

## **From Body To Mental Art**

Many artists throughout the 1970s felt a need to re-establish a link to the human body, a body that was seen then as the last remaining of a nature completely exploited by progress, the last stronghold of a much threatening colonization dictated by technology. Aside from the few super-star-celebrities rising from that period, like Marina Abramovic', we may recall a less known artist, who is rather representative of that movement, now defined as Body Art. Gina Pane, the artist in question, conducted a series of performances where, under different premises, she wounded her body in order to re-awake the public senses. Her various actions of wounding her body were rather subtle and to some degree poetic, like inserting thorns into her forearms or going up a ladder with metal protrusions, this while bare feet.

We can here mention several other more or less renown instances of Body Art like the many courageous performances of Chris Burden, or other less bloody actions reviving not only the body of the artist but the very spirit of the viewers confronted with a big problematic, namely: "Why is an artist that should paint beautiful things end up doing this?". Joseph Beyus, also prominent in many various performance acts in the 1970s, explained this as a need for a Sciamanic act in an over-rational society. However, a new trend coming out of the Body Art movement and probably of art itself, has arisen since the 1980s. As the stronghold of the body has also been invaded and phagocytized by the culture industry, this new trend is more identifiable as dealing with the exploitation of the mental, the psychological.

As the latter part of the Body Art movement shows a certain tendency to introduce technology, augmenting the body as in the case of Stelarc with a third robotic arm, the 1980s shows examples of performances where the artist is no longer enduring physically but psychologically, he is no longer staging his performance in a gallery but in his domestic environment, he is no longer performing for an hour, or a day but for years. Tehching Hsieh, the New York based Taiwanese artist, can be seen as the most emblematic representative of this shift, with his year-long performances which required much psychological endurance, such as confining himself in a cage. The artist then comes from a rather emancipated, Raskolnikov-like existence and in cases also begins to use the technical medium as the only way to document and thus testify such actions. One of the year-long performances of the Taiwanese artist consists in fact of photographing himself while punching a time clock every hour on the hour (again this for a whole year).

At last, in the 1990s, what has been for long anticipated throughout the 20th century by avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Constructivism but also post-war movements such as the OULIPO and Neo-Realism, has come true. As also anticipated by scientist themselves such as Vanneaver Bush, the possibility of turning life into a complete work of art and/or vice-versa (following Oscar Wilde's logic) became an actual reality. Extending the consistent practices of artists like On Kawara and Roman Opalka, the computer revolution of the 1990s brought the possibility of extending the temporal and spatial boundaries of performative practices, practices meant to recuperate the human self with a technology which paradoxically distantiate this self even further.

As art became more eliterian and concerned with its own prestige, thus less keen to any avant-garde "dirtying" experiments, the new possibility was explored by hybrid techno-humanists such as Erkki Kurenniemi and Steve Mann. These people were among the first ones to lay out the possibility of logging one's own life which became a rather spread phenomena throughout the beginning of year 2000 with the increasing availability of such recording and computing technology. At that time several have been the experiments to utilize the documenting medium as a way to create streams of reality whether of one self or its surroundings. This phenomena which has rarely being contextualized within the cultural realm, has actually created an alternative usage of media, from the fiction-based, pretentious and over-imposed mass media to a more factual and time-based and thus authentic and self-imposed personal media.

Such a cultural potential for this intimate documentation of the everyday has risen again a poetic nourishing from the local and the personal, a rather vital movement in times in which an urge for self-sustainability and de-corporazations is needed. As no dream can last, the very global corporations, disguised in friendly service-provider, has now recuperated their status of mass media producer by freely providing the tools to create such poetics. While before they were simply suggesting what we should do, now they are listening to what we want to do, directing us to an even more targeted product. As this silent coup d'etat has taken place, we may now analyze the different kinds of corporation-provided life-logging templates (e.g. Facebook) and compare them with those that are or were self-crafted. As the latter, overshadowed by the colonization of the media giants, have quasi-completely disappear from any public appearance, it is the aim of this research to provide them with an historical background and describe their cultural potential, such as envisioning a future audience of media archaeologists retrieving such culturally relevant human data.