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Abstract

Multimedia artist José Carlos Casado discusses his work, *La Caja de Pandora-revisitada*- ("Pandora's Box-revisited"), in which digital video, 3D animations, and interactivity merge in a series of installations about "reality," artificial reproduction, and sexuality. His study that searches for the boundaries where belief starts, and asks what makes us accept what we see. It also investigates the new relationship between the mind and the body, and its relation to technologies.

"Reality", Artificial Reproduction, and Sexuality.

Reality is only a convention that almost never coincides with what is tangible around us. A large part of what we consider reality, including those closest and nearest to us, is nothing but the product of self-deceit, whether induced by the "system" or not. Thus the word "reality" is no more than a panacea, a great Pandora's box.

This idea has inspired this installation, entitled *La Caja de Pandora-revisitada*- ("Pandora's Box-revisited"). It is set in a black box, a revisited Pandora's box in which unreality supplants, not reality as such, but unrealities that have been presented to us as reality. The viewer will visit this black box and see a small black checker — a metaphor for the cosmic chessboard, in which the fragment is all. A receptacle with two video projections operating as windows show us what is inside and what is outside of Pandora's box. There is no physical contact between the characters living there, but they are connected by their behavior. They exchange experiences, they practice sexual rituals, and they even reproduce.

Human beings like to believe in things that are unreal and to disbelieve in others that may be more credible but which we do not like or understand. The American landing on the moon was held by many skeptics to be a staging carried out in the deserts of California, an imaginative burst by Hollywood's filmmaking machinery. Some incredulous people still expect the equipment supposedly left behind by the Apollo spaceship at the Mare Tranquillitatis to be found in the outskirts of Los Angeles.

This is not surprising, considering how certain governments and NATO have repeatedly manipulated war images in Yugoslavia and the Gulf War for their own interests. In the first case, an attack on a bridge by a missile which hit a civilian train was justified by the supposed sudden appearance of the train out of a tunnel after the missile had already

been launched and could not be averted. Nevertheless it has been proven that the speed of the video image had been tampered with so as to slow down the train's apparent speed and to back up the official version of the incident [1]. In the second case, numerous Western media inserted dramatic images of dead fish and dying birds from an oil spill in Alaska into their coverage of the Gulf War. The apparent intent was to equate the earlier ecological disaster with the misdeeds perpetrated by Saddam Hussein in Kuwait [2].

Recently, by popular demand, a pub in the United Kingdom installed telephone booths in which the user can choose the background noise: airport, street noises, dramatic storms, or car horns [3]. From now on all those excuses that did not sound credible with the sounds of music and bar noise in the background will now be above doubt: "I will be home late, darling, I'm stuck in a terrible traffic jam." While this may be a comical, clumsy, and even coarse way to create virtual environments, it is nonetheless symptomatic of the days to come, when we will partake daily of virtual decors and sensations à la carte. The art world should not be indifferent to these developments.

After all, we might end up finding the machinery of the Apollo mission under the dunes of California's desert.

The Eternal Instant and the Single I

Since the cosmos is a mass of matter that had its origins in a Big Bang, it is reasonable to think that this expansion will one day end. But what happened before that Big Bang, and what will await us after the destruction of matter? According to some theories, after millions of years there could be a new Big Bang, followed by a new beginning, a new form of life. Perhaps it will be the same, or even a combination of both; the passing of time will allow all possible combinations to be repeated over and over, with every possible variant. There have been thousands of new beginnings that are always one and the same, and there will continue to be other thousands of new beginnings in the uninterrupted history of the cosmos.

In X number of years, when the natural elements, chance, and statistics make it possible, we will again live the same moment that we are living today. We will be exactly in the same place, looking at the same sea, and we will be surprised to hear ourselves saying the same words, words that will sound strange coming out of our mouths and in whose echoes we will perceive the remoteness of another life. It is not reincarnation, simply pure matter unmade and remade.

Of course, to reach that moment we will have to go through a million other situations: we will have to be Nero and also Marilyn Monroe. We will be missionaries and slaves. We have all once been the boxer Beau Jack, who ended his days shining shoes. As Jorge Luis Borges observed, all men are the same man [4]. Perhaps we will do the same silly things that Marilyn and Nero did — sing "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" or set Rome ablaze — perhaps not; maybe we are different variants of Marilyn and Nero. It is therefore not hard to imagine a Marilyn Monroe who, instead of committing suicide, would live 100 years. Someday we will be Mike Tyson and we will bite Evander Holyfield's ear; the next time our ear will be the one under attack. There are billions of combinations, but in the end it is only matter; it is only a question of rewinding and replaying a more and more diffuse and worn-out tape. Maybe we are only the civil servants of the universe. Sometimes when we get to a place or see a person for the first time, that place or person seems disturbingly familiar. It is often said that this is due to a short circuit in our mind, a fault in the brain. But what if it was a small fragment of memory that, before being part of our brain, was part of Marilyn's thigh or Holyfield's ear?

Sultan Valad said it in different words: "Why do I say 'I' or 'he,' since he is me and I am he? All is he, and in him I hide myself; even though we are corporeal, without body or soul we are both the same one and only light. Thus, if I am he, what was I looking for? I am myself; I am talking about myself. Certainly I was looking for myself" [5]. Now it is possible to connect the single I that is within us all — which is after all a network — and soon we will perhaps be telepathically united. Technology may make it possible to speed up the process of undoing and reassembling matter. We will be able to experience this string of possibilities without the assistance of statistics, chance, or the elements. We will not have to wait billions of years to repeat the same sequence, the same eternal fragment in which we find ourselves trapped. We will be able to choose whether to reincarnate as Marilyn's left thigh or Evander Holyfield's earlobe.

Lies about Reproduction: The New Body

Nobody declares that they want to have children in order to leave somebody like them behind, somebody that will survive them and that will in a sense *be* them. Nobody declares that they want to have children because they would like to leave behind someone as wonderful as them in the world once they are gone. Or to have someone who will remind them of their young selves as they grow older (a mirror that steams up with the vapors of youth's elixir). Many think such things, but few dare say them out loud. Tomorrow's artificial reproduction will bring people closer to admitting these thoughts, but it should be the individual who has them and not the capricious gardener in the Eternal Greenhouse. The ethical limits to artificial reproduction and its uses will give rise to social norms, and it will difficult to avoid being too restrictive or too permissive. It is precisely here that art will play a crucial role: garnished with humor, aloofness, irony, and critical capacity, it should denounce the absurd and proclaim the just.

New technological means enable us to create comical or improbable virtualities — Marilyn's thigh, Holyfield's ear — even without matter and body. These technologies make it possible to test implausible theories in laboratories with the help of computers. Technology makes the human body — as well as the entire organic world — superfluous. In works such as Critical Art Ensemble's *Flesh Machine* [6], it is argued that we are close to the Cartesian dream of liberating consciousness from the body. It suggests that today's tech revolution will help us retain the body while using a new somatic configuration that will enable us to adjust to the stressful and unhealthy environment of the new pancapitalism. Arthur Kroker and Michael Weinstein express no nostalgia for the body that has accompanied us to this threshold:

The old body was all right, but the wired body with its micro-flesh, its multimedia ports, its cyberfingers and its foaming neurobrain tenuously connected to the Internet's "standard operating system," is infinitely better. It is not really science fiction's mutating, wired designer's body, or the body's flesh, with its ghostly reminiscence of the nineteenth century, but rather the hyperconnected body of both: a nervous system of cables embedded in live flesh [7].

The cordless body will be soon teledirected. But far from being a body without memory or feelings, it will be a political and ethical body, full of conflicts and contradictions.

Just as today's soldiers are no longer soldiers but rather "armed systems," new bodies will be intelligent, autonomous working stations capable of working 365 days a year, twenty-four hours a day. The teledirected body is here to stay, although if we follow the thesis in *Flesh Machine*, unfortunately tomorrow's body will not be a liquid body that gives

in freely to desire and individual atavism. Rather it will be a solid entity whose behavior is reinforced through technological armor destined to achieve certain functions engineered by ideological constructs. The challenge and the possibility of a new revolution will reside in the user's own capacity to teledirect himself if he or she wishes, thus escaping the nightmare of the Great Orwellian Brother who moves the pawns on the board at his whim.

Of course all of these speculations are no more than theory; they are not facts.

Michelangelo's Fingers

There is no doubt that Michelangelo's famous fresco in the Sistine Chapel, in which two fingers nearly but not quite touch each other, represents something deep and mysterious. We have seen thousands of postcards, photos, and reproductions of this scene, which is so full of tactile energy and contained eroticism, but we cannot decipher what captivates us so. Perhaps the mystery resides in the idea that fingers can by themselves make love to other fingers, or that all fingers are the same fingers. Maybe the key is that the fingers never touch, although there is an expectation that they will at any given moment. In a way Michelangelo foresaw the moment in which fingers will be able to transmit sensuality without touching, as is already being experienced today with transmitters of sensations and heat via the Internet. Some attempts at having sex on the Internet have been made recently, with varying results.

Michelangelo perhaps understood that those fingertips could eclipse the rest of the chapel, that the fragment represented more than the whole. Today, thanks to computers, we can recreate those still hands and find out what they would do outside the fresco, outside the captivity they suffered because they lacked the means to make those fingers move. Sensors that will caress a mouse — still without touching the fingers of the adored one — will now transmit the eroticism, the sensitivity of those hands painted by Michelangelo. The eroticism will persist and will increase.

Linearity in literature, cinema, and art has long been devoid of any meaning. The fragment is what inhabits Pandora's box, the dark square room that is nothing but a small black checker in the cosmic chessboard. It can also be the means to get back to the cave. And indeed something of the spirit of Neolithic times remains, although the means of executing art has changed radically since then. The hunter who killed a buffalo one day and drew its image on the cave could spend years looking at it and remembering a fight from many years past. The fragment of that day of permanent hunting remains and is repeated in sequence, changing and becoming less clear each time. Pandora's box is full of nothing, of the fragment, of buffaloes and binary modern bodies that still seek to break the barriers of pleasure. All men are the same man, all fingers are Michelangelo's fingers, as they will appear in the installation, liberated fingers outside the fresco, mobile fingers that will masturbate and be caressed by other fingers, without needing physical contact between fingertips.

We owe Michelangelo another humorous and brilliant step in the advance to virtuality. It is well known that the priests who controlled his artistic work and criticized certain liberties he took ended up, through the artist's subtle vengeance, being portrayed among the inhabitants of hell. Like the incomparable creator of the Sistine Chapel, hyperconnected man will be able to choose his own devils at his caprice.

Frida Kahlo and Francesco Clemente penetrate more deeply into the human body and its scars, into its bowels and its vital organs, and can also be considered seekers of the

hyperconnected body. For these artists, the search is inside the body rather than outside; thus they have taken an essential step toward creating the virtual Big Bang.

The well-known figure of the naked man with multiple open arms drawn by Leonardo da Vinci, created as an exact map, created the foundation for the torment of the body, for its control and for the correction of its errors. Leonardo did not have a mouse or a computer, but he was nonetheless another visionary of the future treatment of anatomy and its manipulation in search of the virtual ideal. And he went far, despite the rapidly approaching obsolescence of his ideal of human flight, now that speedy silicon and cabled circuits are in charge of transport.

Artificial Reproduction and Sexuality

Nowadays there are more than 300,000 human beings in the world who have been conceived through artificial or assisted reproduction techniques. The rationalization and programming of the reproductive process has created a rental market for sperm cells, eggs, embryos, and uteruses that will be managed through increasingly competitive rules. This luxury market can and will create new jobs, many of which do not exist today. Uterine space has begun to be rented out. It can be understood as a part of the biological system of women or as an independent space belonging to the fetus, thus opposing the fetus's rights to the woman's.

This debate is not new, but it is presently acquiring new dimensions and provoking new discussions. Sound waves, frequently used in researching ocean beds, are also being used to explore uterine space: all oceans are the same ocean, and each ocean is a great uterus. New methods like cloning will allow us to dispense with the male in reproduction, and we do not seem far away from the day when the female will be unnecessary as well.

There are many controversies about artificial reproduction. The artist is particularly interested in those created over cases of homosexual couples who use artificial reproduction to create families. The dilemma here is the social environment, which does not acknowledge and even obstructs the normal development of a gay family, rather than the fact that a child would have to make two cards for mommy's day or two for daddy's day. Especially absurd are the theories that treat homosexuality as an illness derived from the nonassimilation of the rule (i.e. heterosexuality) and the methods to correct and cure these "sick" elements. Examples are: conversion therapies from electroshock to genital mutilation and cerebral surgery, as well as to numerous hormonal treatments.

Uterine space might come to be seen as a type of greenhouse controlled by Dad State and Mum Money, who will open or close the sluices following the interests of the wealthy and politically strong minority (as was suggested in the Wachowski brothers' 1999 film *The Matrix*).

Human incursions into DNA will permit us to detect certain illnesses and hereditary defects, and once they are detected they will be corrected. A consumer might be able to buy a genetic cleaner under the premise that he will have healthier children who are free from genetically transmitted illnesses. After several tests carried out in different moments of embryo development, any defect found will be repaired. An embryo that is judged weak or irreparable will be discarded by its parents in order to try anew. The Nietzschean superman is here. Pain will be prevented and eliminated, genetically abolished from our DNA.

This *pret-à-porter* artificial reproduction offers the consumer a blank videotape that can be recorded and erased as many times as he wants. He will make the cuts he wants in order to achieve a result that will meet all his expectations. (This idea is reflected in Tom Tykner's 1999 film *Run Lola Run*, in which the same story is repeated several times, as if in a video game.) It is like a video game, where the "insert coin" message sooner or later leads to a "game over" message. This does not mean the end in any way, but rather serves as an incentive for a new "insert coin." It is the dog that bites its own tail. The eternal instant. The fragment that is all and the man that is all men.

It may not be so far-fetched to claim that H.G. Wells' old dream of the time machine has a lot to do with the idea of rewinding and restarting again. The project that we are working on tries to pinpoint the different cuts in that video and to take maximum advantage of short circuits, errors, voids, or excesses in the chain of artificial reproduction so as to portray the pros and cons of the process in tones of parody and social criticism. Thus it is not strange that Casado has decided to use video as the main means of communicating his ideas.

It is also appropriate to analyze what is technology and what is myth in both artificial reproduction and virtual reality. How much of it is repressive and how much is a technological panacea that leads the masses to believe in these modern wellsprings of desire? What about pleasure? Will it remain relegated to second or third place? What will happen if an excessively hedonistic, wickedly sexual gene is found? Pleasure can also be genetically mutilated. All human behavior that is abnormal from the strictly statistical point of view could be eliminated or modified.

But we must not forget that sexuality and reproduction were disentangled some time ago, leaving the one in the hands of psychology and the other in the hands of biology. These two categories tend to become more and more airtight. As a result pleasure (sexuality) runs the risk of becoming increasingly isolated (and/or controlled) towards predetermined standards. Voyeurism will be rewarded because it presupposes an aseptic passivity as opposed to more participatory versions of a sexuality that always threatens to be contagious. That is the other conflict reflected in this piece of work: the interaction and clash between male sexuality (the old body by Leonardo da Vinci converted into a hyperconnected body) and reproduction seen from a nonexclusive point of view.

The objective in this project is to awaken the spectator through criticism and humor to the awareness and assimilation of all the changes that surround us. This will be done in order to prove that the development of the human being, his/her sexuality and his/her body, is like an Ariadne's thread that keeps its logical consistency and continuity from the time of the caves to the present cyber-era. And this thread sustains itself in great part through the development of the fragment as a representative of the whole.

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...AND WE WILL CARESS PANDORA ETERNALLY

When a biologist specialized in animal behavior finds similarities between human behavior and the social habits of a certain animal, he or she is caught in great excitement, in a certain uncontrollable happiness. After a few weeks we will see the inevitable documentary about the insect, or whatever is the subject of the study. We will be told about its mating practices, its habit of being faithful to the same partner throughout its life, the solidarity, the jealousy, the drive of the male to fight for the female or the

singularity of its death, naturally accepted before embarking on the journey to the elephant cemetery where it will rest next to its ancestors' bones. Even some of the excesses of certain animal species (as in the case of the Black Widow, who eats the male spider as they are mating) awaken in us curiosity. And there is usually a human group that demands – with or without reason, in a more or less humorous way – that some aspects of this filmed “animality” be incorporated for its exemplary nature or excessiveness, or simply because they are fun, into the codes of conduct that rule our daily lives.

In another turn of the screw, and given that androids definitively dream of mechanical sheep or mechanical wasps, perhaps the moment has come to take the step with or without virtual help. From its placid refuge in the Galapagos Islands, Darwin did not count on evolution being disordered by the willingness of some former apes that would make impenetrable shields and ships in which to sail inwards to their bodies. Each member of the human race will choose the proportion of his or her cyber-evolution in the future and whether they prefer to have the sophisticated radar of the bat or the doubtful virtue of fidelity. In the same way that apes still exist, there will also exist former apes like us. But the step is there. Darwin did not count on the variant that Eve might renounce to the apple and that Adam might stay below the tree, alone and helpless, expectant, waiting for the apple to fall, while his sex turned into a clump of brambles as with unkempt lawn for decades. And that he would remain forever until someone opened up Pandora's Box and gave Adam a modem.

José Carlos Casado shows us in his personal Pandora's Box an assembly line that demonstrates that each piece of the process is interchangeable and dispensable for the reproduction and permanence of the pieces, which will depend on its radicalism, singularity or amusement. The only essential link is irony. And we sincerely believe that even on the day when DNA has no more secrets for scientists, even on the day when all types of freaks and clones (bettering what there is at present) can be created, the irony will be the variant, indecipherable genetically and scientifically, that will alter the predicted outcome in the assembly line. This variant will be, in a way, our savior. A sort of beautiful crack in the prefect and boring mold that awaits us.

The Muscovite philosopher Alex Ovsich has reduced all human conduct to a complex mathematical formula full of variants, where the principal driving force is the search for pleasure on the part of humankind. The search for pleasure is necessary, but so is the search for pain, for learning comes only from it. Medieval kings took small doses of hemlock, increased day by day, to create a certain tolerance to the substance, so as not to die poisoned if a conspirator surreptitiously poured some poison [into their meals]. Today it is possible to have our own solarium at home. But in the future it will also be possible to have our own portable electrical chair in which we shall sit everyday and submit to a small charge, increasing day by day our tolerance to electricity. This is the poison of our days.

In the same way that Bridget Fonda found her beating heart at the bottom of the toilet bowl and wondered at the fact that she was still alive, a day in which she vomited her life, we shall soon find strange to hold our hearts in our hands. A heart will no longer be necessary to live when one has suction pads and electroshock. We are evolutionary beings. We are “hacktivists”. Like the old Greek gods, who formed out of clay and out of the hands that molded them, we shall also reproduce ourselves, with our own hands, a little bit of silicon and high doses of irony.

Pandora has died, poisoned with hemlock. Long live Pandora.

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