

Cyborg Detector

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Technology was once something abjected by the individual; it was clearly outside of the body similar to an object that individuals used. By the turn of this century, the understanding of technology had changed and it was more seen as a tool to extend and perfect the human being. Now more than ever, technology has a very strong status in the West and the interchange of technology and flesh has become characteristic of western culture. At the same time, the question about what is the FleshFactor in this technology-informed culture has become a controversial issue.

Technology, the fantasies and dreams about what technology can offer to humans, the history of sense-of-self and the contemporary stratified experiences of reality that we encounter in techno-culture, feed back into the flesh. Through new interfaces/boundaries, the smooth flesh receives more than just an imprint of information. The flesh itself mutates in this ongoing exchanging process.

The identity of humans is no longer based on a body with a carbon substratum alone. By merging flesh that has a carbon substratum, metal and silicon substrated devices like semiconductor chips, the human experience of a sense-of-self is expanded by the properties and cultural factors of the components absorbed.

There are many definitions of cyborgs, but basically, anybody could be a cyborg. Cyborgs are ... flesh, hardware, software, culture and imagination.

The cyborg detector is an installation that gives visitors an experience of the interplay of technology and human identity. The boundaries between technology and flesh are not clear-cut. Just as there is no clear definition of the boundaries of identity, there is no clear definition of cyborgs, either.

Cyborgs are prototypes of contemporary cultural identity. We intend to bring people to ask themselves how integrated technology and their sense-of-self in the information-society are in their lives.

The installation: cyborg-detector

We will "evaluate" the cyborg-degree of a person [anyone] by measuring their technological and cultural use and attitude via a metal detector and an interface questionnaire.

This does not mean that someone with a high degree of metal content is necessarily a cyborg, if they don't identify with the cultural implications of cyberculture.

Visitors will walk through a metal detecting system that measures the metal content of their bodies. Then, they will be led to a clinic office where a digitally generated "scientist" skilled in counseling cyborgs will interview them to determine their cultural attitude toward, and use of, technology and cyberculture. However, the scientist seems to lack strength of character, because s/he changes shape in an attempt to track the cyborgness of the interviewee.

Finally a database calculates the cyborg-content and the scientist tells them their cyborg degree.

But technological calculation by a machine or a determination /categorization by humanoids or cyborgs cannot realistically determine the state of a being.

The final question that the individual has to ask her/himself is: "Are you a cyborg?" which is the most important question in determining the degree of cyborg.

The result gives them an indication of their own cyborg-activity at this moment.

If appropriate, the scientist also gives them a cyborg ID badge. This ID is a spool with a specific resonance to a sensor at the Ars Electronica Center Entrance. If the cyborg passes the entrance of the Ars Electronica Center, the sensor detects the cyborg and sets off a visual and acoustic cyborg welcome-signal. The monitor then signals: "cyborg detected".

Non-cyborgs can go for an upgrade at a special terminal. There they can redesign their identity by downloading information and integrating a piece of hardware into their lives. Afterwards, they can go back and repeat the cyborg-test, and they may find that the virtual scientist has incorporated their hardware into his/her body as well.

The cyborg-activity at Ars Electronica Center is made accessible and visible worldwide via the Web. Tests and upgrades are only possible locally because it involves a living person. The information download for non-cyborgs is also available on the Web.

The determination of cyborg-degrees depends on the sense-of-self of an individual. Technology is so integrated in western culture and practice that it has become a subliminal influence on the reality of individuals. Subconscious immersion and techno-existence have caused the definition of a cyborg to depend on the perception of the self in this environment.