

Symposium

"Philosophies of the New Technology"

Hannes Böhringer (Berlin)
Heinz von Foerster (Pescadero)
Vilém Flusser (Sao Paulo/Robicon)
Friedrich A. Kittler (Bochum)
Peter Weibel (Wien/Buffalo)
Jean Baudrillard (Paris)

Organization of the Symposium:
Peter Genie and Adelheid Paris (Merve Verlag, Berlin)

Invitation

When we were asked to invite people for an international symposium on the topic "new technologies", we were not at all happy with the topic. This term, after all, is one of the figments of a sociologized academicism continuously producing such intellectual stereotypes like new irrationalism, neostructuralism, new spirituality, new intricacy, new Fauvism, postmodernism, Zeitgeist, risk society, etc. Such terms call for a debate of pros and cons and in German speaking countries quickly become something like a religious war without abandoning the symptoms of an academic herd instinct. They are shortlived as new prophets keep turning up with the true wrong doctrine. "... They have difficulty in sustaining their lives in regions that have been left by those who work. This dispute (about structuralism), that had been very fruitful, is now only being carried on by the mimes and showmen" (M. Foucault).

More interesting than the pros and cons of academic trend discussions have always been the philosophies of trends which Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard or Ernst Simmel have been concerned with. Even specialists could not give us the answer to our question where the term "new technologies" has come from. So we had to resort to philosophy. The great 1985 exhibition "Les Immateriaux", inspired by Jean-François Lyotard, was set off by the design discussion concerning "new materials". Here new technologies and art of the avantgarde had been linked up with a concept of etymology and communication theory and had been exposed. A philosopher promoting an exhibition.

The name "Ars Electronica" evokes music's origin in mathematics. The theorists that we have invited to come to Linz are such:

Heinz von Foerster, a nephew of Wittgenstein who was radio program director before founding the legendary Biological Computer Laboratory -the birthplace of the theory of self-referential systems;

Vilém Flusser, a genuine Prague intellectual, who had to emigrate to Brazil, headed a transformer-factory there, and developed his theory of alphanumeric codes;

Jean Baudrillard, like no other philosopher fascinated with the new which he experiences as an ecstasy of simulations. Here the philosopher turns into a writer and chronicler;

Friedrich A. Kittler — the A. gives away the Adornite origin — makes the study of literature a theory of recording systems taking its material from the history of technology;

Peter Weibel, whom we have called polyartist, shows how artistic practices and theoretical reflexions can blend to distinction.

Hannes Böhringer is one of the few who have heeded the advice by Kojève and have studied Greek and he proves the fertility of antique concepts for contemporary art.

We did not list these names in the order of their appearance on the scene in Linz but in the order of their birth dates: they were born in 1911, 1920, 1929 (1936), 1943, 1945, 1948, (1950).

The spoken lecture lets us hear what someone has to say.

Does hearing imply adherence?

Our speakers are of different ages and most different tempers. They are working thinkers, they address our time. The human being as a calculator, the human being as a typewriter or a communication centre, the human being as a vampire, the human being as an engineer or an inventor, the human being as a behavioural animal. Their common activity is to perceive, their perceptions and findings are what they have to give. We, the listeners, pose the silent questions: What is new about the technologies if they spread rapidly like a virus? The tools that slip from our hands and simultaneously reveal chaos and contingency, are they in need of new inventions or human discoveries? Something like that might be the wording of the silent questions of our time. Behind them the issues are even more urgent. Speaker and listener: in the shadow of the words the murmur of time can be heard.

Peter Gente
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