

VESNA PETRESIN

Our Machines

Desire is the fuel of our lives.

The thirst to be different from who we think we are, and things we think we have. Invention propelled by desire, control and fear brought the myth of Technology, a quasi-religion of endless improvement that speaks through the prism of rituals of industry, its methods of production and mechanics of mass satisfaction.

Disappointment only fuels the dream.

While Buckminster Fuller advocated the power of technology to promote social change, current conditions observe the Modernist ideal of limitless progress in decay and reflects the power of technology generated control, terror and submission. The rise of fear and the return to fortress-building, barrier-erecting and militant polarising has marked a departure from principles of openness, transparency and clarity.

Information age has brought back an architecture of suspicion.

By creating a new interface between the self, the other and the world beyond, information technology takes part in constructing and controlling our reality.

But what if reality is an artifice?

Time-based media such as moving images are by definition illusory, non-existent – the projections of our perceptive apparatus, the architecture of our minds. They are instrumental in activating the viewer into questioning the world as we see it.

Ambiguous structures, the shifting multiple views of a configuration in a single representation best demonstrate a reality in a state of flux.

Here, what we perceive oscillates between two equally valid interpretations; none of them exists as a real object. No order or interpretation is privileged, and there is no ultimate overview – only the complexity of multiple reference points and connections.

In Lacanian terminology, it is by suturing off the real that the reality of individuals remains a coherent illusion and also prevents them from 'falling prey' to the Real.

However, the very lack of a reference point and closure represents a denial that protects the individual from confronting the trauma of human finitude; because there is no ultimate irreversible point, the multiple universe always offers alternative realities. It allows for an endlessly repeated reenactment of an impossible Real to overcome trauma.

Multiple perspectives encircle an impossible Real.

Where does Body enter Technology?

The omnipotence of technology reflects a world gone global, replacing the symbolic and mythical structure of past paradigms.

Universalism was characterised by the concepts of transcendence, subjectivity, conceptualisation, reality and representation. The global culture of Flow on the other hand relies on screens, networks, immanence, numbers and a space-time continuum. The global techno-structure eradicates all forms of differentiation, aiming at establishing a world where reference to the natural must disappear.

The ideology of technological progress brings a promise of freedom, prosperity and release from body, birth, death and desire. The mechanistic cosmology of ancient Greece, with Heron's automata and architecture of war machines, prepared the philosophical ground for Descartes and the belief that engineering excellence can manifest a better future.

The Bible's call to conquer nature, the Protestant work ethic and the apocalyptic vision of a New Jerusalem similarly propel the myth of an engineered utopia.

Calvinism, American Christian workaholicism along with technoutopianism and perfectionism all share a belief in a world with limitless potential for improvement.

Modernity is partly defined by the conceptual barrier erected between nature and culture.

Latour sees the beginning of the split between nature and culture in the Enlightenment, when Descartes' mechanistic thought invaded natural philosophy.

Nature is considered as an objective world 'out there' whose hidden mechanisms are unlocked by detached scientific gentlemen using technical instruments to amplify their perceptions. Thus, technology becomes a tool, a passive extension of the human being that reinforces our creative powers by amputating our natural ones.

The Myth of the Machine insists on the authority of technical and scientific elites and in the intrinsic value of efficiency, material progress, control and unrestrained technological development, of economic and territorial expansion.

In the industrial age when the electrical current was transformed into a communication medium, the grandeur that Romanticism attached to nature shifted to technology as energy mutated into information. In the information economy that transcends rather than extends its material predecessors – the agricultural and industrial economies -- matter has been overthrown by mind.

Technology and ideology thrive on dreams of mobility, power and omnipresence; this is in part an enactment of the denial of death, an open-ended system, a chance to start over, replay an event and try a different resolution.

Zizek situates the technological utopia of virtual space between perversion and trauma, fuelled by the desire to reach perfection.

The virtual ultimately generates a proto-psychotic immersion into an imaginary universe unconstrained by symbolic Law or Real.

Fantastic, Futurist, utopian, virtual space or a space of mechanistic dreams is a space without closure and reality of human finitude, constrained only by its self-imposed rules.

The reality of utopia is a fantasmatic 'passionate attachment', a traumatic scene that never really took place. Real is the traumatic essence of the Same against whose threat we escape through the virtual, fantastic and symbolic universes.

Resisting symbolisation and dialectical mediation can bring a release from the myth of the power of technology.

The belief in technology is a way to play omnipresent god, to possess multiple identities, and to escape the trauma of our own mortality. But it is merely a false liberation from the constraints of the social space in which our existence is caught.

Our bodies are made of the same particles as the known universe.

We are the music that shapes the world.

Please see: <https://vimeo.com/187456101/ae4c06c64e>

CREDITS

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Dr. Vesna Petresin (born in Ljubljana, works and lives in London and Berlin) is a transdisciplinary artist and thinker. She has a practice as a time-architect, composing and performing with sound, light, rhythm, space, movement, text and code. She has exhibited and performed at Tate Modern, ArtBasel Miami, Royal Festival Hall, Royal Academy of Arts, Venice Biennial, Cannes Festival, ICA, Sydney Opera House, Vienna Secession, ZKM

Currently a Visiting Fellow at Goldsmiths and Director of the London-based art collective and think tank Rubedo, she has lectured and published internationally (Springer, Thames & Hudson, Wiley Academy)

Petresin's practice explores embodiment, transformation, manipulation of time and movement and synaesthesia, alongside the barriers between the intimate and the public sphere. Using her voice and movement meditation, she constructs a trichotomy of structures: sound, image and light, exploring the concept of time in relation to body, movement, space and emotions.