are proliferating. There have been decades now of production of instruments and languages, indeed of specificities in the context of dance and technology, yet often the boundaries of discourse, and the diverse essentialisms common to media art, the dance world and digital culture are still to be felt. It is perhaps a good moment for a recapitulation, for rethinking the possibilities for the articulation of a
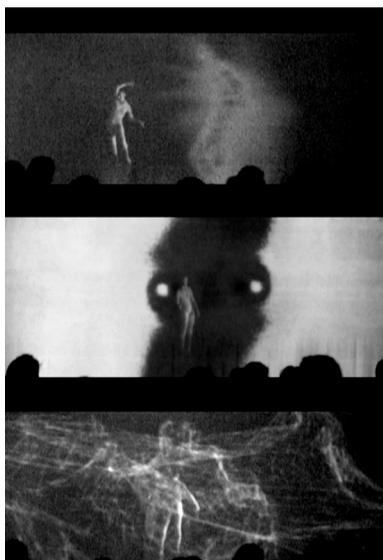

Figure. 4: Morphogenesis, – Interactive dance performance – 2003, Copyright: Jaime del Val.

community, for hybridizing in critical and productive ways the different sub-cultures of dance and technology, media art, hackerculture and cyberculture, critical theory (in its postcolonial, queer, cyberfeminst trends), and the several movements against the global empire, to mention just a few. Deepening the feedbacks between these should be fruitful if we attempt to counteract many of the dogmas and boundaries, if we attempt to work *in between*.

Epilogue. Life after the postmodern, or the world beyond parody

What is there beyond postmodernity? If modernity is linked to transcendental meanings and the postmodern to the surface of signifiers and parody, what are we confronting next in the realm of form and morphogenesis? Can parody still have any political potential in the context of digital and media culture where parody is the style *par excellence*, both in its kitsch manifestations as the language of the media (tv, publicity, etc.) and as the *language of effect* of digital culture? Can parody still be resignified in any way close to subversion in a context in which it is the instrument *par excellence* of assimilation of difference into the flat plateau of globalized standardisation? Perhaps we still need much of the irony of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*. Yet what horizon of emergence and new political strategies, what new frontier positions can be outlined through the lens of metaformativity? It should be both an aesthetics, an art of existence, and a politics.

A *frontier body* is a field whose identification changes in multiple directions other than parody, whose emerging forms are invested with political force, where the very articulation of specificity, and of the ways of connecting to other multiplicities, is already a form of resistance. Perhaps the only way to outreach the exclusive paradigm of the logos in a context of radical democracy is not to assimilate into its circles what was previously excluded from them, for the circles of exclusion are never-ending, but to assume an open multiplicity of being and thinking forms that are not to be framed within the logos, a paradigm of both promise and uncertainty.

References

Austin, J.L. (1998), *Cóómo hacer cosas con palabras*, Barcelona: Paidós.

Ballard, J.G. (1984), *El Imperio del Sol*, Barcelona: Minotauro.

Baudrillard, J. (2000), *Pantalla Total*, Barcelona: Anagrama.

Butler, J. (1993), *Bodies That Matter*, New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1990), *Gender Trouble*, New York: Routledge.

Butler, J. (1997), *Excitable Speech – A Politics of the Performative*, New York: Routledge.

Davis, F. (2002), *La Comunicacióón no Verbal*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

De Lauretis, T. (1987), *Technologies of Gender*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1988), *Mil Mesetas – Capitalismo y Esquizofrenia – 2ª parte*, Valencia: Pre-textos.

Flusser, V. (2001), *Una filosofía de la Fotografía*, Madri: Síntesis Ed.

Foucault, M. (1998), *Historia de la sexualidad*, Madrid: Siglo XXI Ed.

Foucault, M. (1990), *Tecnologías del yo*, Barcelona, Paidós Ed.

Frabetti, F. (forthcoming), *Manifesto for the Futures of Feminist Technoscience*, ESRC Seminar Series on Feminist Technoscience 2004, University of Surrey.

García, J.L. (2000), *Comunicación no Verbal: Periodismo y medios audiovisuales*, Madrid, Editorial Universitas.

Haraway, D. (1995), Ciencia, Cyborgs y Mujeres – la reinvención de la naturaleza, Madrid: Cátedra.

Jones, A. (1998), *Body Art, Performing the subject*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Manning, E. (forthcoming 2007), 'Incipient Action, The Dance of the Non-Yet', in L. Turner (ed.), *Choreographesis*, Minnesota UP.

Negri, T. and Hardt, M. (2002), *Imperio*, Barcelona: Paidós.

Negri, T. and Hardt, M. (2004), *Multitud*, Barcelona: Debate.

Poyatos, F. (1994), *La Comunicacióón no verbal*, Madrid: Ediciones Istmo.

Virilio, P. (1988), *Estéética de la Desaparición*, Barcelona: Anagrama.

Virilio, P. (1989), *La Máquina de Visión*, Madrid: Cátedra.

Suggested citation

Contributor details

Jaime del Val is a digital and visual artist, composer and pianist, choreographer and performer, writer, independent researcher, activist and director of **REVERSO**, the Body Technologies Project. His interactive dance performances have received several international awards. He regularly teaches the Body Technologies Workshop and has participated in numerous international congresses, festivals and exhibitions in the fields of digital and visual art, music, dance and critical theory. He has published on digital art, dance & technology and critical theory in diverse journals and is the editor of REVERSO, the first journal of queer theory in Spanish. Contact: Aguila Real 24, 28232 Las Rozas, Madrid, Spain; Tel: +34 687 558 436.
E-mail: jaimedelval@reverso.org