

DAVID DOUARD

The telephone was the death of Montparnasse.



In conversation with Ruba Katrib

Ruba Katrib What role do movies and music play in your work? These references are integrated in a way that seem to have an autobiographical significance, that they have in some way influenced the way you, or perhaps a generation, think about the world. For instance, in your work you have used *Innerspace*, an '80s movie where Dennis Quaid and his space ship are shrunk and injected into the body of an unwitting Martin Short, culminating in a story of fantastic space misadventure and biology gone wrong. I myself watched this movie several times as a kid, and I know that it had an impact on how I viewed the body and science at the time. The idea that bodies could shift scale and shape, even mutating into other's, as well as the visuals of the interior of Short's body created a strong impression of the landscape, limits and potentialities of our bodies.

David Douard Films have an important role in my practice. It might be because sometime I am influenced by a film to start a project, or to work on an anecdote, or because, sometimes, more directly, I capture a part of a film to incorporate it in an installation.

What I like in films or TV and how it conditions the felt for the characters, especially or horror movies: for their impact on reality, but also for the passivity with which we watch them and the influence they can have on our everyday. A science-fiction film can have repercussions on our behavior, or can stimulate our imagination. Also, the system of project-based (or objectified),

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series is the attitude of the spectator who watches them, spectator's interaction with the narration, like the emotions especially fear.... This is probably why I particularly like Z-mo- tion, as an escape from a certain form of reality. tion, as an escape from a certain form of reality. duction and the exhibition of cinema, which is very ob- is often a starting point for my installation works. The theatrical previews, or commercial devices that serve to promote the film are motifs that I like to reemploy.

They are a form of transmission of a subject or topic: a narration through very controlled media objects. The film *Innerspace*, which gave me the title for my exhibition at Bétonsalon in Paris in 2012, was a direct reference to Jean Comandon, a scientific filmmaker from the '20s. My project was to translate a part of his work and I had chosen to do this through this American film about a crazy inner adventure that is anti-scientific in its treatment of science. One of my intentions is often to bring technology and science back to a more subjective space, one that is more personal than clinical. I think of the people who have viewed these films and if they had taken control of them – had appropriated them for their own narration and their own history – as a form of subjective hacking.

I also have used the film *Lord of the Flies* by Harry Hook for an installation I created at Fondation Ricard. I had reused the system of presentation and promotion of the film. I rerecorded the voices and pasted elements of the films with cut-ups, and shaped it as a theatrical preview with posters in the space and sculptures operating as decor. Through this process the installation and the film were renamed *Island of Lost Souls*, after a 1932 horror movie directed by Erle C. Kenton. The two films share the plot in which characters lost on a desert island are presented as outcasts from society. My work was to recontextualize the film *Lord of the Flies*, and to see the lost teenagers, separated from civilization and led to brutality, as motifs of rebellion. In addition, I had taken some poetry I gathered from the internet during the events around Occupy Wall Street and added them into the new script of the film.

I am currently working with the science-fiction television series *Animorphs* based on young adult books written by K.A. Applegate and published by Scholastic. It is the starting point of an installation/platform where the medium of the TV-series is used as a tool for narration as deployed in the installation.

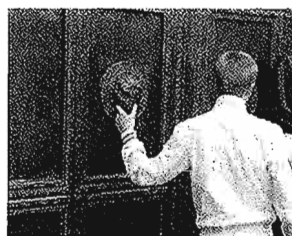
R.K. There is a fixation on youth – perhaps your own with the references to the '80s and '90s – but there is also a general experience of childhood expressed in your work. What is the significance of youth in relation to the other subjects you are grappling with? Also, as we've touched on, children are increasingly bombarded with different narratives and products, a phenomenon that will surely impact the formations of culture and knowledge.

D.D. I see most of my motifs are acne spots, the surface of my objects like the skin of a sick child. I have always been attracted to the world of childhood. In relation to making art, this world came naturally when I was at art school, and I had to find the expressive patterns that could work as the stroke of the brush or as claws. Childhood is a moment in life where everything is being made, and nothing is controlled yet, this is a space I like. Using childhood is a way to stay free without any conviction or utopian ideals. It's not the end, it is the start, but we all know that everything collapses quickly once one passes through this period. But I don't think there is a kind of nostalgia in my approach of childhood, I would like it to be recurrent pattern, natural, like a painter uses a free gesture, or a brush stroke. For me it's a system of pure liberty that takes different formats. Often, when I create narrative works, I imagine children and teenagers as the representatives of a strange world where everything "switches"/"tumbles". I like the idea that an installation could look like a group of wandering children in a *banlieue*.

I am also very fascinated by the adaptation of new generations to new technologies, the way they digest them,

how they use them everyday. The
ped influence me constantly,
been developing for some time
used in popular culture, and

have been using the word "sick" as a slogan
More than its reference to a virus that would
of the word that is interesting, its double
for popular culture. It mirrors the way we see the relation between new technologies and youth. We all know
this fissure brings some kind of generalized autism, but at the same time it increases our capacity to open
new horizons for language transmission, narration, and knowledge. It's a phenomenon I would like to conti-
nue exploring in my work because it constantly evolves, particularly with the new forms of hacking that tee-
nagers create everyday. In a way, my work gathers all these preoccupation and brings them to more poetic
and hybrid forms, made to evolve in the context of art, which should not be moralizing and didactic.



new modes of languages used and develo
the hacking of "DIY" machines. I have
now a way of referencing the language
that influences a lot of my decisions. I
for all my works for two years now.
contaminate my pieces, it's the meaning
function: negative for science, positive



R.K. It seems like you are thinking about a moment of contact, of influence. Thinking about youth and the references you make in your work, they are specific to a formative moment in life. Like *Innerspace*, *Animorphs* or *Lord of the Flies*, films, books, television, music, etc. shape how you (or even a generation) think about culture, society, science, space, and on. It's shared, but also very personal. These elements play a part in how the interior space of children is constructed, part of their imagination is impacted by these cultural manifestations.

D.D. What interests me about these references is how to create some sort of answer, a digestion of media tools and to bring them to something more personal. It is a form of hacking, both dark and pop. And the fact that the actors of these films, and movies, and references are teenagers or children is very important because the person who watches them is also a teenager or a child, and in this way these productions shape the forming mind of the child. My aim is to pervert all these sources, to copy them, to quote them, to use them as references, but to do all this in a subjective *detournement*, like a reappropriation, a digestion with no particular respect for the original source.

I have discovered "cry plays", which are YouTube channels, created by fans of TV shows, or sitcoms produced by very big production houses. The creations made by the fans are very surprising. They often add a personal narration to the original one. If you take the example of the story of zombies in the TV show *Walking Dead*, it holds a very important place in the development of "fan fictions." In relation to this phenomenon, I try to imagine the fans as ghosts manipulating fictions, making them their own reality, or to translate their emotions into a fictional base. And all of these elements do exist on a platform like YouTube. By the way, I am at the moment creating my own TV program, which will be shown in an installation as a video.

R.K. Can you elaborate on the "cry plays"? Viewers take over the existing narration of a television show? Personalizing it? Do they influence the actual program? This form of "hacking" seems to emphasize the attachments that are formed to the narratives and characters of popular culture. It's also interesting in light of all the consumer technology and outlets with which to create and broadcast. But of course, this production isn't based on totally original content.

D.D. Yes, the cry plays are YouTube platforms made by fans in which they elaborate the fiction themselves, meaning that a series' spectator becomes an author who manipulates elements of a show (title, topic, etc.) and applies and extends them into their own life and narration.

This act isn't really anodyne in relation to media impact. It highlights the desire to create our own investigation in relation to the various media we encounter. This is all happening without copyright,

without the author's credit: the spectator becomes the author. And this point is an important element for the construction of the narration. This kind of reappropriation helps my own way of working and creating stories. Using media as a medium can permit a subjective mix of response, which then disrupts the machine. Software does that, I think. In this way, I consider myself to be a sculptor. First, I worked with the "geek" of Blender, a free and print 3D "virus shapes" and then incorporated them in my installation.



around technology a lot, but how do you see it as a concept manifesting in your work? It kind of sneaks in, it isn't overtly technological, although you are almost always incorporating some kind of media. It almost looks like you are hiding it, masking technology in a kind of romanticism... Are these elements opposed?

R.K. We've talked

D.D. The internet as a medium has a great strength. It is very close to the everyday experience of many people. One could say it is an impure/imperfect prolongation of a mutating body. It is very important to use it as a tool. I personally use the tool as a symptom, a virus producer that mirrors society, a generator of new language forms, new forms of communication. It is a very romantic vision.

I always try to give inert objects an affect, whether textual or electronic, to activate new forms of life. The sculptural forms are born from some impurity, from an overload of emotions, from a break, a knot. Most of the time, technology is also used as a text generator, or as a data generator, and the surrounding forms have to comply with this data. They adapt the narration flow to a form and vice-versa.

I have paid a lot of attention to the research made by Bruce Sterling on dead medias (*World power systems*:

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dead media project: a modest proposal on deadmedia.org World Wide Web page). Sterling states that our re-
relation to IT tools works like some kind of affinity. The “program obsolescence” of computers leads
us to experience a relation to the life and death of an IT tool. If I try to translate what Sterling says,
what we have to do is to reactivate dead IT tools. For an artist, working with these kinds of concepts
is quite strange and stimulating. It is linked to some ancient animistic practices, which can be reac-
tualized today.

In Erik Davies’ *Techgnosis*, there is the idea of techno-animism. It functions as a kind of manifesto
for the relation between new technologies and animist practices. I feel I am very close to this thin-
king. I would like to develop this intuition with my project working with Animorphs, without falling
into the trap of merely representing the anamorphosis between technology and the body. I would
like it to be more grounded in the everyday, urban, close to the behavior of the young and less af-
fluent social classes: some kind of world inhabited with quixotic creatures with baseball caps, and
sportswear. As if a young “chav” becomes a three headed eagle with a blackberry in hand. In the end,
I think that to look for a life form for something that is already dead and to find a new form for lan-
guage coming from the subterranean world of death, is one of the founding bases for an art object.
Today, IT tools are very aggressive, even with their luxury packaging. The youth generation has to
overcome what is given to us. It has to hack what is produced by the industries, to give matter its
subjectivity back. One could say that our personality has melted into the IT mass. Our avatars are
traitors, and that’s why I try, in my studio, to do my best to animate a deformed ghost, morphed by
successive compressions, like a low quality jpeg after sending.

R.K. Do you think that emotions are able to resist new technologies? Some people, like Ray Kurzweil, think
that in the not too distant future, the human body will be increasingly robotic, simulated, and uploadable, in-
cluding our emotions.

On the other hand, we also have emotional connections to consumer technologies; we are physically and psy-
chologically attached to them in ways that are now considered very “normal.” It just sneaks in.

D.D. I am currently working on a series of sculptures, linked to a video: In the video, when there is a
particular emotion in the voice of the actor, a detector sends an impulse
the sculpture, and the whole things start pivoting, very lightly, but very
if the membrane was activated by the machine and was also answering
molecules inside the screen. Without going into the interactive aspect,
thing the aspect of a garage creation.

And, in the end, what would be a negative point, the programmed
objects, remains the starting point for a new form of life. In the same
artists used the information flux to make it stutter, kids from the new
are starting a crusade against new technologies, with subterranean
emotion overloads which cause the chipset, the cables, and the screen to blow out.

The outcome of our advanced technology is the creation of new objects that are closer to us. Those objects
will be affected also by the users and vice versa. We can do nothing. We want creature comforts, paper
lightness, but we will stay at the same point, in the same mood, and finally the machine will come to corrupt
everything.

The machine will become her own subject and we will wake up in a morning with red bloody words in mind
as the Nicola Simpson’s types tract⁽¹⁾. Poesy is still the same, words parceling will born from sick data like a
software vengeance.

The last thing I could say is that hybrid stools, tranhumanism... will help us to write our thoughts, sad
thoughts, and stupid thoughts, like the machine in a way.



to the engine of
nervously. It’s as
the emotions of the
it gives the whole

obsolescence of
way the Fluxus
media generation
languages, and

(1). Nicola Simpson (ed.), *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter: The Life and Work of Dom Sylvester Houédard*, Occasional Papers, London 2012.