

Keep Him on the Phone

The Human Body in the Realm of Technology

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"Keep Him on the Phone" is a music number.* It is also a demonstration of two distinct forms of the contemporary use of communication technology: intensifying the experience on one side, preventing it on the other. That's the topic of this text. Did the contemporary technology truly make the human body redundant, superfluous even, enabling us to willfully change the bodies and identifies: or, on the contrary, is it so that the human body is the only site, the only place where this shifting of identifies can take place?

Safe Sex

What do we hear when listening to "Keep Him on the Phone"?

First, Techno. As a matter of fact, this number is more House than Techno, but still, it is typical enough of the kind of electronic, computer-generated music: of sounds and rhythms that are directly tuned with the human body. Of music that has to be listened to aloud, on the headphones or, better still, on distinctly coded parties, Raves; of music where rhythm and sound, not the melody, are what matters; where the non-discursive decidedly dominates over the discursive (therefore the importance of DJs who guarantee that no number is played in the same way twice; and of vinyl records that allow for the manipulation of pre-given recordings).

On the discursive, narrative level, the "Keep Him on the Phone" number re-stages the situation of another use of technology, the Phone Sex service, by re-mixing typical sounds and voices: caller dials the number, woman picks up the phone, she praises her own body and describes their engagement in the intercourse up to the point of simulated orgasm. Compared to Rave parties, technology in the case of Phone Sex functions in exactly the opposite way. Here, the two partners are physically separated, but connected one to the other by telephone line. It is true that in this particular use the telephone, the machine, connects the two. But it is also clear — because such is the main feature, the absolute advantage of this telephone service — that in this use the telephone prevents any physical contact in a sexual intercourse. Here, there are no chances that one would get AIDS: Phone Sex is a perfect form of Safe Sex.

Of course, what one experiences by listening to this number is not a clear form of Phone Sex, but the difference should nevertheless be obvious:

— By Techno and, even more, by Rave parties, one is immediately experiencing: feeling the rhythm, hearing the sound, seeing the lights, images and live performances, smelling the smoke; and is enjoying doing it.

— By Phone Sex, one is enjoying, but except for the sound, one is experiencing nothing: seeing the "beautiful blonde hair," feeling the touch of the skin, sensing the other person's smell, all these things that the woman on the phone is talking about, all these do not exist.

What in "Keep Him on the Phone" bonds the two described uses of technology (Rave parties and Phone Sex service) or, as I'll call them later, the two apparatuses, what on the discursive level fuses them into a single, distinct object is the male voice repeating "Keep Him on the Phone." What does it mean? It makes visible what both, the sex on the phone and electronic music, presume: they are forms of entertainment industry. To put it even more plainly: it's all about money. And about power. The "Keep Him on the Phone"-man is exercising power over the woman, the woman is exercising power over the caller. One could easily conclude that as an object of Techno music, the "Keep Him on the Phone"-number, by referring to the motives other than consumer's enjoyment, points to the "truth" of its own production. But here we reach the point demanding some conceptual clarity.

Sad Friends of the Truth

In a culture where seeing is believing, metaphors, in particular metaphors on seeing, are a convenient way for presenting concepts. John Milton, 17th century British poet, was blind, and probably for this reason he was able to see things more clearly. In a pamphlet which he addressed to the British Parliament in order to defend the idea of the Freedom of the Press, he described "the truth" this way:

The Truth was of a clear image once. As such, it was sent to the Earth, but evil men smashed it up into thousands of pieces and scattered these pieces all over the world.

Therefore, the only thing left to the journalists — and others who are looking for The Truth, "sad friends of The Truth" he called them — the only thing they can do is to look for the separate pieces of the truth.

This has two consequences:

First, we cannot ever, know "the whole truth." it is only available to us in pieces, in distinct parts.

Second, if we start with the question WHAT, then, by deciding WHAT "the truth" or any other phenomena is, we already determine HOW to approach it. If to the question WHAT is the truth, we answer, "it is a distinct, wholesome entity," then we'll look for it, and when we encounter something that looks like it, we'll presume, that's the whole and only truth. But if, to the same question, we answer, "truth is scattered all around in pieces," then we'll look for pieces everywhere, but we'll never be satisfied, always in doubt, if together with some other, not-found parts, this partial truth would still be the same, or would it be totally different. In other words, a decision on ontology already implies certain epistemology.

The first who pointed out to this feature of classical philosophical question of WHAT was Russian linguist Roman Jakobson. He demonstrated it by the example of the basic units of language, the phonemes, The classical question was, WHAT are these basic units of language: are they the phenomena generated by the throat? Or the phenomena generated by the brain? Jakobson did not try to answer, instead, he showed that the answer to this question, to WHAT (ontology), already implies the approach, the HOW (epistemology). Those who say, the basic unit of language is a matter of the throat, do research in anatomy; those who say, it is a matter

of the brains, do research in acoustics. But, concluded Jakobson — and this is the main contribution of the structuralism to the humanities — if instead with WHAT we start with HOW, if instead of ontology we start with epistemology, we do not imply anything like that.

Still, the notion that there must be some final and definite truth is very persistent. And here is where the mechanisms of mediation, the technology, the machines get the decisive role. Simply: if humans, always emotional, biased, prejudiced, are not able to grasp the definite truth, then the machines should be capable of doing this instead of us. Therefore the machine was conceived as the model for thinking, for understanding the world, and also the body. This is the origin of the ideas of the World Machine and of the Body Machine. Such a notion presumes the clear separation of the observing subject on one side and the observed object on the other, or the cognitive subject on one side and reality on the other. Between the two, there is supposed to be a measuring mechanism that helps the subject to grasp the nature, the truth, of the object.

In the arts, the measuring mechanism was Renaissance perspective. The codes of this perspective themselves were conceived as the tools for measuring the outside world, but classical painters often used additional, material tools to do this; such as were Alberti's "constructions" or Dürer's "portillon."

In natural sciences, this mechanism was presumably provided by physics; its methods and tools enabled people to measure the outside world, they were the means by which the subject was comprehending the object. If we take a table as an example: we should be able to grasp the truth of its nature by measuring its height and width, the structure of the material and so on. But this ideal notion of the subject, the object, and safe, observing distance between the two, where the measuring mechanism is located, has been severely questioned in natural sciences as well as in the humanities. In physics it happened when, by quantum mechanics, the measuring mechanisms themselves were being developed to such a degree that it was possible to prove — let's stay with the example of a table — that a table does not exist. We would say that it is of a solid matter, but, actually, the distance between the particles is immense in relation to the radius of the electron or the nucleus of one of the atoms of which the table consists.

In the humanities the doubts were clearly articulated even sooner, for example by the 18th century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Bentham used the law as an example of the importance of the imaginary, untruthful entities. He called them fictions and defined them "as the saying something exists which does not exist, and acting as if it existed."

So, now we are in the situation where physics proved that the presumably "real world," "real entities" does not really exist, are not real at all; and where the humanities proved that not-real entities, fictions, can be more "real" than presumably "real entities." But does this indeed imply — as most of contemporary, so called postmodernist thinkers claim — that there are only fictions left, that everything is being simulated, virtual, fictitious, imaginary ... — That nothing is real? Should we deny that there are tables at all as we ordinarily conceive them? I don't think so, I explained before, with the help of Milton's metaphor, that there is no such thing as one, definite and final truth or reality, That our notion of the truth, the reality, is always partial, always constructed.

Now we can say why: because it is impossible to separate the observing subject from the observed object, the observing subject influences the observed object and vice versa. Everything depends on the concept. At least two contemporary theories prove this distinction,

this separation not possible: Hillary Putnam's "Theory of the Interior Realism" and Weibel's and Rössler's "Theory of the Interior Observe." In both, we see again that instead of WHAT they ask the question HOW. This is the point I regard as decisive with respect to the technology: not the impossibility of any final conclusion about the nature of things, but the specific role of the approach, of the method of comprehending the world, of the mechanisms of mediation or, in the broadest sense, of the technology.

Before defining the concept, the method of conceptualizing the contemporary use of technology, we have one other question to ask. Where, now, is the place of the human body? One thing is clear from daily experience: like this table, the body also did not simply disappear. But we should be more precise.

In his theory of ideology, Louis Althusser also claims that the imaginary has material effects. As an example he cites the religious belief in God: God is imaginary, but those who believe in him perform material actions — they go to church, attend masses, they make the sign of the cross, they pray on their knees and so on. However, the difference between Christianity and other more "primitive" religions lies in the fact that in the Christian religion the control of the physical body is being mediated, not direct. Also among Christians only the most devout believers, like members of the Catholic group Opus Dei, inscribe their belief on their bodies by daily whipping, by wearing chastity belts and the like.

The same happens with the manifestations of another, most common imaginary phenomena, the state of what we call eternal love. "Cultivated," "civilized" people exchange wedding rings. Tattoos with the names of beloved ones written on the skin are attributes of the people from social margins. In the realm of cinema for example, the mainstream movies always portray the state of love by more or less stereotyped metaphors like birds and sentimental music. Movies which portray love by means of the transformation of the body — like films of Tod Browning ("Freaks" or "Unknown"), R.W. Fassbinder's "The Year with Thirteen Moons," "Empire of the Senses" by Nagisa Oshima, or "Boxing Helena" by Jenifer Lynch — are considered at least bizarre.

All this, together with the popular interpretations of the development of technology as fixing the physical failings of human body, clearly shows that we tend to understand civilization as a constant liberation from the physical body. But in the essay on "Kontext Kunst" Peter Weibel also shows how Bentham in a way preceded Jacques Lacan. Lacan conceptualized reality not as a unity of object and subject but as a structured form imaginary, symbolic and real, Real is not reality, it is not truthful or realistic. It is located where there are no words: in sex and violence, and death. And what is the place where these experiences can take place? This place is the body.

Les Mots et les Choses

Regarding the notion of civilization, we can understand why it is so popular nowadays to claim that our culture, contemporary culture, is another step in the process of liberation from our bodies. Yet we can clearly experience, every time we go to the cinema or turn on the computer, that contemporary technologies all presume, demand the individual, in his or her bodily dimension.

Theorists who claim that everything is being simulated, ground their notion on the idea that contemporary culture is the culture of images, that we moved from the culture of writing to the culture of images. Contrary to this, I propose the concept of the apparatus ("le dispositif")

as a simultaneous presence of both, of words and of images. "Le dispositif" was conceptualized by Michel Foucault, who in *The Order of Things* claims that "what we see is never present in what we say." Therefore, in his work Foucault developed the concept of "le dispositif" which enables us to think the simultaneous presence of both, of what we see and of what we say; as the specific organization of the discursive and non-discursive, which always includes the subject.

This later feature of "le dispositif," the inclusion of the subject, is particularly important for the thinking of the use of technology. It is initiated in Foucault's analysis of Diego Velázquez's painting *Les Ménines*: he takes the painting as "le dispositif" and clearly points out how it includes its own observer. This feature was further developed by Jean-Louis Baudry in his essays on cinema. In Baudry's terms, "le dispositif" pertains to the situation in which the film technology is being used: to the apparatus and, at the same time, to its addressee. By this concept, Baudry arrived to his historical conclusion: namely, that the "reality effect" of the cinema does not depend on what is being represented on film. The cinema does not simulate reality, it simulates the subject: "The entire cinematographic apparatus [tout le dispositif cinématographique] is activated in order to provoke this simulation: it is indeed a simulation of a condition of the subject, a position of the subject, a subject and not reality." "Le dispositif," in other words, "concerns projection and . . . includes the subject to whom the projection is addressed."

We could already conclude that Baudry's concept pertains to both, to a hypothetical subject position and to the actual person; to the (imaginary) spectator and to the (real) viewer; or, in the terms of the critique of ideology, to the subject and to the individual. However, the notion of the subject is, first, the key point of Baudry's concept of "le dispositif"; and second, it is also the most controversial point of this concept, as conceived within the paramount interpretation of Baudry's concept, the Theory of the Apparatus. Hence, let's have a closer look at this interpretation:

On one hand, it is based on the American translation that equates both, "l'appareil" and "le dispositif," with "the apparatus," even if Baudry explicitly states that "le dispositif" — unlike "l'appareil" — "includes the subject."

On the other hand, the main argument against the Theory of the Apparatus is that it conceives the subject as an effect, as a structural function of ideology; that therefore it does not acknowledge the active role of the concrete individuals, real viewers, people in flesh and blood: and that it is therefore inadequate or even irrelevant.

Therefore we can not simply reject this interpretation as a misreading. On the contrary: the translation is somehow misleading, but the interpretation is nevertheless correct, because it regards the apparatus as that which "includes the subject." Even the notion of the subject is appropriate as far as Baudry's essay was written in the context of Althusser's critique of ideology in which the individual is "always-already interpellated" into the subject of ideology.

Contrary to this, the argument that Baudry's concept of the apparatus pertains to both the imaginary subject and the real viewer postulates that the individual is not always-already the subject (of ideology); that the individuals are not interpellated *as* subject but *into* subject; in short, that the ideological interpellation is not necessarily successful. This is demonstrated by Rastko Monik in his essay "Ideology and Fantasy": the act of identification is impossible if it doesn't get the support for the individual's idiosyncratic "wishful fantasies."

If so, if ideological interpellation can indeed fail, in other words, if the critique of ideology does not exclude the individual, then we can conclude as I previously suggested. The Apparatus is a situation and a setting ("metaphorical relations between places and relations between metaphorical places," locational and relational at the same time), which:

1) constitutes the subject, by providing him an imaginary subject position, a simulated point of view which one must take in order to recognize the representations and which is common to every spectator; and

2) includes the subject, because it always relates to the individual, to the concrete, living person, to whom it assigns a distinct place within the setting.

Indeed, the contemporary technology for production of images presumes a fixed place for the body of the viewer, a place in which every single individual is, in one way or the other, isolated from the others. At the movies, the viewer buys a ticket that entitles him/her to one distinct seat in the hall; when watching TV, people are put into the couches in their living rooms: cybersuits, datagloves, head-mounted displays are made to be used by one user at a time; the same is true with the telephone, and it is also impossible to end with what we started, to dance on Techno in constant touch with another person as in classical polka and waltz dances or even rock 'n' roll. This is probably the best example: at Rave parties, the touch of the other is unbearable.

In short: not only *some* contemporary communication technologies but *all* of them are isolating the individual by preventing him/her from physically experiencing the closeness of other individuals.

Dying Live

What about the other feature of contemporary use of communication technology, the intensifying of experience? It is obvious from the arts, from the development of new technologies, from TV that the intensified experience is one of the main objectives. In the arts, there is a honorable tradition of body-artists, from Valie Export, Marina Abramovic or Chris Burden to the most notorious contemporary one, Orlan. Virtual reality and cyberspace are praised for their multiplication of the senses involved sight, touch, hear, even smell. And as for the most overwhelming media technology, namely television, we are all aware that Reality TV programmes, Real World series and alike are all aiming at achieving the same.

Instead of listing various particularities, I'd like to prove the point by the example of one single thing: the representation of passing away in photography, cinema and TV. André Bazin, the great theorist of film realism, regarded the ability to represent the passing away as the main advantage of cinema in comparison to photography. Photography, according to Bazin, "can represent a man in his agony before the death or his dead body, but not the unaccessible drift from one to the other."



Let's take as an example an old and well-known photograph, the one taken by Eddie Adams in Saigon in 1968, of a Vietnamese soldier Nguyen Ngoc Loan, pointing his gun right to the forehead of his civilian prisoner. If we compare this photo with the 16 mm film shot of the same event, we can clearly see the difference. With the film shot, we get the event in its duration: soldiers capture the prisoner somewhere on the streets, they take him to the square, the soldier takes a gun into his hand, motions the others to move away, points the gun, shoots; the prisoner falls down and for more than ten seconds we can observe the fountain of blood springing from the hole in the man's head.

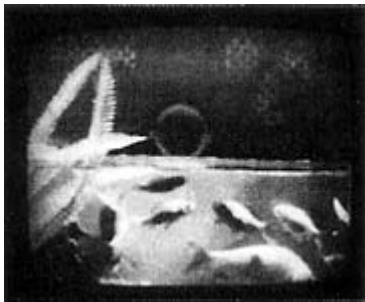
Moving images are clearly more effective than static ones; but this is not all. In one of the contemporary advancements of the Cinematographic Apparatus, the Location Based Entertainment (LBE), the representation becomes even more true. The location here is the location of the narration: the spectator is fastened to his or her chair and via the chair to the machinery, which gives him or her to see, what the movie makers call point-of-view shots. What Harrison Ford is in "Indiana Jones" and Kathleen Turner is in "Romancing the Stone," the spectator him or herself is in the Location Based Entertainment. We can compare this to IMAX, Disney's Animatronics and even more to SimEx "cinema," but the Apparatus of LBE is much more inclusive. As a proof of the effectiveness of this kind of entertainment, a journalist commented that it was so real that his heart would almost stop. One of the operators of LBE dully replied, "if you have a heart attack, it is your problem." The issue here is not the ability to represent, but the absence of representation: the passing away is not experienced through the representation, it is experienced at least potentially — live.

Not only the isolation of the individual consumer, but also the magnification of the experience is a feature that pertains to all, not only to some of the contemporary uses of communication technology. At the beginning I proposed these as two distinct forms of the use of technology, namely, that technology *either* provides the means for intensifying the experience *or* prevents the individual from physical experience. Now, I have to conclude, these are not two forms that would exclude each other, but two simultaneous processes: processes in which the individual is isolated in order to experience, and in which one type of closeness, one type of experience, is replaced by the other. It is the very concept of the Apparatus that enables us to think this simultaneity: the real person must limit its bodily capacities (has to "take place," be isolated as an individual) in order to identify with the imaginary subject position which entitles her/him to the enjoyment provided by the Apparatus. But, if technology presumes or even demands the codified limitation of the corporeal facet of its consumers, should we conclude that the contrary is also the case? Ought we to consider the physical experience as a form of resistance to the use of technology?

The answer lies in the third example of representation of passing away: the one on TV. Live transmission is the most distinct feature of television. There is no doubt that so called live parts of TV program are as pre-planned and controlled as any other previously recorded feature in this program. But as the property of the TV apparatus, live transmission is the mechanism that connects both spaces, the (everyday) space of the viewer and the (imaginary) space of TV: it is a tool that puts both spaces in the same time. Live transmission can not be repeated. Just like, as Bazin says, one cannot die twice. So, if the live transmission is the final achievement of television, then the final achievement of TV's maximizing the experience would be live transmission of dying.

Actually, at the very beginnings of television in Slovenia (for other regions I do not know of a research of this kind), live transmissions of surgical operations from the local hospital were extremely popular. People at TV Ljubljana tested their very first equipment and first cameras for color TV this way. One of the protagonists of these events remembers: "Then Prof. Lavric, who was operating on the other patient, asked me whether the interior of the chest was clearly visible; otherwise he would widen up the cut for the camera."

This happened in 1958. In August 1967, when the association of Yugoslav radio and TV stations, JRT, was transmitting for Eurovision, live of course, the heart surgery by the famous American heart surgeon DeBakey in Belgrade, TV Ljubljana gave up the live transmission. Instead, they broadcast a shortened version of the surgery one day later. The public was enraged, but medics provided the arguments for the ban: something could have gone wrong and the patient might have died. This is like in the circus, they said, but "the penetration into the human body is no circus."



Peter Weibel: TV-Aquarium (TV-TOD 1), 1970

Later this interpretation prevailed on other TV stations as well. At the beginning of the seventies Peter Weibel created for Austrian national broadcasting, ORF two projects of live transmission. One which would, like the early-TV "short breaks," show the interior of the aquarium, only that here the water would moderately leak out, until the fish would be left without water and die. The other project would offer a view into the terrarium where there would first be snakes, then the mice would be thrown to the snakes, and the snakes would eat the mice in front of the eyes of TV viewers. The first project ORF realized to the moment when it was still possible to save the fish; the other was never realized on public TV.

The story is not over yet. In November 1994 German Police hunted two run-away prisoners who took civilian hostages. The reporters were excluded from the places of the event. The reason: fear of the repetition of the so called "drama in Gladbek," an event that took place a few years ago: in a similar situation one of the hostages was killed in front of running TV cameras.

Contrary to the claims that there is nothing that TV wouldn't show, contrary to the critics who advocate "Entbrutalisierung" of the media, there are things that TV wouldn't show. I don't claim that TV should be showing this. But the very presence of these limits is the reason, why I think it is meaningful to point out, that contemporary media are preventing us from certain experiences. These experiences still take place in our societies and in our individual lives, therefore we should consider them as forms of resistance against the transformation of our experience through technologies, Regardless of how we understand, and what value we do assign to, the term resistance. Affirmative or not.

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