

virtually one, actually the other

He noticed me looking at him, 'you are wondering if -'
'Of course.'

'I am,' he replied, glancing at Ralph. 'We both are,
Newbodies.'

'And ordinary people going about the business out
there' - I pointed somewhere into the distance - 'are
called Oldbodies?'

'Perhaps. Yes. Why not?'

'Words are your living,' he said. 'Bodies are mine. But
I would imagine so.'

'The existence of new bodies, as you call them, will
create considerable confusion, wont it? How will we
know who is new and who old?'¹

Hanif Kureishi's *The Body* allows the aged to acquire youthful strength and a new identity by having their brain surgically transplanted into an appropriately prepared 'young' corpse. The rich and well connected choose new vessels from a rack of desirable cadavers, giving them the exciting opportunity to be whoever they choose.

Disembodiment

This appeal of brain and experience retention, whilst reconfiguring the 'casing' is one boon the internet offers to all. However within this swapping spree, the complexities of the body online (as against the online body; which is simpler to address, because it is whatever is experienced online) is consistently engaged with from the standpoint of the illusionary 'normative' white male body. This adversely affects the often alleged Internet's egalitarian nature whilst strengthening the 'norm'. If gender and race are merely social constructions and interpretations of physical

¹ Kureishi, Hanif. *The Body* Faber and Faber, London. 2002. p. 22.

difference, and the brain unitarily understands itself, then everyone online should be equal because they are comparable along definable benchmarks.

Paradoxically if the internet's 'standing' population argue that everyone is equal in Cyberspace, that offline (or real world) 'peripherals' maintain as much authority as the 'mainstream does online, and yet the same 'peripherals' counter-position themselves as being subordinate, it becomes tenable for the mainstream to argue that this represents internalised inequality, for which the 'mainstream' carries no responsibility.

Reconsidering Cyberspace

In space, no one can hear you scream; in deep space, no one will hear you scream; in deep space you are alone. In the vacuum of deep space, the sounds mere humans make with their vibrating vocal chords will be insignificant. Yet with the right equipment, power, and knowledge, screams can be heard loud and clear.

The World Wide Web is wide, but shallow. Envisioning an all-encompassing framework that encompasses everything is highly seductive. Concepts of the 'Global Village' or the 'Electronic Nomad' present paradigms of simple geographical transitions, but these expeditions are defined by Western 'tourists' paradoxically seeking places different from their lived experiences and unspoilt by their own cultural influences. They desire a highly heterogeneous world, but one effortless to access. The surfer (again the language of leisure and adventure) is awaiting that next big electronic wave to ride.

This international network of networks is only as deep as those that control the conjoining individual servers; it is

therefore not amazing that it reflects the corporate values of those in control of its nodes.

It is consequently unsurprising that individualistic silence is created online by the overbearing presence of corporate and governmental real and imagined 'security' concerns. In the vastness of space, screams are easily absorbed. The language and acceptable mores are carefully crafted; national government and corporate e-mail snooping (lately in the form of Google) to ensnare detractors is achieving 'terror' induced acceptance. Everyone is supposed to maintain similar protocols, codes and programmes demand people perform in particular fashions. That these stipulations are culturally, ethnically, and racially coded is indisputable.²

Meanwhile offline, there could have been a 'Multiculturalism and Immigration Special' of The Times newspaper on the third of April 2004, with front page Headline of 'Britain must scrap Multiculturalism'³ accompanied by the ubiquitous photograph of capped and bearded 'Muslims' burning a cardboard British flag. The vilification of multiculturalism, with Trevor Philips (Head of the Commission for Racial Equality) at the forefront (rendering him a darling of the political Right), collapsing personal identity into nationhood. Nation is coded as underscoring identity, arguing that troublesome differences between individual and state ought to disappear. An acceptable position if identifying with modal mainstream values, but difficult where forging a workable political identity in a new space. Reifying 'national' values, and demanding unquestioning obeisance in the name of integration, means accepting facelessness as reasonable price of being online.

² Tanizaki, Jun'ichiro. *In Praise of Shadows* (Vintage Classics) London, 2001.

³ Baldwin, Tom; Rozenberg, Robert. Britain must scrap Multiculturalism, The Times 03 Apr. 2004, p.1.

But if each server is allowed alleged its mythical political and cultural autonomy, then it is essential to recognise a multifaceted world order. Otherwise culture becomes a fixed dominating homogeneous ethnicity, the very thing modern travellers eschew.

Disembodiment?

Anna Kalmann, founder, former CEO of the Pharmacom Industries, Zurich. Born on the first of August 1965, died third September 2015.

Died? Six years ago?

She was imprinted to Pharmacom's Neuralnet installation in Zurich prior to morbidity.

Imprinted?

Her Neuralnet persona has Swiss Citizenship under the Artificial Intelligence Laws of 2006, she advises the current board from this state of being.

(In Japanese) A ghost in the machine.⁴

The idea of the 'Body without Organs' is one that becomes pertinent when one questions race and the Internet. Similar to religious transcendence, it escapes mortal manifestation to commune with the divine. Best represented by the presence emanating from the computer network of Pharmacom (a fictional Drug Company, in *Johnny Mnemonic*), Anna Kalmann is Pharmacom's soul; omniscient and omnipresent. Wherever there is a digital interface, she exists, unrestricted by space and beyond fatigue.

It is a question of making a body without organs upon which intensities pass, self and other-not in the name of a higher level of generality or a broader extension,

⁴ Longo. Robert. Dir. Johnny Mnemonic USA, 1995.

but by virtue of singularities that can no longer be said to be personal, and intensities that can no longer be said to be extensive. The field of immanence is not internal to the self, but neither does it come from an external self or a nonself. Rather, it is like the absolute Outside that knows no Selves because interior and exterior are equally a part of the immanence in which they have fused.⁵

This 'Body without Organs' becomes the entity that surfs the Internet. A cyborg: the computer acting as cybernetics, with fingers as organism that places the disembowelled body online. Desiring to transcend bodily control is not new, religions provide many examples of attempts at surpassing the body, from flagellation, to fasting; maiming to meditation. The presence of race even complicate this 'Body without Organs', because it forces the mind to address the visceral.

The mind and body dualism is one characterised by gender/race. The main argument being that blackness/woman is fixed to the body/earth, while whiteness/man is associated with mind/space. Within this duality, the Internet subliminally becomes the space of whiteness. Race breaks up the singular perception of what it means to be online; the desire of internet apologists being that real world considerations do not impinge on the utopian mental construction of Cyberspace.

A technical state of disembodiment necessarily embodies ideas of cleanliness and perfection. Like animated characters, avatars, are ideal creations; they are wholly imagined entities within their restrictive technical parameters. If a creation is gendered, it carries a

⁵ Deleuze, Giles; Guattari, Félix. November 28, 1947: How do you make yourself a body without organs? <http://www.generation-online.org/p/off/1/5> and herhalf lull if 15 04 2004.

stereotypical understanding of what gender is. Similarly raced creations are specific to what 'racedness' is constructed to be.

How Do You See Me?

The Internet as a space of mass consumption is relatively young at twenty years. Those that set to work in the early days perceived themselves as pioneers, similar to colonialists entering 'empty' space. They placed their mark with the understanding that everything encountered belongs to them by right, a cybernetic Manifest Destiny.

While the Internet itself is still dominated by text, cinematic representations have visualised its supporting conceptual understructure. An early film about computer networks is *TRON*⁶. Here the cyberhighway has cars speeding along, and viruses look like cancerous growth. But the 'inhabitants' are informed by whiteness coded in more than colour of skin.

When considering representations in films such as *The Lawnmower Man*,⁷ or *Demolition Man*⁸ or even *Pi*⁹, the computer's resident, trapped as ones and zeroes, embodies whiteness. *Johnny Mnemonic*¹⁰ for instance, depicts advanced technology as white - with Johnny, while the leader of the Low-Teks, J-bone is black. This can be argued away as an oversimplification, till one analyses the three-part apocalyptic tale of *The Matrix* with visceral rave-loving residents of Zion as against the cool sentient inhabitants of the Metaneural Network.

⁶ Lisberger, Steven. Dir. *Tron* USA, 1982.

⁷ Leonard, Brett. Dir. *The Lawnmower Man* USA, 1992.

⁸ Brambilla, Marco. Dir. *Demolition Man* USA, 1993.

⁹ Aronofsky, Darren. Dir. *Pi* USA, 1998.

¹⁰ Longo, Robert. Dir. *Johnny Mnemonic* USA, 1995.

'The Matrix' has no needs for racial difference, yet mental images - even for those comatose from birth - is the same as their physical bodies. This implies that race is printed onto the brain of the individual. It would appear that within this ultimate network there is need to maintain a schema of race, that each unit cannot forgo this aspect of their identity. Within *The Matrix*, 'revolutionaries' can change, they acquire money, weaponry, and fashionable clothes, they alter everything about themselves except their race.

There is a crossover between the virtual and the actual: It is in those points of crossing over that the debate on race resides. Bodies that see themselves as universal inadvertently carry this conditioning into Cyberspace, while failing to understand the refusal to adopt a normative online persona.

As Lisa Nakamura points out in her essay "Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet"¹¹ when LambdaMOO (role-playing site) occupants indicate race as part of their identity construction, it had to be deliberately stated as it was taken for granted that everyone would be white - and most likely male. Those that symbolically indicated race - usually white men - used skin colour to codify/satisfy violent or sexual fantasies. Those expressing that they were not white in real life, were seen by the white majority as being aggressive, disrupting the virtual 'raceless' paradise.

Players who elect to describe themselves in racial terms, as Asian, African American, Latino, or other members of oppressed and marginalised minorities, are often seen as engaging in a form of hostile

¹¹ Nakamura, Lisa. "Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet" in Trend, David. Ed. Reading Digital Culture Blackwell, Oxford. 2001

performance, since they introduce what many consider a real life "divisive issue" into the phantasmatic world of cybernetic textual interaction. The borders and frontiers of cyberspace which had previously seemed so amorphous take on a keen sharpness when the enunciation of racial otherness is put into play as performance. While everyone is "passing," some forms of racial passing are condoned and practised since they do not threaten the integrity of a national sense of self which is defined as white.¹²

Issues of race have to be engaged with on line. Specifics of lived experience affect the way technology is configured and consumed. Empowerment, access, computer programming, language, design, colour relationships, logic, and interface are not innocent of ethnicity and race. Similarly assumptions are made about literacy, income, values, and professional backgrounds. These particular presuppositions undoubtedly influence the production of material for the Internet.

Art Online: The cultural marketplace

Increasing Internet availability renders it a suitable site for artworks, but commercial interests still dominate main stage, making specific demands on the trajectories of the medium. So exhibitions of technological fluency has become the hallmarks of most artworks online. Otherwise the Internet performs as standing galleries or catalogues to showcase work existent elsewhere, with artistry seen as an 'external' experience. It is also difficult to commodify work produced with the inbuilt flaw of allowing free and

¹² Nakamura, Lisa. "Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet" in Trend, David. Ed. Reading Digital Culture Blackwell, Oxford. 2001. pp. 227 - 228.

perfect duplications. Even with the advent of watermarks and download numbering, there is understandable resistance to online artworks having the same gravitas of works made for the real world.

Anecdote

On the distribution of an e-mail press release for an exhibition that was blocked by a corporate server, queries arose. It was intimated that the server had a list of hazardous words which rendered scanned e-mail subject to close scrutiny and rejection. In this case the trigger word was 'Nigeria'. That a country's name is 'dangerous' points to those who see the internet as a belonging, possessively determining insiders and outsiders. These 'outsiders' are intruders into a hallowed sanctum. It is this claim of ownership/responsibility which re-creates the 'other' as anathema.

Back to the market

Artwork made for the Internet by a black person, will be unable to stand outside its expected readership and racial/cultural hegemony. Work cannot proceed simply as an exploration of ideas, it will have to purposefully address a 'hostile' audience, which will undoubtedly influence content and presentation. Audience cognisance will demarcate the inevitable dividing line between artistic innovation and reiteration of lived experience.

Accordingly, the links between race and representation - or at least the penchant to link one to the other - is one that increased visibility on the Internet will have to address. Third generation mobile phones, digital television, and broadband phone lines will affect the use of the Internet to the point where live visual media will

become synonymous with the internet. Webcams are here to stay, and with them the user's face and evident realities of race.

Black artists are theoretically able to participate equally online with their white counterparts. Cultural dominance is challengeable online; with advertising on a search engine, e-mail shots (even with biased filters), and aggressive publicity, anyone can achieve a voice. Those with cultural and financial clout in the real world will still ensure their online adventures receive superior notice, but there is the possibility of equality. Once a guest visits a particular site, the host has their undivided attention. However being number 305,256 on a search engine's list, means you'll probably never be seen by chance. and chance plays a huge part in being seen online without prior determination.

The tune

To all my people, just lift your fist
Seem like it ain't no peace, no justice
How you want it, the bullet or the microchip?
Either way you got to lift your fist; we get it down like
this

To all my people, ball up your first
Seem like it ain't no peace, no justice
How you want it, the bullet or the microchip?
Either way you got to lift your fist¹³

The Internet aspires to remove difference, deny the realities of the layers that complicates human existence. So deliberate dialogue is the only way forward on-line, a dialogue that recognises and values difference, creating the forum where art can be made, a forum that

¹³ Guru. 'Lift Your Fist' on Jazzmatazz: Streetsoul Virgin America, New York, 2002.

simultaneously acknowledges the maker and the audience.

As Todorov points out in his essay, 'Bilingualism, Dialogism and Schizophrenia', hierarchies are complex, and splitting the self is hazardous. Until the desire to recognise the different constructed states (economic, political, sexual, social, racial, orientational) people take appears, it will be impossible for the internet to be more than a tool for the technologically and politically powerful to entrench established orders under the banner of parity.

I wonder if a bilingualism that assumes the neutrality and complete reversibility of the two languages is not an illusion, or at least an exception. If its emancipatory use would not require both a common ground shared by whoever utters in either language, and that the same time, an articulation, a significant gap between the two, a strict division of duties - in a word, a hierarchy. Silence and madness appear to me at the horizon of man polyphony and I found them oppressive, this is undoubtedly why I prefer that measured space of dialogue.¹⁴

Perhaps choosing a new body is not that innocent after all. Even the makers of Kureishi's new immortals cannot escape the ravages of the society they created:

Can I suggest something? Said Ralph 'You might for a change want to come back as a young woman.' [. . .] 'Or you could choose a black body. There are a few of those' he said with an ironic sniff. 'Think how much you'd learn about society and . . . all that.'¹⁵

¹⁴ Todorov, Tzvetan. Bilingualism, Dialogism and Schizophrenia New Formations, no. 17. Summer 1992. p. 25.

¹⁵ Kureishi, Hanif. The Body Faber and Faber, London. 2002. p. 24

Question:

People who make art - and think about it and comment on it - for a living, frequently engage in a continuous, elaborate, life-long performance, signifying the value of their product.

In order to assess artwork, public and establishment also rely on external indicators of value: critical writing, media coverage in general, other demonstrations of commercial and professional acuity. Very few people are willing to make a value judgement without relying on a clue or two from external indicators. Hence the power of advertising, and perhaps also the difficulty of talent from an unexpected source to break into an established system.

Given that you've written, as I understand it, in part about the performative aspect of maintaining an online presence, can you think of ways in which the performic element of presentation on the web might work against the Calling artists? Against the project as a whole? Or how it might work to their advantage?

I remember the first time I read *I Write What I Like* by Steve Biko, Apartheid was still in place, quarters were clearly set. Everything, with good reason, was livid to me. I was dismayed, stunned, and inspired by his testament. It was a moment when the realisation dawned that there can truly be more to life or death, that the determining principle of activity reaches beyond individual desires when it is politicised. By the time I got to 'On Death', the final essay of the book, I was aware there had to be a change in priorities if one wants to achieve anything beyond the much vaunted goals of self interest and compulsive acquisition.

You are either alive and proud or you are dead, and when you are dead, you don't care anyway. And your method of death can itself be a politicising thing. So you die in the riots. For a hell of a lot of them, in fact, there's really nothing to lose - almost literally, given the kind of situation that they come from. So if you can overcome the personal fear of death, which is a highly irrational thing, you know, then you're on the way.

Biko, Steve. *I Write What I Like*

Biko stolidly addressed what to do when confronted with aggressive violence, it is incumbent on the individual to actively respond, to resist. The demand is that the aggressor has to either back down or increase their onslaught which will be equally met. If the restrictive opposition seeks acquiescence, they have to openly and actively restrain all possible responsive retaliation.

"Listen if you guys want to do this your way, you have got to handcuff me and bind my feet together, so that I cannot respond. If you allow me to respond, I'm certainly going to respond. And I'm afraid you may have to kill me in the process even if it's not your intention".

Biko, Steve. *Op. Cit.*

The power relationships for a reactionary art world are not remotely as oppressive as to set about exterminating 'undesirable' makers, but little is done to encourage aspirations and production beyond publicity. The eventual absorption and co-option of the occasional outsider does not make up for the soul-destroying experiences of the

majority either. The often made claim that restrictions/limitations are imagined have a remote chance of being true, yet even imagined boundaries have a profound impact on the goals individual artists make. The 'choice' to remain outside the 'mainstream' may not be a choice in the final analysis, but personal limits set as not to confront the embarrassments of rejection.

However the power to control, marginalise, or determine aesthetic production is not constant, and shifts periodically according to artists' ability to resist the demands and strategies of those that seek to exercise their domination over their social and corporeal body. It is however not enough to posit that power shifts and demand that the subject of power merely devise means to effectively resist the evident dominating desires. It is necessary to address the stable conditions which act to give the 'incorporating' impression that resistance is futile - especially in this liberal cultural space that openly discusses power relationships, structural invisibility, and social inequalities.

All this talk of power assumes the possibility of individual freedom, to act in a variety of alternative ways, exists. And that this freedom is being curtailed by the dominating strategies of another (who has the means to enforce their position). Consequently the heralded ability of resistance is tempered by the knowledge that there is a price for all acts of opposition. It is this fear of swift, if cloaked, reprisals that diminish the ability of the subject to act in their own 'non-disruptive' self interest. The threat of cultural oblivion, like death, is enough to stifle even ardent critics. The counteracting strategy of accepting 'death' as an fundamental option may be the only way forward for artists that are not exhibited, recognised, or written about. Attempt to toe the cultural line by plundering their heritage as a sacrifice to a discourse that has already placed them

outside the core of influence is ultimately futile. It is self-marginalisation feigning the price of admission.

The value of alienated artistic production is so intrinsically linked to 'identity' that the artist becomes trapped within systems that appear to support the activation of that identity. Artists eventually become irrevocably bound by what ever that acquired identity is, and once the identity is recognised and commodified, it becomes almost impossible for the artist to exist, other than in their 'accepted' guise.

The marketable identity of the artist is therefore encouraged. Ease of commodification is now very important in a crowded cultural market, and for the Black artist, race and continental identity which is easiest to sell. However there are even limits set on the performance of this 'identity': It must not antagonise the economic system that underpins the art market, and in particular duplicitous buying customers. Transgressions will be allowed (even encouraged) apart from questioning the market and attempts to undermine wealth creation. This abeyance will continue until the transgressive activity can itself be made into a marketable product, after all shock and infringement sell. So representations of sex and sexuality, crime, deviation, or gender are very welcome. Even abjection and poverty is permissible, but attempts at addressing non-aligned issues of race, alternative politics, and power relationships are still problematic. The prevalent tendency is to 'deliberately' read the 'unapproachable' or 'unrepresentable' in works that are already accepted. This acts to neutralise any attempts to directly confront uncomfortable issues, the implication being that these issues have been dealt with sufficiently within existing work. An attempt at a direct challenge is seen as bad taste. More significantly, it is seen as work made in bad

faith, production to be ignored, as if its goal was to simply antagonise a benevolent system.

Everything starts with a question. Every change follows a question. Questions allow a reconsideration of the familiar, they orientate the mind to new directions, forcing the established nodes of discourse into fruitful disarray. Not knowing the answer is not always the problem, it is that the 'intention' has been misquoted in the question. Questions becomes suspect when one realises that often the purpose of the answer is to normalise the uncomfortable quandary of a self-serving system. Perhaps the ultimate question defies an answer, either because the answer is hidden within the query or that the frame within which the question exists lacks the resources to fashion an answer.

To end as I began:

Meditation on inevitable death should be performed daily. Every day when one's body and mind are at peace, one should meditate upon being ripped apart by arrows, rifles, spears and swords, being carried away by surging waves, being thrown into the midst of a great fire, being struck by lightning, being shaken to death by a great earthquake, falling from thousand-foot cliffs, dying of disease or committing seppuku at the death of one's master. And every day without fail one should consider himself as dead.

There is a saying of the elders' that goes, "Step from under the eaves and you're a dead man. Leave the gate and the enemy is waiting." This is not a matter of being careful. It is to consider oneself as dead beforehand.

Tsunetomo, Yamamoto. Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai

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