Chapter 4

The Art and Flux of Telepathy 2.0 in Second Life

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at contemporary art practice in Virtual Worlds, and the effervescence of new technologically mediated telepathies. Avatar Performance Art by Jeremy Owen Turner and Second Front have explored a variety of Second Life telepathies, and have quickly earned the title of Virtual Fluxus. Second Front’s links to Western Front, Fluxus, Robert Filliou and the Eternal Network assist the continued internationalised new media and performance collaboration work with telepathy. As the body becomes obsolete, it develops new techlepathy1.

INTRODUCTION

“Artistic activity is founded on high telepathy – a high contact – and everything which comes into its field becomes a sign, and is part of art. It is therefore evident that the primary problem of today’s art has become the renovation and intensification of perception.” (Lebel, 1968: 721)

Within Second Life (SL) there are a variety of emerging and established artists, art scenes, art galleries, residencies, sculpture parks, curators, artist-run spaces and an art market. Mario-Paul Martinez Fabre y Tatiana Sentamans detail key manifestations of art in SL (2007). There is the hyperformalism of Dancoyote Antonelli a.k.a. DC Spenseley that borrows from the graphic arts, modernist abstraction and pixel algorithms (Martinez Fabre y Sentamans, 2007: 55). There is avatar performance art, hybrid projects that are halfway between the real and the virtual such as the work of Eva and Franco Mattes a.k.a. 0100101110101101. ORG and video and animation is called Machinima (ibid: 55-62). Code Performance involves writing a script that can then be performed and changed by avatar performance artists when making the work. Code-scripts can also alter the behaviour...
of avatars as collaborators and audience as well as the environment (ibid: 66).

Second Front (SF) are the pioneering avatar performance artists in SL, co-founded by Jeremy Owen Turner, Tanya Skuce, Doug Jarvis, Patrick Lichty and others on November 23, 2006. Gazira and Lichty also work as code-performance artists and they have brought code-performance to some SF artworks. Italian art-star avatar performer and ‘code-wiz’ Gazira was recruited quite early on by Turner. The SF website artist statement lists their influences as Dada, Fluxus, Futurist Synthesis, Situationism as well as performance artists such Laurie Anderson and Guillermo Gomez-Pena. “Second Front creates score-based performances and interventions that challenge notions of traditional performance, virtual embodiment and the culture of immateriality.” (Second Front, 2010) SF members often refer to the grandmother of performance art, Marina Abramović and Fluxus in artist statements, writings and remediations of her artwork. (Kildall, 2010; Lichty: 2009; Lichty, 2009a; Turner, 2010). References to Abramović in Lichty’s writing are too many to be listed individually here, but many of his writings are easily accessible from his website (Lichty, 2010). Fluxus performance artist Robert Filliou was acknowledged in an SF hybrid real-world gallery and virtual happening for Art’s Birthday, a Fluxus tradition that Filliou invented, which involves local and global telepathic exchanges and performances (Fritz, 2007).

Artists Abramović (Abramović, 1993; 1996; 1998) and Filliou (Ruhreg, 2000, p. 589; Fritz, A., 2007) are also known for working with telepathy, as is Marcel Duchamp (Dalrymple Henderson, 1998: 101-111, 103; Drinkall, 2010; Lipsey, 1988: 98-101, 99). Duchamp and contemporary artist, psychoanalyst and art historian Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger recognise the importance of “psychic transgression … [and] its irruption in the form of telepathy mysterious and mystical,” (Lichtenberg-Ettinger, 2005: 211) to deliver “intersubjective transference relationships to the artistic sphere, and to have them intersect with aesthetic experience.” (ibid) Duchamp and Ettinger show how the “artist and the viewer transform the artwork and are transformed by it in different-yet-connected ways” where there is “a kind of aesthetic osmosis between the artist and the viewer via the artwork.” (ibid) Telepathy is a hidden psychic force behind identity transformation. Telepathy cannot be separated from the Freudian concept of transference and the uncanny reality of shared language, feelings and empathy between the I and the non-I. Further, telepathy assists the generation of doppelgangers, puppet-selves, modified egos and alternate selves as Green discusses through looking at the artwork of Gilbert & George and Abramović/Ulay. (Green, 2000; Green 2001; Green, 2004) Duchampian telepathy aesthetics and Green’s model of telepathetic and collaborative performance can occur in collaboration between avatars, between the ‘real’ self and the alternate avatar self, and between the creator and the viewer/participant end-user. Whilst nanotechnology and cyberspatial developments create new techlepathies in science (Finkelstein, 1999: 13), a number of collaborative SL avatar performance artists are remediating works by collaborative performance artists such as Abramović/Ulay and Fluxus and this is developing virtual and synthetic telepathies in art.

Dominico Quaranta, a prominent SL art critic, reports that the kitsch capitalist dystopia of SL is teeming with artists keen to develop their alter egos, meet other artists and collaborate, more so in SL than any other virtual world. (Quaranta, 2007) It is utopic for artists in terms of creating ‘enormous’ sculptures and installations works in SL, and the “lack of corporeality is compensated by the increase in specularity and cheap financial costs.” (Martinez Fabre y Sentarmans, 2007: 64) “While real world venues frown upon dowsing an audience with napalm or crashing planes into it, not so is SL, where anything goes, and SF was quick to take advantage.” (Wodell, 2008) SL artists are showing their work in experimental and...
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