

## THE INEVITABLE INJECTION

by Patrizia Ferri

Today we can still plausibly appreciate, more than ever, McLuhan's famous slogan "the medium is the message", claiming that the electronic and digital media have in effect their own language, a structure, an inner sense that must be understood and indulged, and an intrinsic nature whose awareness is made possible by its creative use. Derrick De Kerckowe, the man who is rightly considered McLuhan's successor and follower, and an acclaimed guru in the digital field, with its wide range of hybridization and ways of operating, confirms it in a recent interview, where he reaffirmed that the artistic research is like a border, it's what humanizes the scientific technology, in the wake of Beuys giving the artists the role of antennas for the community, but at the same time recognizing that "the network's open spaces for art are still unexplored, and a (real) art of communication still has to be generated". Of course he refers to those experimental creative forms, which are interactive and multimedia, increasingly developing but still far from the top of their technological potential, constantly improving themselves fast. Art must not simply hurry up after scientific development because it must know it before applying it to its own purposes, it must metabolize and integrate it into an aesthetic process and to its own intrinsic purposes. If it's true that electronic and digital art needs scientific and technological research, it's also true that the latter needs the first, because artistic intuition helps creating new languages through the animation of a collateral and aware thinking, a kind of processing in terms of difference and gap which is quietly expressed, but always present against the mere standardization and integration with the system, whatever it is. All this, helps understanding its hidden ways of development, its effects on the consciences, the social implications, the possibilities for the future human and environmental transformations, the relationship with the unconscious needs, the thinking about identity, the ways toward self-determination and freedom. Creativity and technology, the artist and the scientist are winning combinations for the mutual strengthening of their expressive and creative opportunities, especially for redesigning the future in an overall perspective, connecting together all the elements that make up the world, the whole universe: if science analyzes the human relationship with the world sending back various representations of it, art, certain art, by conceiving other worlds shaping between present and future, goes toward the true work of art perceived and theorized during the original avant-garde, as a metaphor for a complete integration with the context. Actually there is a continuity between the pioneers of the experimental trials of the 20th century, the new avant-garde of the '60s and '70s and the interactive digital research, primarily based on the breaking of the barriers of language, on dismantling the traditional idea of an "Art" with a capital "A", of the artist as an isolated creator, of the passive spectator, starting instead to be an active author taking part to the

expressive process as a changeable product, the communicative stream of a potentially transforming meaning, also weaving upper and mass culture. This implies an extension of the semantic boundaries in a new, self-managed relationship with the new media helping the immediacy of an expressive form as a space for experience and communication, in balance between real and artificial. The crisis of the anthropocentric view makes weaker and weaker the distinction between natural and artificial, organic and inorganic, no longer opposed but in a way completing each other, according to that intuition expressed by Barthes and somehow picked up by Perniola about a “naturalization of culture”. In this perspective, as indicated by Pier Luigi Capucci “creativity is not something typically human but has a broader, biological base, it’s a mechanism to overcome the obstacles to the realization of the human being”. In this wide context of processing and testing new communication systems, telecommunication networks and interfaces, the work of art also includes simulated performative practices, virtual reality or digitally generated environments and the telepresence, using neural networks techniques and various systems generating artificial life, with the contribution of biotechnology research, sound and literary devices, and many all round influences not only between different genders and fields, but between body and technology, leading to a cyber performance: it’s like a rhizome, a word largely used in the American web communities. This visionary kind of art theorized by Deleuze and Guattari fits very well for the creation of a collective, decentralized, nonhierarchical, cooperative and ephemeral net art, created by a conceptual, emotional and visual alliance, conceived in positivist or apocalyptic terms, especially widespread in the American webartists communities and in an Italian radical movement. An art conceived in these terms can only be an enlightened, passionate process of relationship, a forward looking one, and alive rather than lively, because it changes by interacting with different contexts, where avantgarde’s art and life flows into a living art where the material limit for the mind and the vision becomes immaterial, thinking about the future of art and life as a global project for a different aesthetics and a new ethics of everyday life. The phenomenon involving art and new technologies has resulted in a wide and extremely rich geography of experiences and ways of working, thus making it fair to take them all into account with their qualities as poetics and telematic expressions, all of them dynamically interacting, more or less strongly with our senses and perception. Just to name a few of them, we have to mention “plotter painting” where the mouse is used as a paintbrush, perhaps the only variation betraying McLuhan’s motto, and then computer art, video art, video installations, techno-sculpture where images are the substance creating a space overlapping and merging the real one, for an extreme involvement and psycho-sensorial participation; then finally the videos and videogames and all those forms of short communication arising from the generalist mass media, and the web and net art with its most extreme expression in the hacker art. An antagonist way of working where also computer viruses find a cultural value, if

we assume that language is a virus as Burroughs said, among the first men to conceive a primitive vision of the Internet in the concept of Interzone, a landmark for that whole underground, radical and borderline, avant-garde of the web. Something deeply different then, from that art disguised as avantgarde, which is provocative, merely recreational and playful, often ostentatious, formalizing and functional to the system that crowds the assigned room and that even if it's built with technological tools it's nothing else, when these are used in a stereotyped, formalizing way, without understanding and taking into account the potential technological language. What position do these-called traditional languages occupy instead? What function and what meaning do they have nowadays? Painting, sculpture, installations, in short those true forms, those fascinating and emblematic presences will go on, when they are not just mere style exercises themselves but give expression to some truth, concepts and processes, telling us about dreams and the need for the poetry of existence, about functions historically passed on in the human memory. They're witnesses of a world and of an art undoubtedly experiencing one of the most intense moments of the change of an era. An art, as an insuppressible human need and a contemporary practice that cannot be but in tune and synergy with the new perspective opened by the new digital technologies: a living and viral creative process which we cannot help being infected by. The videoart in particular, from the '60s to today, has been the contaminated search par excellence, where the relationship with television develops into an interesting story, full of joints and attitudes such as the opposition to the common tv image or the linguistic deconstruction, or the exchange between high and low, starting the possibility of a contamination with a borderline area of communication like commercials, signature tunes, clips: these modalities are rarely identified in the same poetics, rather representing three different steps, today combining an experimental exercise and a fluid exchange, thanks to the overcoming of the dichotomy and of the oppositional Manichaeism of the neoavant-garde, but always emphasizing a hypothetical critical difference from the media icon, often analyzed to investigate its pervasive mechanisms or bent to create an ethical view on the world in general, not regarded for its showbusiness or consumerism potential. Lucio Fontana already stated in the '50s that with the advent of television art should show itself willing to face it by abandoning the substance of the traditional art object, according to the contemporary demand. This statement perfectly anticipates a video art that today could identify with an experimental use of a future, desirable, television starting an original thinking on linguistic contamination inspired by the mingling of music, theater, cinema, performances, photography, comics, but also with the language of painting and sculpture as well as with the architectural and environmental space, giving it a inherent final complexity and a multiple identity, virally widespread as it was in the historical avant-garde's desires, and meeting the hopes of an increasingly aware public.