

## HYBRID – living in paradox

*Hybrid – living in paradox*, mit diesem Thema widmet sich die Ars Electronica 2005 den implisiven Tendenzen, die, von den digitalen Technologien in Gang gesetzt, unsere Welt verändern. Kulturen werden überlagert und stürzen ineinander, Grenzen werden aufgebrochen – nationale ebenso wie materielle, technologische, psychologische.

Hybride Kreationen und Kreaturen, Identitäten und Kulturen entstehen aus den Rekombinationen unserer grundlegenden Codes – den digitalen, den genetischen und den atomaren. Letztlich ist digitale Medienkunst selbst ein Hybrid aus den Verbindungen von Kunst und Technologie. Sie akkumuliert das gesamte Spektrum an Ausdrucksformen und erfordert ein außergewöhnliches Crossover von Expertenwissen und Kompetenzen.

Hybrid – kein anderes Wort könnte die charakteristischsten Bedingungen unserer Zeit besser beschreiben.

- Die treibenden Kräfte und Muster der Hybridisierung
- Hybride Formen in Wirtschaft und Politik
- Hybride Kulturen und Identitäten
- Hybride Kreaturen und Ökologien

Hybrid – kein anderes Wort beschreibt den aktuellen, vielfach paradoxen Zustand unserer Welt treffender und umfassender – einer Welt, die gekennzeichnet ist von mitunter höchst widersprüchlichen und dennoch höchst wirkungsvollen Verbindungen:

- von Entgrenzungen, Verschmelzungen und Crossovers, neuen ökonomischen und politischen Koalitionen und Allianzen ebenso wie interdisziplinären Kooperationen in Kunst und Wissenschaft
- von globalen Kultur-Amalgamen, die aus der weltweiten Zirkulation von Menschen und Waren, von Zeichensystemen und Informationen erwachsen
- vom symbolischen wie physischen Eindringen der Maschinenwelt in unseren Körper -von bionischen Prothesen, Neuroimplantaten, Cyborgs und transgenetischen Chimären
- von Sampling, Collage und Re-Mix, von konsequenter Cross-Kompilation und Rekontextualisierung künstlerischer Ausdrucksmittel, -formen und -genres
- von eskalierenden Kämpfen gegen die Kontamination des Eigenen durch das Andere.

Das Hybride ist die Signatur unserer Zeit, der Gelassenheit, mit der wir uns in real physischen ebenso wie digital virtuellen Habitaten eingerichtet haben, der Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der wir kulturelle Differenzen und Antipoden verhandeln und neu konfigurieren, der beunruhigenden Routine, mit der wir mit den Bausteinen des Lebens spielen.

Hybridisierung – von den Züchtungen und Kreuzungen von Pflanzen und Tieren über die mechanische, elektrische und digitale Simulation und Nachbildung der Natur bis zum Hochmut der modernen Gentechnik – ist immer auch Ausdruck der archaischen Sehnsucht des Menschen, über sich hinauszuwachsen und die Natur zu verändern, zu korrigieren.

Und so wie jeder Organismus seine Immunkräfte gegen Eindringlinge und Fremdkörper mobilisiert (selbst wenn es sich um lebensrettende Organtransplantate handelt), weckt auch jede

kulturelle oder soziale Hybridisierung Widerstand und Abwehr: fundamentalistischer Purismus, eine Abgrenzung aus Angst vor Assimilation oder eine Skepsis, die hinter der „neuen“ Verbindung doch nur andere Artikulationen der gleichen alten Trennkräfte verborgen sieht. Hybridisierung als kultureller Prozess ist in den seltensten Fällen steuer- und kalkulierbar, ihre Produktivkräfte entspringen meist dem Zufall, mitunter sogar dem Wunsch nach Differenzierung, oft sind sie auch Nebenprodukte subversiver Aktion. Dies zeigt sich besonders im erfolgreichen Culturejamming der Jugendkultur und Popmusik, gilt aber auch für viele Anwendungen digitaler Medien: Niemand hatte SMS geplant, und das machtvolle Aufkommen eines Citizen Journalism mit Blogging, RSS-Feeds und Podcasting ist ein Hybrid, dessen Entstehen wohl von visionären KünstlerInnen und KulturtheoretikerInnen vorhergesagt wurde, nicht aber von den Marketinggurus der New Economy.

Dass am Ende doch immer ein Weg gefunden wird, die so entstandenen Derivate kommerziell zu nutzen, tut der Lust und Energie, mit der weiterhin gesampelt, remixed, verunreinigt und missbraucht wird, keinen Abbruch, bestenfalls provoziert es dazu.

Das erste Hybridwesen ist der Mensch. Und er lebt in einem Paradoxon. Als Mischung von Geist und Materie, als Transmission und Handschlag zwischen Geist und Materie und vice-versa lebt der Mensch bewusst oder unbewusst in einem permanenten Zustand der Hybridisierung.

Wozu also soll man sich mit einem so allgegenwärtigen Zustand befassen? Weil sich neue Triebkräfte der Hybridisierung herausgebildet haben, die den hybriden Zustand immer deutlicher – und für einige immer unangenehmer – zutage treten lassen. Mit der Globalisierung kommt die Implosion, in der alle Kulturen aufeinanderprallen und sich die Zeitzonen überlagern. In dieser Implosion integrieren sich die Dinge oder sie zerbrechen. Ein weiterer Faktor ist die Digitalisierung, die einen steten Fluss von immer neuen Kombinationen hervorbringt – alles Hybride, sorgfältig mit Software kultiviert, wie Blumen.

Wir leben im Paradoxon, in einem argwöhnischen Schwebezustand, der fort dauern wird, bis sich der Staub setzt und die Widersprüche zwischen dem Selbst und dem Anderen, zwischen Nationalismen und Globalismus, zwischen Demokratie und staatlicher Kontrolle gelöst sind. Und dann sind da die Widersprüche zwischen der Macht der Medien und jener des Staates. Und die Widersprüche zwischen Wissenschaft und Wirtschaft, die alle möglichen Hybridformen hervorbringt mit der klaren Priorität des Profits vor dem Dienst an der Menschheit. Und die Widersprüche ...

Kunst ist die Nahrung der Hybridisierung. Sie übersetzt und transportiert die Formen einer Kultur in die einer anderen, indem sie Teile von beiden hervorhebt und mischt.

Sampling ist nicht nur eine der digitalen Techniken, sondern hat sich zu einem Lebensstil entwickelt. Und so gibt es DJs der Kulturen, wenngleich diese in langfristigeren Rhythmen arbeiten. Was bleibt uns anderes als zu sampeln, in einer Umwelt, in der alles immer verfügbar ist?

Derrick de Kerckhove

## Hybrid: Elements of a Re-mix Culture

The first hybrid is the human. A mix of mind and matter, a translating device, a handshake from mind to matter and vice-versa, humankind is in a permanent state of hybridization, consciously and unconsciously. Andy Clark, in a recent book, *Natural Born Cyborgs*, describes his feeling of hybridity thus: “Electronically speaking, my body is virgin. I don’t embody silicon chips, bionic eyes, cochlear implants or a pacemaker. I don’t even wear glasses but I am gradually turning into a cyborg. And so are you all. Very soon [...], we will become cyborgs not superficially as a result of a combination of flesh and wires, but in the more profound sense of human-technological symbiosis: thinking and reasoning systems whose minds and selves are distributed across biological brains and non biological circuitry.”

### Drivers

Why then focus on a such a pervasive condition? Because new drivers of hybridization have emerged over the last few decades, bringing renewed attention to our hybrid condition which is becoming more and more evident—and more uncomfortable for some.

What brings about hybridization? Hybrid creations and creatures emerge from fragmentation and recombination. The smaller, the more flexible the unit, the greater are the possibilities of recombination. Hence the principal drivers of hybridity are the gene, the atom and the bit. Language itself is a product and a generator of hybridization. Like migration and cross-breeding, languages drive hybridization because they bring together common features from otherwise unrelated entities. Digitization increases and multiplies the existing property of the alphabet to act as a translator of human experience and a generator of technologies. As more and more objects are made available in digital form, invention arises more and more from sampling and mixing, leading to a generalized digital/material bricolage. The key driver is digitization. We are smashed to bits by digitization. By reducing everything to sequences of zeroes and ones, 0/1 is now the smallest common denominator of everything. 0/1 is the privileged gate and filter through which our senses as well as our sense or meaning are passing, only to be restituted in their secondary modality, as Walter Ong so astutely observed in his *Orality and Literacy* landmark book. The digital process invites an infinity of recombination, all hybrids, with software cultivated with care, like a flower.

The digital is also the cognitive edge of electricity. It is that edge that commands the rest, driving machines in a purposeful way. While in its analogue mode, electricity gave us light, heat and energy; by going digital it is truly emulating our central nervous system to extend our senses and our selves and, through a new level of translation, to join our biological being, itself an electro-chemical entity.

At a more mundane level, digitization is also a precondition to the practice of sampling and remixing. If music be the food of hybridity, mix on ... Sampling translates and transports the modes and rhythms of one culture into another, lifting bits of both and mixing. Sampling is not just one of the techniques of the digital, it has become a way of life. And we have DJs of culture, David Letterman, Michel Drucker or Maurizio Costanzo, albeit operating at longer-term rhythms. Everybody is sampling; Costanzo samples vignettes of contemporary folklore on TV, my students Google pearls of wisdom and factual data, and Buddhabar mixes oriental and occidental to the satisfaction of both sides. What can people do but sample in an environment where everything is always available?

### Cultures

If you want to see cultural hybridization in action, watch a Bollywood movie. Globalization, one of the drivers of today's hybridity, is not new, but electronic media are making its pressure felt more than ever upon our psyche.

Globalization brings a new scale to our mental representation of the world. Under the gaze of satellites, the world implodes and hybrid societies redesign the political face of the planet. With globalization comes implosion, all cultures and time zones piling up upon each other. Being at once global, continental and local, we are all global, but some of us are more global than others. When imploding, things either integrate or break.

Take Europe, for example. To make Europe, or even to simply let it happen, requires thinking Europe. A geographical mental space that makes room for many different cultures, let alone languages, must either appear spontaneously or be produced. How does one stretch one's imagination from the local to the global and back? We have been helped to do that every evening watching the weather reports on TV. Europe is branded in our psyche as a unified climactic environment. We even get the occasional live transmission from satellites to confirm the authenticity of the representations. Hence we may owe to satellite transmissions of our own common image a new scale of spatial representation that is based on the continent and not on national borders (these have all but disappeared in Europe). The question is: Is Europe a mosaic or a melting pot? And the answer is, a mosaic, of course, juxtaposing cultures with strong identities supported by locally secure and confident languages. This confidence is evidenced in the discussions surrounding the inclusion of Turkey in the European community. These reflect both a resistance to hybridizing Europe further, but also the amazing potential of sharing a common literacy to establish at least the possibility of coming to terms with the inclusion. When Mustapha Kemal Atatuerk decreed in 1928 that Turks would use the Roman alphabet instead of the Arabic one, the legacy of the Ottoman empire, it was to reduce the power of the imams, but it was also to include Turkey in the European spectrum. Turkey is indeed a mostly Moslem culture, with apparently very different values than those subconsciously associated with what being European implies, but it is a Moslem culture run by the phonetic alphabet, one of the very tools of hybridization. So it might just work.

Continentalism is a trend that can be observed in economic—and political—alliances between countries sharing the same continental space, NAFTA, MERCOSUR, ASEAN, EUROPE. Continentalism, an emerging trend that will eventually metamorphose into globalism, clusters administratively, economically and politically neighboring countries in ever larger realms until they reach a large body of water or a high range of mountains, or, a major cultural difference. From micro-economies to macro-mergers, the very structure of traditional sectors is yielding to new pressures, new alliances. Most changes are lateral as we witness the repeated drama of vertical disintegration. In the media-driven politics of the globalized economy, and keeping in mind the dubious strategies of recycling old concepts to fit new situations, what is the meaning of "democracy"?

### Identity

Do we have hybrid sensibilities? Both the robot and the cyborg are hybrids. Humans lend their mind to the first and their body to the other in the still uneasy coupling of metal and flesh. All technologies, however, begin visibly as an externalized extension, only to be unconsciously absorbed and internalized in the psyche of the user. The very technologies that support us have a tendency to sink into invisibility. The blog could be the soul of the cyborg, of somebody made up of a node and a network. As we blog our daily encounters,

we publish ourselves simultaneously with our networks of like-minded people. Differing from our shadow, our “digital persona” does not merely follow us, it precedes us, as when people “google” each other before they meet.

The concept of the “Digital Persona” was developed and described thus by Roger Clarke: “The digital persona is a model of the individual established through the collection, storage and analysis of data about that person. It is intended for use as a proxy for the individual.” The digital persona is a kind of electric shadow of the self. But it’s archived. As we pour ourselves out into networks in streams of data springing from our credit cards, our cellular phones and out of the myriad barcodes scanned for us and the myriads cameras recording us, we develop an electronic profile that upon reflection, we might not want to recognize, but that unquestionably, instantly and everywhere recognizes us. Some urgent questions, among others:

**Is this persona safe? are we safe with/from it?  
Is it threatening to replace or dominate the organic, psychological persona  
each one carries with his or her body? Can we, should we keep it private?  
(Is transparency destiny?)**

And, of course, as Clarke carefully describes, we have several digital personae, some of them active, most of them passive, which simply continue to accumulate, combine and hybridize references to ourselves from different sources, a lot of them wrong, and over which we have little or no control. To that singular perception of the digital persona, we could also add the distinction between private or shared. A blog, for example, projects the markings of a personal identity selecting and controlling the information it provides. It is thus an active digital persona. However, a blog is not a stand-alone linguistic expression of a personality committing itself to paper for private use or at least very restricted readership. A blog is a publication of self, along with the ever-changing and flexible network of interactors. In turn, these interactors are provoked and inspired by ever-changing, flexible, but reliable sets of indices, the catalogue of ideas, hypotheses, comments made by the blogger and commented by his or her readers. To be accurate, one could say his “wriders” because nobody actually “reads” a blog. To engage in a blog is to invite oneself to a condition of potential intervention on whatever is read. People somehow read and write at the same time when they engage in a blog, even if they do not care to do anything else than “poke”. Blogs, then, present a perfect hybrid of self and other. You somewhat “are” what you post and your value is both estimated and represented at once by your network and the networks created by, or, at least, with your list of interests. The structure of blogging software, by necessity, respects the limits and the features of both self and other and presents them as a combination, not an addition of separate elements. Thus the blog both resolves the contradiction between self and other as well as reaffirms the basic connectivity of the self (“we are our networks”). Inasmuch as the cyborg could said to be a hybrid of body and technology, the blog is a hybrid of mind and technology. It needs to be displayed on a screen, itself a hybrid of psychology and technology, which we now need and use more than paper to negotiate and communicate meaning. The blog is thus a psychotechnology introducing a new variety of human communication and social way of being. It is one of the first signs of the psychological maturation of the web. Blogs could be said to engage humans in the internalization or introjection of the condition of electrical projections of our central nervous system. In that regard, blogs present the traces of a perfect hybridization between and among active digital personae. The blog is the soul of the cyborg.

## Ecology

We used to think of ecology as an essentially “natural” thing. And the first observation was that the intervention of mankind is what disturbs and destroys that natural quality, as well as, more often than not, ecology itself. Having cloned sheep and other creatures, having reshaped vegetables and other plants, having written down the human genome, we have reversed the order of precedence of nature over culture. We cannot think of ecology in the same manner ever again. Henceforth it has to include all the human factors that come into play to modify the basis of existence.

New techno-cultural ecologies (such as that of the mobile industry, for example), arise from the renewed cycles of external innovation and internal assimilation. The 1.5 billion owners of a portable phone may not yet be aware of the fact that they can now put the world in their pocket. They may not be aware either that thus equipped, they are “always on” in a vast “ecology of mind” in Batesonian terms, or an active “noosphere” in Teilhardian ones. Daily life has certainly changed often enough over the last twenty years, but never did such change come as fast as now. It is important to examine what is happening now to time and space as a result of what the industry calls mobility. It is the culture of the Present: all times are now on the web and in a wireless condition. It is almost as if the world itself had turned “always on.”

Hybridity, then, has become a visible sign of fashion in cars, power plants, clothes and music. A good question is: Does the rising consciousness of the hybrid condition spell a permanent feature of a globalized culture, or merely a transition phase between the era of hardware and the era of software?

One of the US army special strategic leadership units calls itself VUCA, an acronym which stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. We live in a paradox, in a suspension of disbelief that will last until the dust settles and the contradictions between self and other, between nationalisms and globalism, between democracy and state control are resolved. And the contradictions between the power of media and that of the state. And the contradictions between science and the economy generating hybrids for all purposes with a clear bias towards profitability over service to humanity. And the contradictions ...