

Memesis

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The Future of Evolution

is the theme of this year's Ars Electronica. The symposium, performances, workshops, installations, network projects and events illuminate that fast-approaching moment in "digital evolution" at which the existence of the hardware becomes self-evident, and working with digital technologies makes the transition from "cultural technique" to second nature, a simple fact of life. Memesis is a synonym for the current acceleration and compression of vectors of development in culture and technology, culminating in a state of aggregation of our mass-media environment which cannot as yet be reliably described.

By analogy with "genes", the building-blocks of biology, Richard Dawkins' term "memes" denotes cultural information units, cognitive behavioural patterns that propagate themselves and replicate through communication, a paradigm of a "culture-based history of development".

Against this backdrop a discussion process should be initiated, stimulating different lines of approach to the topic, and polarising opinions. The aim is not to dream up new utopias, but to develop a critical and reflective approach to the current situation, with its renewed promise that much-vaunted visions of the future will finally become reality.

As the biological body is paralleled first by its mechanical, and now also by its informational clone, our conceptions of individual, body and gender are being undermined by neurobionic and robotic prosthetics; cyborg theory and cyberbody fetishism constitute one initial response.

Media memory — a memory which is shaped by media, or the collective memory and experience of humanity externalised in world-wide networks. What history will be perpetuated on the other side of the media filter, in cyberspace?

The reality of digital networking, now a fact of life at least in our own cultural environment, is the real venue of the 1996 symposium. The Ars Electronica Network Symposium has been running since March, laying the groundwork for the Festival. The idea is not simply to try out a novel format for the event, but to erect a permanent platform, from which the debate will constantly reach out to engage specific segments of the techno-cultural revolution.