

Terminal Sex

future sex as art practice

How much better is your love than wine (book of Solomon 4.10)

Sex spells the future of art. As the life sciences enable art to create life rather than objects and systemics, sex will come to serve as one of the foundations of art practice. But it will be a kind of sex different from the way it's currently practised. Jacking into your next sex will be terminal. It means an end to sex as we know it. Then again, it will be the start of your Next Sex. Just as silicon made the current biotechnological revolution possible, the present move to the wired society is preparing us for a cultural communication practice that will revolutionize future sex. It will be a distributed, dynamic, networked process going across entire species and life forms. It will be a romantic orgy of Life-Art. In the following I should like to comment on a few possibilities of the new Life-Art from an aesthetic point of view.

Prologue: the epigenetic change of paradigm

If we understand the new developments of Life Science as the advent of a new paradigm, then this can be understood as the transition from the Preformative to the Epigenetic age.

In the 18th century the question of the origins of life divided the intellectual community in two—on one hand the defenders of the theory of Preformation, and on the other, the young faction composed of the advocates of Epigenesis. The Preformists believed that the formation of newborn life was completely predetermined either in the male semen or—and as well as—in the female egg. The Epigeneticists were of the conviction that new life could only arise out of the blending and mixing of the sexes. Thereby something genuinely new could arise. So they became the birth assistants to the period known as “romanticism” or the phenomenon of “romantic love.” When the arts now propagate the age of Life Science, we can expect new ways and methods of creating. No more monologist “introverts”, but the free play of inter-bio-active forces. That is, while playing/living with the user, the medium (life) overcomes its loneliness. It becomes the possibilities shared with the user. If we follow this typology, we are now currently in an eminently epigenetic situation, a situation caused by the new technologically-founded possibilities, for example in the current advances in bio-science, DNA mapping and genetic engineering. Additionally enabled by the digital (controller) technologies, the future Life-Arts therefore opens up new ways to perceive and conceive.

Life-Art

The essential material of the life sciences is the living body. The enabling life-science technologies will be utilized by artists to make life the next medium of art. The current transformation of Life into Art can be called Life-Art. The aesthetics of Life-Art is about Life's design, modification, alteration, perfection, creation and continuance. The Book of Life currently being written turns the body into a canvas of being. I think it will be less about creating the super-human and more about creating new shades of existence. The life sciences will cross fields and ultimately join body (the flesh), technology and creativity in one sensual orgy that open up a new form of creative space. It's the play-

ground for the ultimate creative act—making life. All kinds of life. Life—as the new canvas of art—will be artistically designed as evolving, dynamic and adaptable processes. The art-object as life is not to be hung on the wall or installed, nor does it need a power outlet. It cannot be turned off, and walks away if it likes. Its narrative is unpredictable at best. This extreme outland of creativity is terminal creativity. It is terminal because it's about the termination of the creator itself. The artistic ambitions are clear: art in the age of life science is about making art larger than life. One's own that will be. Over the course of time the forthcoming designer life-art species will find its own ways, and most certainly replace its originator, either completely or in an enhanced manner, as in our most polished eugenic fantasies—or dark nightmares. In any case, what cyborg theory expanded on the post-human being, the life sciences will finish. This time, however, it won't be virtual. With Genoshop, the future equivalent to Photoshop, it's time to say a final good-bye to the human. But we're going to have a lot of fun while we're at it. The great promise of Terminal Sex is the thrill of creating something brand new—something not felt, seen or thought of. As the hypes are emptied in contemporary digital arts the awe of the new has faded, but it will return with a vengeance in the Life-Art-sciences. Terminal sex turns us into gods that create life in the image of our pleasures.

Terminal Coolness: Future Sex as DNA sampling

Today the life sciences are positioning the extremes of Future Sex. Until now procreation/fertilization has been the matter of combining a female egg with male semen. In future biology we will not need complementary pairs (female-male) to procreate. We will write the new Books of Life through the combination of DNA from different sources. The inheritable properties of children will be a selection of sensual and dynamic assets from more than one man and one woman. We can foresee a situation where two or more men will contribute genetic material to the same child. Taken to the extreme, we can foresee that having sex and reproducing will be like surfing the Net. Today we use the Net to read and distribute intellectual material. Soon we'll use it to create our real-life offspring. In future sex the history of your info-surf & communion will leave traces in the form of descriptions of your DNA. With DNA synthesis we will construct our offspring with bits and pieces from a wide range of people. *Surf the NET—and give your child a thousand fathers and mothers.* Or let the DNA-jockey sample it.

Terminal Heat 1: the orgy as the future practice of sex

Sex and procreation in the future will adapt to the constitution of communication on the Internet. Just as the Net is distributed, sex will be, too. The Internet will function as a testing and training ground for future types of communication. It is a low bandwidth, monosensory medium, but it gives us a sneak peak into the topology of tomorrow's communication culture. Communication on the Net can be from one person to many, many to one, or many to many. So will sex be exercised in the future tel-emotion society. As sex in the future becomes net-oriented, it will increasingly be practised like Chatting today. *That is, the Orgy will serve as the role model for sensuous communication.* Reproductive Sex in the future need no longer be a private thing between two people. It will be dynamic and distributed phenomena with globally distributed participants—based on synesthetic biology conveyed by extreme media.

Why the orgy? The orgy breaks down the borders that define humans as individuals. Outside the orgy human beings are isolated, not just from each other, but from nature, the heavens and God. One possible effect of Terminal sex is the creation of a techno-

religious ecstasy in the tradition of the archaic ecstatic experience of the Divine. Traditionally this was achieved by means of music, dance, sex and/or drugs. Now we can do better and do it more intensely. Imagine DNA coding a life form to be continuously high on self-made endorphins. Terminal sex can be expected to break down the individual's genetic building plan to rebuild it from scratch in the shape of a mythological creature with a multinodal, rhizomatic network connectivity. Seeing the future of Life from this point in time, it will appear divine – just like a few centuries ago when it would have been sorcery if hitting a switch on the wall turned on light.

Terminal Heat 2: sextreme creative environments

Made potent by science and detached from procreative activities, future sex will be synonymous with the creative practice of making art. By making the body—both human and not—into a bio-technological space for artistic practice, we will have an extremely creative arena for the combination and re-combination of features and potential abilities, and this will not be just because of the billions of possible genetic combinations.

Future sex will go beyond reproduction and penetrate the realm of aesthetic practice. Sex as aesthetic practice will make possible extremely creative environments marked by the distinct existential implications of life cycles. Art in the future will be more about survival than presentation, context, beauty and information. Future art will therefore not become unfashionable or grow boring; it will become extinct and die out. The positivistic attitude of present media-art practice as observed in the information-sharing net-art will be expanded by hedonistic pleasure principles based on darwinian-dyonisiac selective processes. The “beautiful” art gene of the future will survive through its ability to enhance the “user” experience to the point of orgasmic creativity. Which extraordinary sensations does it allow its carrier to possess? Which distinct perceptions to evolve? Sex in the future will be a physio-inductive practice manipulating the flesh and serving as the foundation of experience. It will manipulate the corporeal blueprint of our aesthetic perception. The resulting life-art body will serve as the navigational apparatus for symbiotic aesthetics where the difference between life and fiction are terminated. Where does this leave us? The Next Sex becoming Terminal Sex, and Terminal Sex as a strategic practice for the intensification of existential aesthetics.

Terminal aesthetic existentialism in Life-Art

Up to now aesthetics has been a matter of identifying perception. Contemporary definitions focus on “a work of art as an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an art world public.” Such definitions touch upon the problems of context and presentation, but not the fluid, distributed and process-oriented character of much interactive and Net art. Life-Art will demand quite different re-understandings of what art is about. Terminal sex represents a new, biologically-driven concept of what art can be. Our experience of art will move away from the tool orientation of today, towards a new corporeal, experience-oriented paradigm. We can foresee a shift in aesthetics from the identifying perception of today towards the existential perception based on the translation of physical perception into emotions and impressions. In Life-Art it is a matter of perceiving from inside the art. The experience comes from inside the being. Life-Art is the co-existence, even in-existence with the art. With the internalisation and corpo-realization of Life-Art it now does matter whether art will kill you or not. What about your body developing art-cancer? This state of concern is aesthetic existentialism.



Terminal pleasure in aesthetic existentialism

As we today read DNA, we will soon write it back into life forms. One artistic strategy to process this inscription will be to model it on intercourse. The coolness of the uncovering science will be the hot practice of art. This will be art as action, driven by desire. It will involve aesthetic parameters other than those we are used to. Seduction is set to become one parameter of Life-Art, the quantity and quality of pleasure another. Even rape can be considered as an art-creational strategy. The future “user” of Life Art will measure the quality of the Art Form inside the aesthetics of corporal pleasures. Which pleasures? Art-consuming will likely be topped with orgasm as the height of aesthetic climax. Sex is the process of Life-Art, creative orgasm the objective. Odd questions arise with the parameter time in Life-Art. What happens after orgasm? With the creation of Art-Life what legal and emotional bonds can we expect between “work,” artist and user? What about nursing as a form of artistic practice—or consumption? Can the artist be considered a parent of his bio-experiments? How long will he have to take care of his “art”? In the case of the user, how will s/he contemplate Life-Art if not in a symbiotic union? Whether as a modification of one’s private, individual body or in a social, environmental context the symsthetics of Life Art pose challenging problems.

Life-tools

How can the technologies of Life Sciences be put to artistic use? Where are the tools to craft life? Practice in the Life Sciences is currently based on both chemistry and mechanical processing. As “in vitro” fertilization it is a matter of manual selection of egg and semen before the semen is mechanically inserted into the egg through a needle. Future practices foresee a more precise manipulation of inheritable qualities. Protein scissors and molecular docking will eventually allow exact DNA re-modelling methods. Making Life-Art will be like mixing a cocktail—somewhere between throwing a party and practising hard-core science. An intriguing question of technique is how to grasp and control the literally billions of combinatory possibilities of DNA. Interestingly enough this problem will need the development of much more powerful control and processual equipment than we have today. So far the computer has been one of the most enabling techniques in the Life Sciences and it’s likely to continue that way for a while.

Interfacing to bio-sex-technologies

What will the user interface of future sex be like? Probably more “physiologized,” chemicalized and internalised than current sculptural media art interfaces. Most likely it will be with more blood and guts than with the silicon technologies. The first interfaces will most likely be based on old media metaphors, but now the target of the systems has changed. In the quest for breeding, Life-Art pattern recognition and pattern matching will be essential to select the most original mates. Then seduction will be an integral part of art-practice and art-behaviour.

A possible, near-future tele-tactile, multi-sensory cyber-bio-sex system will be an environment that makes it possible to feel the personality profile of your future friend/lover/sperm- or egg donor. It could even allow for selective mating based on a multidimensional, synaesthetic profile described through several combination of medias, for example through connecting stimulator suits with in-vitro fertilization machines. Through a 2D, 3D or multisensory “personality combinator” you design the father and/or mother of your child. Such a combinator will recognize, describe and print possible combinations of DNA. DNA can be seen as a description of properties and a (textual) carrier of information. The base material of Life can therefore be described in text. The combinator would read DNA as a divine, religious text of creation. And the resulting synaesthetic text can be read as blueprints for DNA structures. We will go from Life to Über-life, using the building blocks of nature to reconfigure ourselves.

“Please do not feed the art”

Art Print Life

As we today print words on paper, in the future we will print life. What kinds of Life will we print? The Life-Sciences—as we know them now—draw up at least three categories of Life-Art species. The first is the singular life form. This can be either self-luminated dogs or freak-constructions of humanoid shapes. The second is the connected organisms of brain-like constructions. The last and third is possible “bio-computers,” that is to say combinations of silicon computing and living cells.

Bodytainment

How will this affect our lives? How will it be used for fun? As communication technologies and biotechnologies recraft the body we will see the rise of a new entertainment industry based on bio-aesthetics. It will be a seductively pleasing experience. It will be in-corporal communication for the new Millennium in glossy wrapping. The dystopian symbolics of the past “cyber” decade will be avoided. Using the body for manipulation will be a fun and entertaining thing—it will be *Bodytainment* that both pleases and changes. And it’ll be a recursive modeling of the human. Plastic surgery and the psycho-induction of Re-birthing is nothing compared to the corporeal possibilities of your clone as modified through Gene-sampling and Genoshop. If we discover that we have become the sex organs of the machine world, then reality has turned terminal—and sexy.

Terminal Art

Where does Terminal Sex leave us? As it creates life in the image of our pleasures, we can expect new sexual sensations to be an integral part of art in the future. This is simultaneously an end and a starting point. As exemplified in the scientific practice of in-vitro fertilization and cloning, procreational sex is changed into cool science—and terminated. This means an end to sex as we know it, but a beginning of re-creational sex in the sense of epigenesis. Terminal Sex in the arts opens up new ways to perceive and conceive.

Let us not forget that DNA is the most passive and conservative entity we know of. It represents extremely intricate plans for life, but it’s still only a description. It takes Terminal Art as desire, action and embodiment to execute it.