

They say the streets are alive in Europe, but dead in America. They are wrong. Nothing could be more intense, electrifying, turbulent, and vital than the streets of New York. They are filled with crowds, bustle, and advertisements, each by turns aggressive or casual. There are millions of people in the streets, wandering, carefree, violent, as if they had nothing better to do – and doubtless they have nothing else to do – than produce the permanent scenario of the city. There is music everywhere; the activity is intense, relatively violent, and silent (it is not the agitated, theatrical activity you find in Italy). The streets and avenues never empty, but the neat, spacious geometry of the city is far removed from the thronging intimacy of the narrow streets of Europe.

In Europe, the street only lives in sudden surges, in historic moments of revolution and barricades. At other times people move along briskly, no one really hangs around (no one wanders any more). It is the same with European cars. No one actually lives in them; there isn't enough space. The cities, too, do not have enough space, or rather that space is deemed public and bears all the marks of the public arena, which forbids you to cross it or wander around it as though it were a desert or some indifferent area.

The American street has not, perhaps, known these historic moments, but it is always turbulent, lively, kinetic, and cinematic, like the country itself, where the specifically historical and political stage counts for little, but where change, whether spurred by technology, racial differences, or the media, assumes virulent forms: its violence is the very violence of the way of life.

Such is the whirl of the city, so great its centrifugal force, that it would take superhuman strength to envisage living as a couple and sharing someone else's life in New York. Only tribes, gangs, mafia families, secret societies, and perverse communities can survive, not couples. This is the anti-Ark. In

the first Ark, the animals came in two great flood. Here in this fabulous Ark, him or her each evening to find the I

In New York, the mad have been set difficult to tell apart from the rest of the down-and-outs who inhabit it. It is difficult one would keep its mad in the shade circulation specimens of a madness w taken hold of the whole city.

'Breakdancing' is a feat of acrobatic realize it actually was dancing, when the pose (elbow on the ground, head not hand, the pose you see on Etruscan torso rest like this is reminiscent of Chinese to a halt at the height of the acrobatic breakdancer stops at the slack point in derisive. You might say that in curling ground like this, they seem to be digging own bodies, from which to stare out in

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in sudden surges, in historic moments of times people move along briskly, no one understands any more). It is the same with us in them; there isn't enough space. The place, or rather that space is deemed public arena, which forbids you to cross it or be a desert or some indifferent area. Perhaps, known these historic moments, but static, and cinematic, like the country itself, and political stage counts for little, but by technology, racial differences, or the violence is the very violence of the way of

at its centrifugal force, that it would take living as a couple and sharing someone's, gangs, mafia families, secret societies, live, not couples. This is the anti-Ark. In

the first Ark, the animals came in two by two to save the species from the great flood. Here in this fabulous Ark, each one comes in alone – it's up to him or her each evening to find the last survivors for the last party.

In New York, the mad have been set free. Let out into the city, they are difficult to tell apart from the rest of the punks, junkies, addicts, winoes, or down-and-outs who inhabit it. It is difficult to see why a city as crazy as this one would keep its mad in the shadows, why it would withdraw from circulation specimens of a madness which has in fact, in its various forms, taken hold of the whole city.

'Breakdancing' is a feat of acrobatic gymnastics. Only at the end do you realize it actually was dancing, when the dancer freezes into a lazy, languid pose (elbow on the ground, head nonchalantly resting in the palm of the hand, the pose you see on Etruscan tombs). The way they suddenly come to rest like this is reminiscent of Chinese opera. But the Chinese warrior comes to a halt at the height of the action in a heroic gesture, whereas the breakdancer stops at the slack point in his movements and the gesture is derisive. You might say that in curling up and spiralling around on the ground like this, they seem to be digging a hole for themselves within their own bodies, from which to stare out in the ironic, indolent pose of the dead.

I would never have believed that the New York marathon could move you to tears. It really is the end-of-the-world show. Can we speak of suffering freely entered into as we might speak of a state of servitude freely entered into? In driving rain, with helicopters circling overhead and the crowd cheering, wearing aluminium foil capes and squinting at their stop-watches, or

bare-chested, their eyes rolling skywards, they are all seeking death, that death by exhaustion that was the fate of the first Marathon man some two thousand years ago. And he, let us not forget, was carrying a message of victory to Athens. They also dream no doubt of bringing a victory message, but there are too many of them and their message has lost all meaning: it is merely the message of their arrival, at the end of their exertions, the twilight message of a futile, superhuman effort. Collectively, they might rather seem to be bringing the message of a catastrophe for the human race, which you can see becoming more and more decrepit by the hour as the runners come in, from the competitive, athletic types who arrive first to the wrecks who are literally carried to the finishing line by their friends, or the handicapped who do the race in their wheelchairs. There are 17,000 runners and you can't help thinking back to the Battle of Marathon, where there weren't even 17,000 soldiers in the field. There are 17,000 of them and each one runs alone, without even a thought for victory, but simply in order to feel alive. 'We won', gasped the man from Marathon as he expired. 'I did it!', sighs the exhausted marathon runner of New York as he collapses on the grass in Central Park.

### I DID IT!

The slogan of a new form of advertising activity, of autistic performance, a pure and empty form, a challenge to one's own self that has replaced the Promethean ecstasy of competition, effort, and success.

The New York marathon has become a sort of international symbol of such fetishistic performance, of the mania for an empty victory, the joy engendered by a feat that is of no consequence.

I ran the New York marathon: 'I did it!'

I conquered Annapurma: 'I did it!'

The moon landing is the same kind of ultimately not really so surprising; it was course of science and progress. We dreamer's millenarian dream of conquering space.

Carrying out any kind of programme that comes from doing anything merely to it: having a child, climbing a mountain committing suicide.

The marathon is a form of demonstration is running to show you are capable of ge of yourself, to prove it . . . to prove what Graffiti carry the same message. They sin They are free publicity for existence.

Do we continually have to prove to ourselves of weakness, harbinger of a new fanaticism endlessly self-evident.

### MYSTIC TRANSPORTATION INCORPORATED

A blue-green lorry with gleaming chrome Avenue in the early morning sun, just after in gold metallic lettering, the words 'Mystic Transportation Incorporated'.

It sums up the whole of New York and Every special effect can be found here, from the ground, all the special effects of the movie the fourth dimension of the city.

In years to come cities will stretch out here (Los Angeles). After that, they will bury themselves no longer even have names. Everything will

skywards, they are all seeking death, that the fate of the first Marathon man some two years ago is not forgotten, was carrying a message of triumph and no doubt of bringing a victory message, and their message has lost all meaning: it is empty, at the end of their exertions, the twilight of effort. Collectively, they might rather seem a catastrophe for the human race, which you might decrepit by the hour as the runners come in the types who arrive first to the wrecks who line up by their friends, or the handicapped runners. There are 17,000 runners and you can't see them of Marathon, where there weren't even 17,000 of them and each one runs for a victory, but simply in order to feel alive. The Marathon as he expired. 'I did it!'; sighs the runner of New York as he collapses on the grass in

artistic activity, of autistic performance, a sense to one's own self that has replaced the effort, and success. It becomes a sort of international symbol of the mania for an empty victory, the joy of consequence. 'I did it!' 'I did it!' 'I did it!'

The moon landing is the same kind of thing: 'We did it!' The event was ultimately not really so surprising; it was an event pre-programmed into the course of science and progress. We did it. But it has not revived the millenarian dream of conquering space. In a sense, it has exhausted it.

Carrying out any kind of programme produces the same sense of futility that comes from doing anything merely to prove to yourself that you can do it: having a child, climbing a mountain, making some sexual conquest, committing suicide.

The marathon is a form of demonstrative suicide, suicide as advertising: it is running to show you are capable of getting every last drop of energy out of yourself, to prove it . . . to prove what? That you are capable of finishing. Graffiti carry the same message. They simply say: 'I'm so-and-so and I exist! They are free publicity for existence.

Do we continually have to prove to ourselves that we exist? A strange sign of weakness, harbinger of a new fanaticism for a faceless performance, endlessly self-evident.

## MYSTIC TRANSPORTATION INCORPORATED

A blue-green lorry with gleaming chromework is going down Seventh Avenue in the early morning sun, just after a snowfall. It bears on its sides, in gold metallic lettering, the words 'Mystic Transportation'.

It sums up the whole of New York and its mystical view of decadence. Every special effect can be found here, from sublime verticality to decay on the ground, all the special effects of the mixing of races and empires. This is the fourth dimension of the city.

In years to come cities will stretch out horizontally and will be non-urban (Los Angeles). After that, they will bury themselves in the ground and will no longer even have names. Everything will become infrastructure-bathed in

the billiard player's red braces. Foucault, Sartre, together at the counter, talking to each other, gaily like the originals. 'Cocktail scenery.' The pour of beer. 'Hustling is prohibited.'

Sex and beach, beach and mountains. Concepts. Sex and concepts. 'Just a life.' appear as simulation. Landscapes as photo-d scenario, thoughts as writing, terrorism as as television. Things seem only to exist by You wonder whether the world itself isn't just copy in some other world.

Beauty is created by plastic surgery, the only surgery, the only opinion by opinion poll genetic engineering, along comes plastic surgery

specialized institutes so that people's bodies and, at the same time, invents pans in which tom of the pan, which is made of a substance official that not a single drop sticks to it, just 'feeling' and therapeutic love, which do not . This is called interface or interaction. It has and action. It is also called communication, communicate: the miracle is that the pan o the water without touching it, in a sort of me way as one body communicates its fluid, without that other ever being seduced or even

disturbed, by a sort of molecular capillary action. The code of separation has worked so well that they have even managed to separate the water from the pan and to make the pan transmit its heat as a message, or to make one body transmit its desire to the other as a message, as a fluid to be decoded. This is called information and it has wormed its way into everything, like a phobic, maniacal leitmotiv, which affects sexual relations as well as kitchen implements.

Other examples of this mania for asepsis:

The Getty museum where old paintings look new, bleached and gleaming, cleansed of all patina and *cracqueture*, with an artificial lustre that echoes the fake Pompeian décor all around them.

In Philadelphia, a radical sect named 'MOVE', with a bizarre set of rules, including one forbidding both the practice of autopsy and the removal of rubbish, is cleared out by the police, who kill eleven people by fire and burn down thirty adjacent houses, including those (the irony of it!) of all the neighbours who had called for the sect to be removed.

This, too, is a clean-up operation. They are getting rid of rubbish and patina, getting back to an original state of cleanliness, restoring. 'Keep America clean.' And that smile everyone gives you as they pass, that friendly contraction of the jaws triggered by human warmth. It is the eternal smile of communication, the smile through which the child becomes aware of the presence of others, or struggles desperately with the problem of their presence. It is the equivalent of the primal scream of man alone in the world. Whether I am right in all this or not, they certainly do smile at you here, though neither from courtesy, nor from an effort to charm. This smile signifies only the need to smile. It is a bit like the Cheshire Cat's grin: it continues to float on faces long after all emotion has disappeared. A smile available at any moment, but half-scared to exist, to give itself away. No

ulterior motive lurks behind it, but it keeps you at a distance. It is part of the general cryogenization of emotions. It is, indeed, the smile the dead man will wear in his funeral home, as he clings to a hope of maintaining contact even in the next world. The smile of immunity, the smile of advertising: 'This country is good. I am good. We are the best'. It is also Reagan's smile - the culmination of the self-satisfaction of the entire American nation - which is on the way to becoming the sole principle of government. An autoprophetic smile, like all signs in advertising. Smile and others will smile back. Smile to show how transparent, how candid you are. Smile if you have nothing to say. Most of all, do not hide the fact you have nothing to say nor your total indifference to others. Let this emptiness, this profound indifference shine out spontaneously in your smile. *Give* your emptiness and indifference to others, light up your face with the zero degree of joy and pleasure, smile, smile, smile. . . Americans may have no identity, but they do have wonderful teeth.

And it works. With this smile Reagan obtains a much wider consensus than any that could be achieved by a Kennedy with mere reason or political intelligence. The recourse to a pure form of compliment, be it animal or infantile, is much more successful and the whole American population comes together in this toothpaste effect. No idea - not even the nation's moral values in their entirety - could ever have produced such a result. Reagan's credibility is exactly equal to his transparency and the nullity of his smile.

The skateboarder with his walkman, the intellectual working on his word-processor, the Bronx breakdancer whirling frantically in the Roxy, the jogger and the body-builder: everywhere, whether in regard to the body or the mental faculties, you find the same blank solitude, the same narcissistic refraction.

This omnipresent cult of the body is which everyone is made to concentrate an object of frantic concern, in the of performance, a sign and an anticipation can any longer give a meaning, but wh be prevented. The body is cherished uselessness, in the total certainty of it an effect of the resurrection of the bod vascular and dietetic equilibrium in exorcism by fitness and hygiene. So pleasure as present grace, to forget it forms of appearance and become dedi youth that is, in any case, already lost existence is already half-dead, and the of the body is a morbid preoccupation. alive prefigures the way it will be made be given a smile that is really 'into' de

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This omnipresent cult of the body is extraordinary. It is the only object on which everyone is made to concentrate, not as a source of pleasure, but as an object of frantic concern, in the obsessive fear of failure or substandard performance, a sign and an anticipation of death, that death to which no one can any longer give a meaning, but which everyone knows has at all times to be prevented. The body is cherished in the perverse certainty of its uselessness, in the total certainty of its non-resurrection. Now, pleasure is an effect of the resurrection of the body, by which it exceeds that hormonal, vascular and dietetic equilibrium in which we seek to imprison it, that exorcism by fitness and hygiene. So the body has to be made to forget pleasure as present grace, to forget its possible metamorphosis into other forms of appearance and become dedicated to the utopian preservation of a youth that is, in any case, already lost. For the body which doubts its own existence is already half-dead, and the current semi-yogic, semi-ecstatic cult of the body is a morbid preoccupation. The care taken of the body while it is alive prefigures the way it will be made up in the funeral home, where it will be given a smile that is really 'into' death.

This 'into' is the key to everything. The point is not to be nor even to have a body, but to be into your own body. Into your sexuality, into your own desire. Into your own functions, as if they were energy differentials or video screens. The hedonism of the 'into': the body is a scenario and the curious hygienist threnody devoted to it runs through the innumerable fitness centres, body-building gyms, stimulation and simulation studios that stretch from Venice to Tupanga Canyon, bearing witness to a collective asexual obsession.

This is echoed by the other obsession: that of being 'into', hooked in to your own brain. What people are contemplating on their word-processor screens is the operation of their own brains. It is not entrails that we try to interpret these days, nor even hearts or facial expressions; it is, quite simply, the brain. We want to expose to view its billions of connections and watch it

operating like a video-game. All this cerebral, electronic snobbery is hugely affected – far from being the sign of a superior knowledge of humanity, it is merely the mark of a simplified theory, since the human being is here reduced to the terminal excrescence of his or her spinal chord. But we should not worry too much about this: it is all much less scientific, less functional than is ordinarily thought. All that fascinates us is the *spectacle* of the brain and its workings. What we are wanting here is to see our thoughts unfolding before us – and this itself is a superstition.

Hence, the academic grappling with his computer, ceaselessly correcting, reworking, and complexifying, turning the exercise into a kind of interminable psychoanalysis, memorizing everything in an effort to escape the final outcome, to delay the day of reckoning of death, and that other – fatal – moment of reckoning that is writing, by forming an endless feed-back loop with the machine. This is a marvellous instrument of exoteric magic. In fact all these interactions come down in the end to endless exchanges with a machine. Just look at the child sitting in front of his computer at school; do you think he has been made interactive, opened up to the world? Child and machine have merely been joined together in an integrated circuit. As for the intellectual, he has at last found the equivalent of what the teenager gets from his stereo and his walkman: a spectacular desublimation of thought, his concepts as images on a screen.

In the Roxy, the sound-proofed bar dominates the dancefloor the way the screens dominate an air traffic control room or the technicians' gallery towers over a television studio. The club is a fluorescent milieu with spotlighting, strobe effects, dancers swept by beams of light . . . all of these the effects you find on screens. *And everyone is aware of this.* Today, no

staging of bodies, no performance can be w not there to see or reflect those taking part, the mirror. No, it is there as an instantane everywhere, serves only this end: it is a s such, it has nothing of the traditional im, theatricality, and its purpose is not to contemplation; its goal is *to be hooked up to it up*, without this brief, instantaneous netw event, or a discourse create by being hooked perpetual video, nothing has any meaning given way to the video phase.

This is not narcissism and it is wrong to effect. What develops around the video or st imaginary, but an effect of frantic self-refe immediately hooks up like with like, and, surface intensity and deeper meaninglesne

This is the special effect of our times. The same order: to hold the object and its image conception of light of ancient physics or met was thought to secrete doubles or negatives our eyes, has become a reality. It is a dream. of a magical process. The polaroid photo is a has come away from the real object.

You stop a horse that is bolting. You do not Foaming at the mouth, his mind riveted on moment when he will achieve a higher plane be stopped. If you stopped him to ask the tim He doesn't have a bit between his teeth, thou



All this cerebral, electronic snobbery is giving the sign of a superior knowledge of a simplified theory, since the human animal exorcises of his or her spinal chord, such about this: it is all much less scientific, daily thought. All that fascinates us is the things. What we are wanting here is to see us -- and this itself is a superstition.

with his computer, ceaselessly correcting, turning the exercise into a kind of glorifying everything in an effort to escape -- day of reckoning of death, and that other -- is writing, by forming an endless feed-back marvellous instrument of exoteric magic. In down in the end to endless exchanges with a sitting in front of his computer at school; do practice, opened up to the world? Child and together in an integrated circuit. As for the the equivalent of what the teenager gets in: a spectacular desublimation of thought, men.

bar dominates the dancefloor the way the control room or the technicians' gallery . . . The club is a fluorescent milieu with ers swept by beams of light . . . all of these . . . *And everyone is aware of this.* Today, no

staging of bodies, no performance can be without its control screen. This is not there to see or reflect those taking part, with the distance and magic of the mirror. No, it is there as an instantaneous, depthless refraction. Video, everywhere, serves only this end: it is a screen of ecstatic refraction. As such, it has nothing of the traditional image or scene, or of traditional theatricality, and its purpose is not to present action or allow self-contemplation; its goal is *to be hooked up to itself*. Without this circular hook-up, without this brief, instantaneous network that a brain, an object, an event, or a discourse create by being hooked up to themselves, without this perpetual video, nothing has any meaning today. The mirror phase has given way to the video phase.

This is not narcissism and it is wrong to abuse that term to describe the effect. What develops around the video or stereo culture is not a narcissistic imaginary, but an effect of frantic self-referentiality, a short-circuit which immediately hooks up like with like, and, in so doing, emphasizes their surface intensity and deeper meaninglessness.

This is the special effect of our times. The ecstasy of the polaroid is of the same order: to hold the object and its image almost simultaneously as if the conception of light of ancient physics or metaphysics, in which each object was thought to secrete doubles or negatives of itself that we pick up with our eyes, has become a reality. It is a dream. It is the optical materialization of a magical process. The polaroid photo is a sort of ecstatic membrane that has come away from the real object.

You stop a horse that is bolting. You do not stop a jogger who is jogging. Foaming at the mouth, his mind riveted on the inner countdown to the moment when he will achieve a higher plane of consciousness, he is not to be stopped. If you stopped him to ask the time, he would bite your head off. He doesn't have a bit between his teeth, though he may perhaps be carrying

dumb-bells or even weights in his belt (where are the days when girls used to wear bracelets on their ankles?). What the third-century Stylite sought in self-privation and proud stillness, he is seeking through the muscular exhaustion of his body. He is the brother in mortification of those who conscientiously exhaust themselves in the body-building studios on complicated machines with chrome pulleys and on terrifying medical contraptions. There is a direct line that runs from the medieval instruments of torture, via the industrial movements of production-line work, to the techniques of schooling the body by using mechanical apparatuses. Like dieting, body-building, and so many other things, jogging is a new form of voluntary servitude (it is also a new form of adultery).

Decidedly, joggers are the true Latter Day Saints and the protagonists of an easy-does-it Apocalypse. Nothing evokes the end of the world more than a man running straight ahead on a beach, swathed in the sounds of his walkman, cocooned in the solitary sacrifice of his energy, indifferent even to catastrophes since he expects destruction to come only as the fruit of his own efforts, from exhausting the energy of a body that has in his own eyes become useless. Primitives, when in despair, would commit suicide by swimming out to sea until they could swim no longer. The jogger commits suicide by running up and down the beach. His eyes are wild, saliva drips from his mouth. Do not stop him. He will either hit you or simply carry on dancing around in front of you like a man possessed.

The only comparable distress is that of a man eating alone in the heart of the city. You see people doing that in New York, the human flotsam of conviviality, no longer even concealing themselves to eat leftovers in public. But this still belongs to the world of urban, industrial poverty. The thousands of lone men, each running on their own account, with no thought for others, with a stereophonic fluid in their heads that oozes through into

their eyes, that is the world of *Blade Runner*, that to be aware of the natural light of California, that has been driven ten miles out to sea by the offshore oil platforms in its smoke, to see not to carry on running by a sort of lymph exhaustion is reached, that is truly a sign of obese person who keeps on getting fatter, that the same groove, the cells of a tumour proliferate lost the formula for stopping itself. This entire productive part – everyone – is running straight lost the formula for stopping.

All these track-suits and jogging suits, these cotton shirts, these 'easy clothes' are actually these relaxed walkers and runners have not result of wearing these billowing clothes, their clothes and they themselves float in the

Anorexic culture: a culture of disgust, of rejection. Characteristic of a period of obesity. The anorexic prefigures this culture in rather keep it at bay. He refuses lack. He says: I lack eat. With the overweight person, it is the repletion. He says: I lack everything, so I will staves off lack by emptiness, the overweight excess. Both are homeopathic final solutions.

The jogger has yet another solution. In a sense doesn't merely expend his energy in his run to attain the ecstasy of fatigue, the 'high' of mechanical anorexic aims for the 'high' of organic annihilation.

his belt (where are the days when girls used to wear corsets?). What the third-century Stylite sought in his asceticism, he is seeking through the muscular exertion of the brother in mortification of those who have turned themselves in the body-building studios on commercial gyms and on terrifying medical contraptions. From the medieval instruments of torture, via the production-line work, to the techniques of modern mechanical apparatuses. Like dieting, body-building, jogging is a new form of voluntary martyrdom (of adultery).

The Latter Day Saints and the protagonists of the fitness craze evoke the end of the world more than any other. They are on a beach, swathed in the sounds of hissing machinery, every sacrifice of his energy, indifferent even to the destruction of his body to come only as the fruit of his own energy of a body that has in his own eyes become a machine. When in despair, would commit suicide by jumping into the sea. He could swim no longer. The jogger commits suicide on the beach. His eyes are wild, saliva drips from his mouth. He will either hit you or simply carry on like a man possessed.

It is that of a man eating alone in the heart of the city, that in New York, the human flotsam of the city, revealing themselves to eat leftovers in public. The world of urban, industrial poverty. The jogging is a running on their own account, with no thought of the future, fluid in their heads that oozes through into

their eyes, that is the world of *Blade Runner*, the post-catastrophe world. Not to be aware of the natural light of California, nor even of a mountain fire that has been driven ten miles out to sea by the hot wind, and is enveloping the offshore oil platforms in its smoke, to see nothing of all this and obstinately to carry on running by a sort of lymphatic flagellation till sacrificial exhaustion is reached, that is truly a sign from the beyond. It is like the obese person who keeps on getting fatter, the record rotating endlessly in the same groove, the cells of a tumour proliferating, like everything that has lost the formula for stopping itself. This entire society, including its active, productive part - everyone - is running straight ahead, because they have lost the formula for stopping.

All these track-suits and jogging suits, these loose-fitting shorts and baggy cotton shirts, these 'easy clothes' are actually old bits of nightwear, and all these relaxed walkers and runners have not yet left the night behind. As a result of wearing these billowing clothes, their bodies have come to float in their clothes and they themselves float in their own bodies.

Anorexic culture: a culture of disgust, of expulsion, of anthropoemia, of rejection. Characteristic of a period of obesity, saturation, overabundance.

The anorexic prefigures this culture in rather a poetic fashion by trying to keep it at bay. He refuses lack. He says: I lack nothing, therefore I shall not eat. With the overweight person, it is the opposite: he refuses fullness, repletion. He says: I lack everything, so I will eat anything at all. The anorexic staves off lack by emptiness, the overweight person staves off fullness by excess. Both are homeopathic final solutions, solutions by extermination.

The jogger has yet another solution. In a sense, he spews himself out; he doesn't merely expend his energy in his running, he vomits it. He has to attain the ecstasy of fatigue, the 'high' of mechanical annihilation, just as the anorexic aims for the 'high' of organic annihilation, the ecstasy of the empty

body and the obese individual seeks the high of dimensional annihilation: the ecstasy of the full body.

The latest obsession of American public opinion: the sexual abuse of children. There is now a law that two people must be present when very young children are being handled for fear of unverifiable sexual abuse. At the same time, supermarket carrier bags are adorned with the portraits of missing children.

Protect everything, detect everything, contain everything - obsessional society.

Save time. Save energy. Save money. Save our souls - phobic society.

Low tar. Low energy. Low calories. Low sex. Low speed - anorexic society.

Curiously, in this world where everything is available in profusion, everything has to be saved and economized. The obsession of a young society, concerned to protect its future? The impression given is rather that of a sense of threat, all the more insidious for being groundless. It is profusion which creates an hallucination of a sort of backfiring into shortage and penury, which has to be averted by homeopathic discipline. There are no other reasons for these starvation rations - collective dieting, ecological control, this mortification of bodies and pleasures. A whole society organized to ward off the vengeance of overfed divinities, suffocated by plenty. Of course our basic problem today is how to avoid becoming overweight.

Compiling inventories of everything, ~~stocking everything, memorizing everything.~~

Hence the elephants enveloped in liquid bitumen, whose bones become

fossilized in its black, mineral viscosity, the and wolves who roamed the plains of prehistoric victims of the oil fields. Today embalming at Hancock Park in a museum prehistory. And, in conformity with the presented with conviction. Americans are everything and seeking to convince. One this stubborn determination to reconstruct history which were not their own and spirited away. Renaissance castles, fossil tions, sequoias as holograms, etc.

In storing details on their computers of (white) countries, the Mormons of Salt Lake from other Americans, who all share the too late to revive your origins. It is their to be in on history, they will be the reconstitution (by putting things in museum the fossilization process nature took mill conception Americans have of the museum them, everything is worthy of protection thing can have a second birth, the eternal are the Americans missionaries, they are out on the original baptism, they dream time and only accord value to this later repeat performance of the first, but its re this indeed is the perfect definition of the sectarian, and sometimes violent. American To reconstruct things in their exact form, Judgement, they are prepared to destroy was an Anabaptist.

pitiless necessity and the even greater defiance, the even greater freedom one has to counterpose to it. Here, every last vestige of a heroic sense of destiny has disappeared. The whole place exudes an air of sentimental reconciliation with nature, with sex, with madness and even with history (by way of a carefully corrected, revised Marxism).

Like many other aspects of contemporary America, Santa Cruz is part of the *post-orgy world*, the world left behind after the great social and sexual convulsions. The refugees from the orgy — the orgy of sex, political violence, the Vietnam War, the Woodstock Crusade, and the ethnic and anti-capitalist struggles too, together with the passion for money, the passion for success, hard technologies etc., in short, the whole orgy of modernity — are all there, jogging along in their tribalism, which is akin to the electronic tribalism of Silicon Valley. Reduced pace of work, decentralization, air-conditioning, soft technologies. Paradise. But a very slight modification, a change of just a few degrees, would suffice to make it seem like hell.

A new development in the field of sexuality. The orgy is over, liberation is over; it is not sex one is looking for but one's 'gender', i.e. both one's 'look' and its genetic formula. People no longer oscillate between desire and its fulfilment, but between their genetic formula and their sexual identity (to be discovered). This is a new erotic culture. After a culture based on prohibition ('What are your prerequisites for sex?' — 'The door has to be locked, the lights have to be out, and my mother has to be in another State'), this is a culture based on the questioning of one's own definition: 'Am I sexed? What sex am I? Ultimately, is sex necessary? What does sexual difference consist in?' Liberation has left everyone in an undefined state (it is always the same: once you are liberated, you are forced to ask who you are). After a triumphalist phase, the assertion of female sexuality has become as fragile as that of male sexuality. No one knows where they are. This is why there's so

much love-making, so many children produced, proof that two people are needed *so differe*. Already, the 'muscle-woman', who, simply manages to reproduce the effect of male example of self-referentiality and of getting a least has found her label.

The more general problem is one of an al with a decline in the display of sexual cha masculinity are tending towards zero, but so in this conjuncture that we have seen new ide the challenge of undefinedness and who } 'Gender benders'. Neither masculine nor } either. Boy George, Michael Jackson, David the previous generation were explosive figu new idols pose for everyone the question of own lack of definition. They are exceptional } most of them have gone in search of a 'gen Some kind of differentiating feature has to b in fashion . . . or in genetics? A 'look' based cells. Any old gimmick will do, any idiom. more crucial than that of pleasure. Are w version of a sexual liberation that is now pa mere fashion, or is this a bio-sociologica perception, based upon the sexual losing the priority which characterized the whole mode New Frontier?

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much love-making, so many children produced: there at least you still have proof that two people are needed so *difference still exists*. But not for long. Already, the 'muscle-woman', who, simply by using her vaginal muscles, manages to reproduce the effect of male penetration exactly, is a good example of self-referentiality and of getting along without difference — she at least has found her label.

The more general problem is one of an absence of difference, bound up with a decline in the display of sexual characteristics. The outer signs of masculinity are tending towards zero, but so are the signs of femininity. It is in this conjuncture that we have seen new idols emerging, idols who take up the challenge of undefinedness and who play at mixing genres/genders. 'Gender benders'. Neither masculine nor feminine, but not homosexual either. Boy George, Michael Jackson, David Bowie. . . Whereas the idols of the previous generation were explosive figures of sex and pleasure, these new idols pose for everyone the question of the *play* of difference and their own lack of definition. They are exceptional figures. For want of an identity, most of them have gone in search of a 'gender model', a generic formula. Some kind of differentiating feature has to be found, so why not look for it in fashion . . . or in genetics? A 'look' based on clothes, or a 'look' based on cells. Any old gimmick will do, any idiom. The question of difference is more crucial than that of pleasure. Are we seeing here a post-modern version of a sexual liberation that is now past and gone, that liberation as mere fashion, or is this a bio-sociological mutation in our own self-perception, based upon the sexual losing the priority it formerly enjoyed, a priority which characterized the whole modern period? 'Gender Research: a New Frontier?'

Pushed to its logical conclusions, this would leave neither masculine nor feminine, but a dissemination of individual sexes referring only to themselves, each one managed as an independent enterprise. The end of seduction, the end of difference, and a slide towards a different system of

values. An astonishing paradox emerges: sexuality might become once again a merely secondary problem, as it was in most earlier societies, and be eclipsed by other stronger symbolic systems (birth, hierarchy, asceticism, glory, death). This would prove that sexuality was after all only one possible model among many, and not the most crucial. But what might those new models be today (for in the meantime all the others have disappeared)? The model that seems likely to emerge is that of an ideal of performance, of the genetic fulfilment of one's own formula. In business, in emotional life, in their projects and their pleasures, everyone will seek to develop their optimum programme. Everyone will have their code, their formula. But also their 'look', their image. So shall we perhaps get something like a genetic 'look'?

Irvine: a new Silicon Valley. Electronic factories with no openings to the outside world, like integrated circuits. A desert zone, given over to ions and electrons, a supra-human place, the product of inhuman decision-making. By a terrible twist of irony it just had to be here, in the hills of Irvine, that they shot *Planet of the Apes*. But, on the lawn, the American squirrels tell us all is well, and that America is kind to animals, to itself, and to the rest of the world, and that in everyone's heart there is a slumbering squirrel. The whole Walt Disney philosophy eats out of your hand with these pretty little sentimental creatures in grey fur coats. For my own part, I believe that behind these smiling eyes there lurks a cold, ferocious beast fearfully stalking us. . . . On the same lawn with the squirrels stands a sign put there by some society or other of Jesus: 'Vietnam, Cambodia, Lebanon, Grenada - We are a violent society in a violent world!'

There is nothing funny about Halloween. This sarcastic festival reflects, rather, an infernal demand for revenge by children on the adult world. The

threat from this evil force hangs over adults their devotion to children. There is no childish sorcery, behind all the dressing up out their lights and hide, for fear of harassment of them stick needles or razor blades hand out to the children.

Laughter on American television has taken tragedy. It is unrelenting; the news, the weather forecast are about the only things you go on hearing it behind the voice of Beirut. Even behind the adverts. It is the around in all the corridors of the spaceship. a puritan culture. In other countries, the viewers. Here, their laughter is put on the screen that is laughing and having alone with your consternation.

Vietnam on television (a pleonasm, since The Americans fight with two essential weapons. That is, with the physical bombardment of bombardment of the rest of the world. The whilst all the Vietnamese weapons and all people and its territory.

That is why the war was won by both sides, ground, by the Americans in the electronic won an ideological and political victory, the that has gone right around the world.

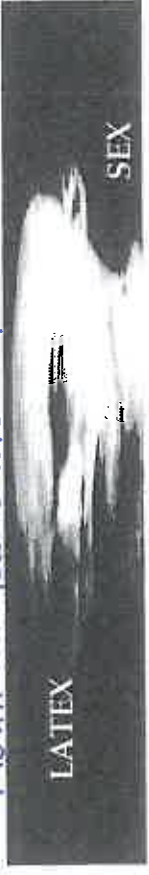
Kroker, Arthur. SPASM: Virtual Reality, Android Music and Electric Flesh. Culture Texts Series. Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1993



machines get into the act, cutting fingers off the *Biospherians*. The much-vaunted "first enclosure" quickly turns into its reverse: a story of the leaking biosphere. Leaking oxygen (10% of the air supply has been replenished); leaking power (an external power generator has been installed to run the internal machinery); and leaking species (all the environmental modules have gone into speed *spasm*, with all the species refusing their traditional places in the modernist hierarchy of evolutionary values).

And finally, human nature rebels. At the very end of the tour, we turned the corner of the final building, still waiting for a glimpse in the flesh of the *Biospherians* inside. Suddenly, a member of our tour group yelled out: "There they are." Everyone rushed to the windows for a glimpse of the fabled earth-escapees. And there they were: the cream of the technological elite, terribly emaciated (the *Biosphere* had just experienced two crop failures in quick succession), on their hands and knees in the cyber-soil desperately trying to get something, anything, to grow. On seeing the earth-bound plight of the starving *Biospherians*, an instant mood shift swept across my tour group. To that point, everyone had been in awe of the technological superiority of *Biospherian* culture, but that immediately flipped into a collective feeling of pity, and maybe even contempt. Without a word spoken, everyone in my tour group turned from the window on the Garden of Eden in ruins, breathed in the desert air, looked at the spectacular nature scene around us, thought of a cold beer at the old Motorola bar up the road, and happily left the *Biospherians* to their illusions.

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## Spasm: The Recombinant Sex

### Elvis, Madonna and Michael as the New Entertainment Trinity

I recently received a letter from Ken Hollings, a British friend, who had this to say about the London club scene:

Rave culture in the U.K. has gone so hardcore now that it almost is like a cartoon--there's so much speed around that music sounds like it's being played at the wrong RPM setting--BPMs of over 240! I think that the London raver is going to replace the diehard punks with their leather and multicoloured mohicans as a tourist attraction. However, the bondage/europerve scene is really expanding--SM parties are the new forum for safe sex in the fallout zone--latex and rubber as metaphor for the new *cordón sanitaire*. Desire in a time of declared emergency.

In the age of sex without secretions, latex sex is everywhere. Blocked from its (natural) ground in the free exchange of bodily fluids, sex flows from the wetware of the now prohibited arena of sexual secretions to the dryware of sado-masochism lite. It leaves behind the body with its dangerous liquid flows and waste fluids, and jump cuts for the more alluring shores of *cold sex* (Madonna), *pure sex* (Michael Jackson) and *dead sex* (Elvis). Madonna, Michael and Elvis, then, as the new entertainment trinity (ET) of the age of global aesthetics.

**Cold sex?** Think of Madonna Mutant who in her most recent incarnation as Marlene Dietrich Vamp (just before she does a final sexual reversal and begins to spout 'No Sex before marriage' in time for the end of the millennium), appropriates the media territory of SM. Not sado-masochism like in the good old



days of Berlin sex clubs where the blending of liturgically inscribed pain and sweet pleasure was done on a tableau of blood, but now SM boutique. A photographic journey of erotica for a culture of the distended eye that privileges the disappearance of sex into an optics of sexual penology, of SM under the lash of the camera's eye. All of this wrapped in a simu-prophylactic as if to doubly reassure us that leather and plastic today are just another way of mylaring the waste flows of bodily secretions. And so: Madonna Mutant as cold erotica for a cool sex that does everything to escape the wetware of the body. White heat for a cold time, oscillating between melancholia and euphoria.

**Pure sex?** That's Michael Jackson in his big comeback show with Oprah after fourteen years of reclusion in the fairy tale spectacle of Neverland Ranch, California, decided to resequence his televisual replicant in the saintly image of the Lamb of God. And so, a quick series of denials all delivered in the very best injured tones of the sacrificial lamb: No, he doesn't sleep in an oxygen chamber; No, he didn't kill Bubbles; No, he doesn't have incestuous thoughts about La Toya; No, he wasn't deliberately bleaching his skin hyper-white; No, he didn't propose marriage to Liz Taylor. And finally, to the question of cosmetic retooling, the Michael Jackson replicant is a product of no more than two surgical redesigns (his collapsing nose most of all). If Michael could demythify his private self with such energy, it's because he has already passed beyond the earthly sphere, ascending to the level of an entertainment god. Not the "King of Rock, Pop and Soul," as Liz gushed at the music awards, but the first of all the android gods produced by the mediascape. A deeply religious figure living in a perfectly transcendent state (Michael tells Oprah that music is a link between the human and the divine and that he "is honoured to be chosen to be an instrument of nature" between, we suppose, earth and the heavens above), Michael is a Lamb of God for the electronic age: a sacrificial figure

of abuse who ritually invests in his tabloid body all the resentful fascination for our own inadequacies, and who links himself directly to a global chain of children held to be in a perpetual state of innocence.

The proof of this? Well, as Michael says to Oprah, if you really want to know who I am, read my book, *Moonwalk*. Exactly right. If you want to know the sacramental rites of the Lamb of God, you must read the Gospel of the electronic media way. *Moonwalk* is a deeply mystical text, an American New Testament, hovering like Michael's wonderful dancing legs somewhere between the edge of the music and the sounds of the transcendence trapped within, making the case for a silent complicity between childhood innocence injured by a cynical time and the lonely star of the Jackson Replicant. It might be, of course, that the pure sex of Michael Jackson is just a clever promotional twist, a way of reprogramming his electronic body for the chloroform culture of the nineties, but it might also be that like Jesus Christ before him, Michael Jackson actually is what he suspects himself to be, a "chosen instrument," a Lamb of God who thus makes of his body a site of a double cancellation: pure sacrifice and pure energy. If this is the case then the song-line of Michael Jackson from *Thriller* to *Dangerous* is in the nature of a universal religious event, a point finally beyond entertainment aesthetics and in the sanctified domain of the sacrificial lamb. This would explain in part the awesome nature of the "Jackson phenomenon": beyond music and the fibrillations of dance, Michael makes worshippers of everyone, participants in the unfolding of the greatest religious spectacle of all times, the Jackson World Tour. The last Lamb of God said, just after they crucified him and he was bodily resurrected on his way to his heavenly home, that he would return to Stateside someday. Who would ever suspect the Jesus of the Gospels living midst the ferris wheels, roller coasters and animal rides in Neverland, dealing with Sony, capturing our fascination with his perfect rough pitch of rock and recombining dance, and all the while beginning again a children's crusade

DEAD

SEX

that hasn't been seen since the great Medieval pilgrimages. An electronic Jesus with a message of pure sex for the new lost generation.

And Dead Sex? That's dead Elvis who, in a brilliant reversal in advance of Michael's comeback on a talk show, appeared on the TV screen in outlaw black, looked the camera in the eye and said: "If you're looking for trouble you've come to the right place." Just like James Dean and Marilyn before him, no one knows better than Elvis that in the dark, gaseous galaxy of the electronic body, dead sex is the very best sex of all.

FLOATING

TONGUE

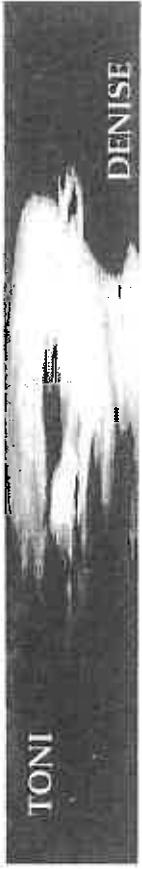
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### SCENES FROM THE RECOMBINANT BODY

#### The Floating Tongue

What is the fate of the tongue in virtual reality? No longer the old sentient tongue trapped in the mouth's cavity, but now an improved digital tongue. A nomadic tongue that suddenly exits the dark cavity of oral secretions, to finally make its appearance in the daylight. Like *Spasm*, the new computer programme for NEXT, where the digital tongue is exteriorized from its evolutionary location in the body's biology, actually severed from the mouth. Here, the tongue might begin by curling back in the mouth with all the accompanying nasal sounds, but then it migrates out of the mouth, travelling down the chest, out of the toes, and even taking libidinal root in the talking penis. Not a surrealist penis where objects lose their originary sign-referent, and float in an endless sign-slide, but a tongue referent that has actually lost its sound object. *Spasm* is, then, surrealism that is inscribed in the flesh.

With this difference. The digital tongue has finally come alive, acquiring sounds from its different bodily referents. The



## Toni Denise

I have a recombinant brother, Toni Denise, working the drag queen bars of Tallahassee, Florida. She has taken her memory and put it aside for a moment.

She is not just a guy who warp jumped into a woman's body by surgical cuts, but the first of all the virtual bodies, that point where Disney World becomes flesh: a double movement involving an endless remaking of sexual identity and an abandonment of the (gendered) past.

Toni Denise. The perfect transexual woman. More perfect than a woman ought to be, or can be: slim hips, large breasts, shoulder length raven hair with legs as long as Barbie's.

Toni Denise. Too perfect to be a real woman? The picture perfect woman? The woman all women think a woman should be? Toni Denise is a man-made woman. A woman made from a man. A man with slim hips, long legs, and raven hair. A man who could say no to cellulite, and yes to silicon breasts.

Toni Denise? A virtual woman or virtually a woman? She can turn gender signs inside out, and play the game of the doubled sex.

Once she became a woman on the outside, she could finally take on the seduction of the male psyche and become the male mind colonizing the female body. Or as Toni Denise likes to say "If I had a clit, I'd have a hard on."

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Toni Denise was written with Marilouise Kroker



## The Transistorized Face: Give Me Your Code

For many years, doctors have been injecting silicone into women's faces. Now a New York City doctor has outdone the procedure by taking silicone from low grade transistor fluids and injecting it directly into the skin of women, disappearing facial wrinkles. This is the new digitalized, transistorized face that rewires memory: no more wrinkles, no more tears, no more history.

But the face does have a history, and a remembrance of that history. The transistorized face in New York rebels. It rejects the silicone, that tries desperately to justify its existence by sliding, seeping, weeping such that the transistorized face becomes a virtual face that floats beyond time, beyond wrinkles: it is also a face that operates under the sign of a fatal destiny. It will always oscillate between digital ecstasy and earthly decay. The scene of a greater mythological drama, the transistorized face remains condemned to an endless repetition of Nietzsche's prophecy of eternal recurrence: a physics of the weightlessness and pure energy of wrinkle-free seduction versus the earthly drag of transistor fluid as it seeps under the fatal pull of gravity to the lower regions.

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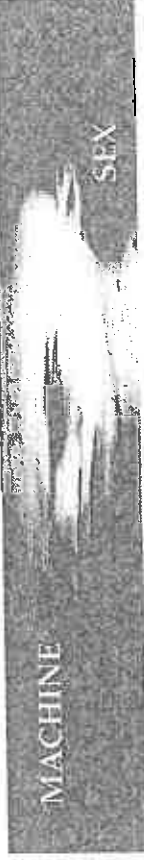
*The Transistorized Face* was written with Marilouise Kroker



mathematical sequencing project. A floating, spatialized world where reality is reconfigured into a dense algorithm, where bodily identity can be tracked at the spikes of the X and Y axes of digital sound waves, where the algorithmic face acquires organicity in the real world of TV, where digital music is all about travelling at warp speeds across the valleys and peaks of sound algorithms, and where the white space of all the electronic communication networks rapidly descends into the inertia of world cultural gridlock. A digital reality that now acquires tremendous social acceleration, moving at a violent speed towards a great algorithmic convergence: that point where the complex strands of human genetic history are reduced to the telemetry of a single dense algorithm. This algorithm encodes in its programming the final legacy of recombinant culture: the fatal combination in the new world algorithm of the operational logic of data generation, sequencing, cloning, and transcription.

*The new world algorithm?* That is, the merger of recombinant genetics and virtual reality into the horizon of contemporary culture. Neither purely biological, nor simply mathematical, the new world algorithm insinuates biology into the language of hyper-mathematics, and reorders biology by the virtual dimensionality of algorithmic logic. Consequently, the new world algorithm is produced as a spectacular launching site, not only for the dominance of bio-technology as the contemporary language of power, but for the very first dimension-jump. Such a jump signals the moment at which recombinant technology disconnects from its earth support systems, becoming self-sustaining in the space of bio-mathematics. Consequently, virtual reality, which comes into existence through the recombinant language of genetic biology, is set into motion by the algorithmic logic of mathematics, and takes the android form of organs without bodies.

What is the fate of the body in the recombinant culture of



virtual reality? Like crystals, plants and animals before it, it becomes genetic refuse. Having fulfilled its evolutionary function as a chemical way-station in the development of genetic history, the body can now be discarded as surplus skin. But with this difference. The final product of genetics—intelligence, the very medium by which humans prepared the algorithmic orbital stations for gene travellers—also condemns us to consciousness of loss. The human body, then, as a sacrificial scapegoat preyed upon by the primal gene for its evolutionary purposes, and then abandoned as anthropological debris. In the dark space of virtual reality, in this universe of organs without bodies, the human body floats like a chemical afterimage, with no purpose (the body is a terminal function), no final destiny, and no (evolutionary) role beyond that of a predator flipped into a useless parasite. Perhaps the last function of the body is to be sequenced as data: to be shuffled and reshuffled into sinewy nucleotide chains having a threefold biological logic: self-replication, quick adaptation, and chemical (media) cloning. The recombinant body, therefore, as a molecular sequencer in the ganglia of the mediascape: sometimes combined into an eye when TV genes sweep to cultural ascendancy, sometimes mutated into an ear when sound alleles gain genetic dominance, and at other times aimlessly shuffled into chemical chains of embryonic cultural matter.

### Organs without Bodies

Spasm is a libidinal descent into this sea of liquid media populated by organs without bodies, a world of robo-theory, machine sex, virtual reality, electronic TV fibrillation, surveillance scanning, and recombinant culture where our bodies migrate daily, and especially nightly, to be processed



DEAD

POWER

and re-sequenced. A seductive descent of the body where the flesh flips open, and out fly all the previously hidden codes of human genetic history on their way to a fateful meeting with recombinant technology. Maybe it is no longer technology, as much as an immense galaxy of android genes finally coming alive and taking possession of us. And we adore it. For this is not a passive world, but a violent one: a universe of sacrificial violence, and *we* are its willing practitioners; a world that promises maximum information, wealth and mobility, but actually produces radically minimal understanding. Not a new universe of mass communication, but a society of alienated masses, radically independent of others, but uniformly dependent on elite command centres.

A cold and antiseptic world of technologically constituted power where virtual experience means the sudden shutting down of a whole range of human experiences. Not really a new virtual world, but a fulfillment of the more ancient phallicentric dream of recoding experience with such intensity that the body floats away from itself, and in that universe of digital impulses finally alienates itself from its own life functions. Virtual reality is the exteriorization of the human genetic apparatus with such speed and violence that the body finally becomes its own techno-skin.

Consider the cinema, which is, after all, how virtual reality is first inoculated into the system of liquid media: a site of low epistemological profile but mass emotional appeal. It provides an already superceded electronic travelogue concerning how we have learned anew how to swim in the sea of data. And if we flock so eagerly to the cinema of virtual reality, it is because we have long ago recognized ourselves as mirrored images of special effects, spectral personalities floating within liquid media: data workers, practitioners of sex without secretions, floating tongues, memorex minds, and fax hearing. Consequently, we



CYNICAL

SIGN

can participate so enthusiastically in the crash cinema of *Lawn Mower Man*, *RoboCop* and *Terminator 2* probably because these are less fateful images of a future not yet experienced, but vague intimations of a past forever eclipsed. For better or worse, we are the progenitors of special effects personalities. Crash bodies always on the hunt for a new techno-thrill. Having long ago sworn off the neurosis of user-friendly technology as terminally boring, we've become frontier riders of a digital reality that always moves too inertially for our long-suppressed taste for the forbidden pleasures of telematic speed. We are on the hunt for abuse technology, for digital gear that can be strapped on or swiftly patched into our neural networks. Crash gear that will allow us to arm the liquid media, and trigger a dizzying array of special effects experiences.

### Crash Aesthetics

This may be our political predicament: to be simultaneously a new human race of techno-mutants in the name of an expanding freedom, and critics of technology as degeneration. If this appears ambivalent, it means that all comfortable modernist exits for ethics and politics have been cancelled out, forcing us to travel in hyperreality at crash speeds without the guidance of traditional ethical suasions. While we can recognize the dark truth in Nietzsche's prophecy that ours would be a time of revenge-seeking nihilism, either by the majority of passive nihilists or by the leading "ascetic priests" of suicidal nihilism, we cannot finally evade his insight into the impossibility of rupturing the closed horizon of technology as the latest, and most grisly, manifestation of the *will to power*. Consequently, our fate now is to develop an ethics and politics of impossibility: a critical politics that would simultaneously insinuate itself within

## CYBER EARS

*SPASM is speeding down the throats of all the android processors.*

In the age of virtual reality, the traditional sovereignty of sight over sound undergoes a big flip: the image-simulacrum begins to slow down, and to act as a technological drag on the speed of virtual reality. Requiring for its very existence an amplified memory structure, the image-reservoir of computer graphics begins to substitute its own imperatives for the violent speed of virtuality. The computer image-reservoir achieves its final destiny as a big capacity resistor, slowing down all the circulatory networks of digital reality. In virtual reality, sight always moves to inertia.

But not the world of sound. Needing little in the way of computer memory, digital sound can finally come into its own as the expanding envelope of virtual reality. Here is where all the experimental breakthroughs are being made in understanding the unfolding cultural logic of technological society: looping, partitioning, layering, panning, aliasing, filtering, mutating. Listen to the sounds of virtual reality, therefore, to discover the speeds and slownesses, the breakthroughs and breakdowns of the world of digital technology. The demand

for an enhanced sound cranium finally fulfills itself in a sampling technology that swiftly flips music composers into android processors, allowing MIDI computers to break their vows of silence, to tell us personally what music machines have been thinking about all this time but have never had the opportunity to say. Until now, sound has usually been in the background. Digital music is different. It foregrounds sound by making problematic the energy field of noise, reenchanting the ear and projecting complex sound objects outwards into imaginary shapes, volumes, and liquid flows.

The ear finally comes into its own. But not the old ear attached to a living head. That has already disappeared and no one cares. We are now living in the evolutionary era of improved eardrums, of cyber ears for spastic sounds. If digital music is to be appreciated, there is an urgent necessity for the development of algorithmic ears: for eardrums that can hear sounds that do not yet exist, and that can never be replicated by the human voice. Consequently, what is necessary is not the recovery of the ear as a privileged orifice for the nostalgic return of oral culture, but the growth of new ears—digital ears—as a sign of nostalgia for the future. The bio-technical ear, that is, operating at the level of the sub-human, splaying outwards across the mediascape, afloat in the digital world of virtual sound.

Anyway, sampler technology is the forward mechanism of late capitalist culture. Working parasitically by appropriation, it mimics perfectly the acquisitive tendencies of technological society under the sign of the private commodity form. Operating at the level of digital sound, not sight, it envelops us in a massive soundscape that vocalizes the codings and recodings of the body telematic. Here, all of the hidden strategies employed by technological society in sampling human beings—of their memories, desires, fantasies, and needs—are worked out in brilliant detail. When we listen to sampler music (and what

music is not digitalized today?), we can actually hear our approaching fate as we are sampled for our history, dreams, and destiny. Consequently, think of the computer commands for the digital manipulation of sound as an exact ideological code concerning how our subjectivity is processed by virtual reality. *Looping?* That is, the ceaseless inscription of semiological tracks of personality, facial redesign, body sculpting, memory masaging. *Filtering?* That is, the movement of the previously aesthetic strategy of the trompe l'oeil beyond painting into the mediascape, that point where every action is only understandable by mirror references to its cultural code. And *panning?* A war strategy designed by the mediascape that submits the brain to multi-directional tracking: of its preferences, likes and dislikes, points of nausea and ecstasy. An encryption machine for understanding the ideology of advanced capitalist society, sampler music technology both deciphers the inner semiurgical rules of the mediascape and provides a method of transgressing a culture where simulation is nature. Digital sound, then, as an advanced outrider of the ideology of the mass: an eight-second waveform with ninety-one minutes of sampler memory. Having no real presence, the digitalized mass exists only as an optically charted wave function. Capable of infinite manipulation, the volatile wave-form can be massaged in the same way that android processors (computer music composers) look for the best spikes at the XY axis. Just like virtual sound-objects in sampler music technology, subjectivity today is a gaseous element, expanding and contracting, time-stretched, cross-faded, and sound accelerated.

## Writing the History of the Cynical Ear

The repressed ear? That is the fate of hearing in the age of virtual reality: a whole cultural image machine which privileges the eye, and that simultaneously shuts down the ear. And why not? The eye is a masochistic orifice in the age of panoptic power, capable of endless discipline and of being seduced beyond bodily subjectivity into a floating free fall within the society of the spectacle. Public not private, spatial not durational, the eye is always a possible traitor of its human subject, always tempted by the siren-call of the dialectic of enlightenment to make its peace with the scopophilic apparatus of cynical power. And it must be so. For the eye has a penis. It is a privileged organ of the male sex: space-binding not time-binding, hierarchical not polysemic, mechanical not fluid, signifying not subjective. It is precisely the opening up of the eye of cynical power which shuts down the consciousness of embodied subjectivity. We live, then, in the time of the cynical eye.

If the ear can be so stunted today, if hearing can only be accomplished through the medium of the specular, if music today must be mediated through the imaginary overdrive of MTV, it is because everything now functions to repress the ear. For the ear is politically dangerous. This is the organ of the feminine: of a possible sex that ruptures the silence of the eye with a babble of bodily fluids and that in the act of listening rehearses the recovery of bodily memory.

Or maybe it is neither. Not the masculinist eye with its privileging of specular power, nor the feminine ear with its lament for lost subjectivity, but something different: the mutant ear as a site of arbitrary sign-shifts for the body telematic, half-skin/half-code, which shimmers like a time-shifter across the

surfaces of sampler culture.

Consequently, the imperative emerges for writing a history of the ear. Not of the natural ear (which has vanished with the appearance of simulation), and certainly not of the discursive ear (listening is no longer limited by the grammatical rules of semiology), but the history of the cynical ear.

The cynical ear? That is how our ear flashes across digital reality. Neither the old biologically-driven ear lost in nostalgia for aurality nor the recombinant ear splayed indefinitely across the mediascape, digital hearing is the degree-zero point for the mediation of biology and algorithmic recordings. Finally then, the modernist history of the ear under the fatal aesthetic sign of referentiality can end, and the postmodern story of the exteriorized ear under the ecstatic sign of recombinant genetics can be refused. In this case, a third hypothesis can be negotiated: the cynical ear as neither modern nor postmodern, but *bimodern*. Bimodern hearing is a partition-point between (bodily) memory and (digital) reconfiguration, between listening for "intimations of deprival" in the midst of the technological dynamo and hearing the future sounds of the reconfigured body. Which is to claim that the cynical ear — bimodern hearing — is nothing less than a third evolutionary stage in the history of the ear. Beyond unsignified biology and disembodied simulation to the aural hinging of genetics and data. In bimodern hearing, the ear is endlessly recoded by *culture sounds* as a way of recovering an aesthetic strategy for digital manipulation in the age of android processors.

A philosophical history of the bimodern ear can only be written in the shadow of ambivalence and ambiguity, for it concerns two impossibilities: the recovery of memory by learning a new method of algorithmic hearing, and the opening of a new horizon of listening through a digital reality that seeks to

displace the ear. Consequently, an impossible writing. A writing that rebels against the ruling order of the eye, only to seek out the excluded territory of the ear. And a history of the mutant ear that claims that the biologically-determined ear has disappeared to be replaced by a recombinant ear. The digital ear, first existing at the folding back of biology into data, can already be at the dark and unexplored side of virtual reality, because it can hear the silent shuffling and reshuffling of data in sampler culture. A sampler ear can listen to the sounds of virtual reality as a way of tracing out in consciousness the mutation of the bimodern body into that which it always thought it was only listening to: cyber sounds, waveforms, volume swells, partitioned subjectivity, looped brains.

We live now in the age of recombinant culture, where the previously private genetic structure has gone public and is played back to us in the form of data. An algorithmic world where data has come alive and in its endless codings and recordings we can discover our fatal destiny. A prosthetic world where sound appears only in the form of aural *trompe l'oeil*: virtual volume, velocity, pitch, and rhythm. An auditory space of illusion that is inscribed as the dominant locus of our social space. Not panoptic space (there is no longer a stable eye of surveillance), nor representational space (virtual sound is already beyond the governing episteme of the model versus the real), and not even simulation (today even the model is cybernetically generated), but an autonomous space of illusion. Sleights of ear, mirror shifts of sound, waveforms, sound warps, phasal noise: this is the illusionary space that marks the imaginary territory of the digital ear.

Which leads to the question: what is the space of virtual sound? the response must be: the sounds of the *trompe l'oeil*, that virtual space where sound has no (referential) existence except as a sign of that which never was: sampler sound. And



why not? Sampler music is its own simulacrum. It knows no ordinary referent because it generates its own territorial codes for the mutant ear. It is always hyper-mimetic because it can exactly reproduce (and swiftly surpass) any sound in the human sensorium. Sampler machines light up the previously dark region of virtual reality. Not passively, but following an experimental strategy that explores at the level of sound what has happened to us as we have been processed through the virtual world of technology. The work of sampler composers (from Australia's *Severed Heads* to Amsterdam's *Ministry*) and sampler technology as artistic filters trace the migrant journey of the crash ear. A brilliant political theory of the ideological constitution of bimodern subjectivity (the filtered self) and an aesthetic strategy for reterritorializing the specular space of virtual reality (digital manipulation in the age of android processors and recombinant culture) is to be found in sampler music. In such works, the ear rebels on behalf of improved hearing.

### Improved Hearing

To tell the truth, hearing has always been alchemical, a violent zone where sound waves mutate into a sedimentary layer of cultural meanings, where historical referents secrete into contemporary states of subjectivity, and where there is no stability, only an aural logic of imminent reversibility. The cynical ear makes alchemists of us all: primitive physicists who know that sound does not exist except as an empty zone of energy exchanges. Our legacy? An entire history of bimodern sound theory: sound waves/sound particles as the theoretical antinomies of an early twentieth-century discourse on sound, which anticipate the logic of contemporary cultural experience.

Anyway, we are already living beyond simulation (where the model generates reality) in a more spastic experience: the society of the waveform (where the model vanishes into the recombinant language data genomes). Sampling, therefore, beyond alienation (which seeks to preserve the order of the real), beyond reification (which privileges the stability of the ruling concepts), and beyond simulation (where the concept is the real itself). A culture of quantum fluctuations where you can only know that you have never seen what you thought you were looking at because you have never really heard what you were listening to.

The pre-digital ear is the first victim of sound *trompe l'oeil*: from the virtual sound of Madonna Mutant to the virtual body of Michael Jackson. So then, an urgent requirement emerges to speed up the ear to match the aural velocity of digital reality, to pump up the genetics of hearing to equal the sounds of the datascape. Sampling technology, therefore, as a filter for mutant eardrums: looped ears, partitioned hearing, panned sound, accelerated eardrums, time-stretched sound, digit design ears. In the materiality of sampling we can discover anew a language for rethinking a universe that has been blasted apart by digital technology. Consequently, the education of the cynical ear can be an aesthetic strategy for learning how to cohabit the planet with android processors.

### Barbie Gets a Penis

What is the meaning of the bondage fetish in recombinant culture? A ritualistic return of the primitive? A condensation of the psychoanalytics of desire into a floating object-cathexis? Or something different? The bondage fetish as an amorphous hinge between primitivism and crash culture. A gateway through which the recombinant body time-travels across the glittering galaxy of its own lost remainders.

The Barbie doll is a perfect talisman of crash culture. Itself a hologram of sampler society, Barbie is attached to Martial's leather belt as a sign of a virtual sex that never was, a little switch in the theatre of sado-masochism. And Barbie just loves it. For she had long ago tired of her disciplinary role as a California mutant, and wanted desperately to be set free. Not to be Barbie any longer, but to reverse the Barbie "look" into its opposite sign: a monstrous double, a site of iconic innocence, yet inscribing sexual transgression. This is what Barbie always really wanted, and on behalf of which she was prepared to abandon the dull and affirmative model of an obsolescent female beauty. That is, to become a Barbie fetish that can be so fascinating because she pulsates in opposite polarities: repressive cuteness and the liberation of male bondage wear. Barbie, then, as a sign-slide in which even doll icons seek to regenerate themselves by going over to their opposite number. Here, Barbie grows a penis.

Barbie then as enjoying one last fashion vogue as a sexual sequencer, ordering and reordering the transgressive strategems of all the games of male bondage and discipline. And what better bondage fetish than Barbie? For she was always a perfect disciplinary clone: blonde hair, long legs, pert face, and trendy Valley clothes. Barbie, as America's bondage Queen, is just perfect to hold together the 3-part body of the pleasure of male bondage.



*Martial* (Three Part Body Series)  
Photo: Linda Dawn Hammond

## The Big Toe

Remember Bataille for what he *doesn't*, and maybe cannot, tell us about the big toe in the era of spastic culture:

The big toe is the most *human* part of the human body, in the sense that no other element of this body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (chimpanzee, gorilla, orangutan, or gibbon). This is due to the fact that the ape is tree-dwelling, whereas man moves on the earth without clinging to branches, having himself become a tree, in other words raising himself straight up like a tree, and all the more beautiful for the correctness of his erection. In addition, the function of the human foot consists in giving a firm foundation to the erection of which man is so proud (the big toe, ceasing to grasp branches, is applied to the ground on the same plane as the other toes).

But whatever the role played in the erection by his foot, man, who has a light head, in other words a head raised to the heavens and heavenly things, sees it as spit, on the pretext that he has this foot in the mud.

Although within the body blood flows in equal quantities from high to low and from low to high, there is a bias in favor of that which elevates itself, and human life is erroneously seen as an elevation. The division of the universe into subterranean hell and perfectly pure heaven is an indelible conception, mud and darkness being the *principles* of evil as light and celestial space are the *principles* of good: with their feet in the mud but their heads more or less in light, men obstinately imagine a tide that will permanently elevate them, never to return, into pure space. Human life entails, in fact, the rage of seeing oneself as back and forth movement from refuse to the ideal, and from the ideal to refuse — a rage that is easily directed against an organ as *base* as the foot.<sup>1</sup>

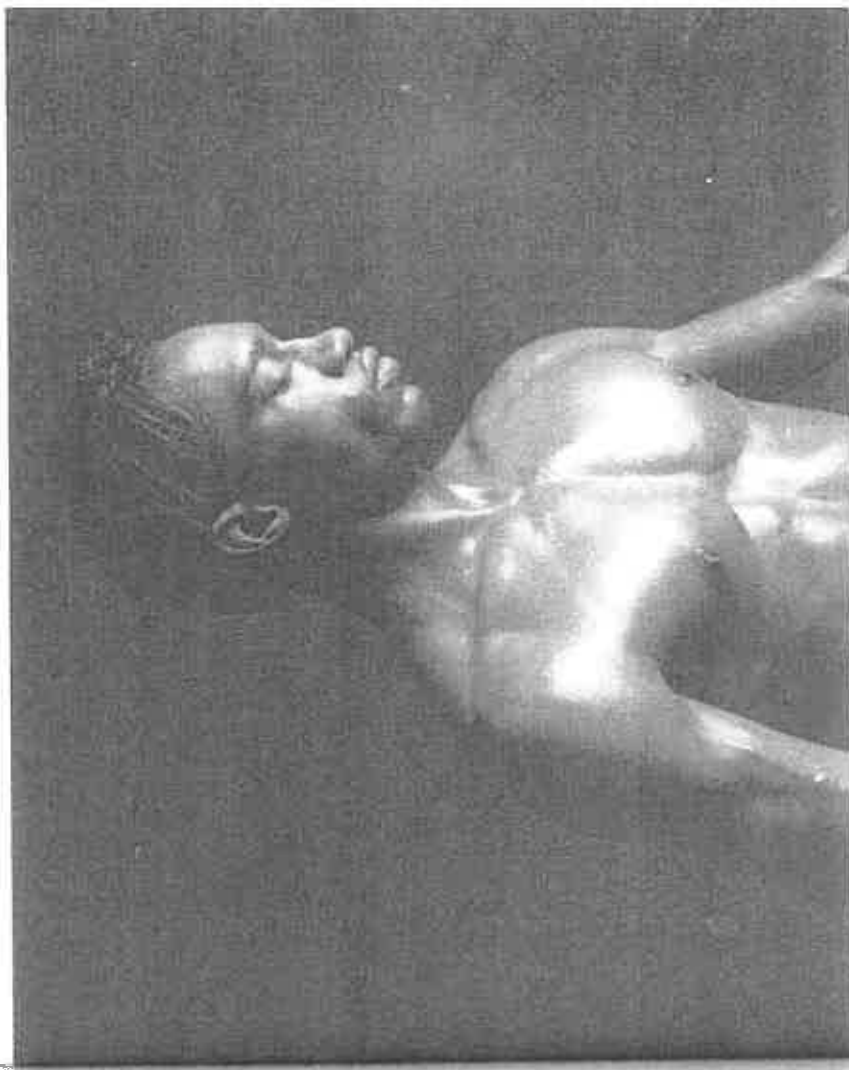


Thomas (Three Part Body Series)  
Photo: Linda Dawn Hammond

We are no longer living in the age of Bataille's "Big Toe," of a permanent elevation beyond the mud of experience to the pure space of virtual reality, from refuse to the ideal. That is what made the appearance of the big toe such a scandal in the modernist episteme. It represented a refusal of the light head of the sun, and an affirmation of the sovereignty of the base.

But now it's just the opposite. The big toe can be so valorized today because the surrealist doubling of the body between decomposition and resignification has lost its meaning in spastic culture. Perhaps the big toe could have assumed its scandalous proportions just because the *base* no longer exists as a fatal scission of the "glory" of the sun. This would indicate that the big toe has migrated from the mud of experience becoming an eye, a head, a recombinant ear, a gaping mouth. In this case, the focus on the fetishistic sign-value of the big toe is a *trompe l'oeil* deflecting the eye from the spraying of the body mutant by all the secretions of base experience. Here, the big toe can retain its fascination only as a schizoid fetish implying the impossibility of delimiting the pure space of specular value from the nostalgic materialism of the body recombinant.

And what of the appearance of seduction? That would be reduced to a theatre of the burlesque, all the more piquant for its absence of division between light and base. We no longer inhabit the universe of seduction, but that of crash bodies, and crash big toes too, which is precisely what makes Bataille's description of toe licking so delicious. It's a nostalgic reinvoation of a toe sex that can be so charming, because the object of its desire, the big toe, has long ago vanished, just disappeared, into the universe of cynical signs.



Garth (Three Part Body Series)  
Photo: Linda Dawn Hammond



And so, remember Bataille as the Patron Saint of Lost Fetishes:

As for the big toe, classic foot fetishism leading to the licking of toes categorically indicates that this is a phenomenon of base seduction, which accounts for the burlesque value that is always more or less attached to the pleasures condemned by pure and superficial men...A return to reality does not imply any new acceptances, but means that one is seduced in a base manner, without transpositions and to the point of screaming, opening his eyes wide: opening them wide, then, before a big toe.<sup>2</sup>

### Liquid Crystal Skin

The application of ointment to the skin is perfect for the body recombinant. A sign of the vanishing of the skin as a symbol of separation between air and blood. A liquid materialism of the skin that is thereby transposed into a sliding signifier, one that glitters, slides and glistens. Perfect for a dry technology and a dry age: an era of sex without secretions where the body too loses its natural lubricants as it is processed like speed metal across the screen and the networks of virtual reality.

There can be such emphasis on glistening skin today because skin only exists as a eye high-liner of the vanishing body in recombinant culture. Not skin any longer, but a complex combinatorial of the fleshy body that serves as a turbulent signifying machine of all the passing values: steroid meat frames for body builders, annointed skin in fashion advertisements, liquid membranes on display in strip parlours. And to the question: What is the future of skin in virtual reality? it might be replied that skin has one last technical function as a liquid crystal array. Liquid skin for the liquid self, where images of



possible selves can be stored in memory chips, and then displayed across the screen of the flesh. And not only of one's own self, but of the mutation of the body across the spectrum of the stars. Hologramic images that blend in with or flare out from the environment architecture, producing a seductive display of liquid crystal images.

### Brain Tap

Photographic images of the head can be so fascinating because it does not exist. Perhaps we have finally exited the old (Western) world of a head-centred body, and a head-centred universe, and have gone over to the image of the liquid body: the telemetried speed-body without a centre, where fetishes have lost their referential value, reappearing now only as videotattoos inscribed on an indifferent flesh.

And why not? In the age of artificial intelligence and robotic telemetry, the brain has been severed from the head and with it thinking has been exteriorized from its geographical locality in the skull, taking up residence in smart machines, digital feelings, and sampler architecture. In this case, we float in the ocean of liquid intelligence, one that has data as its content, pattern-recognition as its emblematic sign, scanning as its telematic function, and telemetried information as its evolutionary destiny.

Consequently, the optically privileged head can finally return to prominence as a material sign of that which never was. Having lost its original philosophical claim on earthly rationality and been abandoned by the telemetried brain that long ago blasted into orbit around the skull, the head can make one final appearance as a deserted bodily protuberance, ideal for coloni-