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Hypersurface architecture and the question of interface

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With the rapid evolution of the information epoch and the onslaught of cyberspace, we are thrown into new spatiotemporal terms compounding an already dualist-schizo condition. These circumstances cannot be ameliorated technocratically. Problematics arise at each posited interface involving hidden assumptions that operate within language and iterative dysfunctions that emerge from material production. The deleterious effects of dualism may be overcome through an inquiry into the dynamics of metaphor and technological interface, although dualities are necessary in organizing the complex contingencies of daily life. New possibilities are latent in the radical deployment of technology that also reveals chaotic potential as it continues to rupture being from body, toward disembodied being. Z23

As a language tool, metaphor is anthropocentric and governs the logic of interface. An interface metaphor is self-referential, referring to the body and other familiarities of presence such as real objects. Deeper in the mechanism of interface, in virtuality, lies a realm of instrumentality and manipulation that sustains a bodiless, weightless immateriality that uniquely isolates and accentuates function and desire. These two realms, combined by metaphor, join the embodied and the disembodied in a transfigured, posthuman condition.¹ This techno-human mutation reinvents the terms of isolated bodies and selves. The virtual realm harbors radical and problematizing potentialities that are activated within the binding force of metaphor-as-interface. Perhaps unexpectedly, Virtual Reality (VR) does not simply liberate us from embodiment but instead de-anthropocentrizes lived being. Under the veil of functionality this force transfigures human being into an unknown condition, one that has been inadequately described thus far. The juxtaposition of real and virtual as a presupposed dichotomy subtly enfeebls our knowledge base. This debased condition, constituted through the forceful boundedness of metaphor (an almost violent conjoining) can either empty or enrich being beyond its merely technological plight. This other condition offers a richer mix in the gap between mind and body. Otherness, as such, not technological achievement, could be the focus in discussing the role of interface metaphor.

This dualism reifies the supposed sameness on a terminal surface. The televisual/computer screen and by association the architectural surface is a ground zero, a dematerializing horizon of human being and place, the ultimate framing device for the instrumentalization of life. It is perhaps the final plane-coordinate in the universal Cartesian construct prior to an implosion of the ubiquitous practices of reason into a black hole of cultural relativity. It is the end of quantifiable space and time and the beginning of an architectural construct. There may be new possibilities in considering an architecture that envelops deconstructed dualisms, that intertwines language and substance. K06 This architectural/philosophical project understands philosophy to be always already architectural and architecture to be co-constitutive of life practices. The intent is to open and intensify new trajectories for the becoming of life within topological surfaces that unfold in a complex, relativist nexus. Attention to these dynamics resists the dysfunctions of metaphor where meaning is reduced to fixed representations. To establish flows and continuous flexion, language must be considered an immersive event with an interface that absorbs the material world. An interface no longer splits realities if it integrates difference and continuity. K11 This modification of interface mechanics is effected through the subtle geometric force of inflection². Inflection sustains continuity, it maintains interconnectedness while allowing for difference.

Interface not only divides spatial realms but allows for the projection and performance of desire to cross borders. Interface negotiates the laminar flow of meaning, the becoming of life traversing an incessant problematic of language/substance in an endlessly interrelated information landscape. The screen that negotiates increasing quantities of intention is only a material artifact. Metaphors posited too symbolically only serve to organize redundancy. The screen's surface is imbricated with software structuring the production of work and thus the work of production. The transference of life and force occurs through the combined complex of the topo/neuro-body (with its respective life-world feedback systemic) through to the combined screen-software complex (also situated in a feedback system extending into the far reaches of internetted cyberspace). If our neuro/topo, desiring body/selves exist in a meta-context whose feedback system includes all of the (virtual) impulses that can be interfaced in an environment, then our embodied beings and technological space are a priori interconnected. Metaphor becomes an event and interface becomes horizontal speed, or viscosity; metaphor becomes haptic. The sign no longer has a perpendicular relationship to the plane of operation; it tangentially unfolds. Metaphor transforms into an operative force traversing a technotopology, an intertwined intersubjectivity. K06

While current interfaces are efficient and liberating, they require that being and desire transfigure in a context of immaterial informatics (a suspension of disbelief). This narrows subjectivity into the restrictive code pathways of information space. While tolerating these temporary reductions of fullness, we live the consequences. Much of what we do extends into information space, where work, money, and expressions intermix. With reduction comes a concomitant sense of loss; perhaps we can regain a new form of fullness through more immersive interfaces and adorned presences such as the avatars now emerging on the Internet. But while greater immersion continues to be sponsored by both cultural and technological interests, what is of critical importance is when immersion reaches a point beyond return. Human will projects itself into a world construct, and in the midst of this configuration we enact human being. The moment a technologically induced realm becomes so substantial that we become defined by the logic of its domain, we are in effect disembodied. We may consider this a fundamentally architectural condition. Housing these contours of human being and becoming is an architectural project. The complexity of human praxis today, limited to neither embodiment nor immateriality, is in a state of transfiguration that requires a fluxing architecture.

The division between real and virtual, an operative division, is illusory. The virtual is an extension of ourselves into a manufactured and constructed space. It is not a separate space but an extrusion of being. The virtual recreates the specific and local conditions of our bodies and projects. Virtuality represents our work through the technotranslation (coding) of our actions. Z08 Virtuality, digital space, and the technosphere are worlds that reflect our virtual work back into the realm of lived life and embodied being. The work made possible in a space without the restrictions of embodied being interrelates with our activities and self-understanding as embodied beings. But this extension returns as a fantasy or phantasm to the real which is ultimately the critical impact of interface metaphors. Collectively we are no longer the same and can never return to an innocent state as slow, imperceptible erosion occurs through the technologies of interface.

The binary reduction of the physical and immaterial worlds is undermined by the machinations of hypercapitalism. The more each realm operates independently, the more an autodeconstruction creates an inadvertent inflection and intertwining of dualities that alter the fundamental premise of interface.³ Toward an alternative but not entire replacement for dichotomization we might instead work with the seams and fissures of resultant inflections brought about by the crisis of humanism. Initial clues to an (architectural) response to this crisis of representation lie in an understanding of the future of architecture through projects representing two dominant trajectories in architecture and culture, the first being "fragmented form" and the second, "pixel architecture."⁵ These two paths delineate on the one hand, the deconstruction of the architectural object and on the other, signification in architecture (or subjectivity) as being deformed, projected, and wildly manipulated through electronic praxis. Where these two trajectories interface and intertwine through inflections (as modified interface) a condition results that I call a "hypersurface," which is not a metaphor, but a condition established between a multiplicity of modified asymptotic relations.

A hypersurface is a threshold whereby the density of difference in an interface becomes vital, self-configuring and autopoietic.⁴ This is an effect of speed (Paul Virilio) causing an opacity and delay in which a deferral and associative play result. When this occurs, interface transforms from a transparent tool into a surface inscribed with multiple, disparate forces. The absorption of difference and transfer of forces create a hypersurface, an architectural manifestation connecting life forces with emergent figures. This condition of inhabitable art and otherness advances directly from a relativist context of self and material. This haptic architecture is not one of space and time but of density and engagement. It implodes space-time into a dense network of singularities negotiating difference within a dynamic nexus. Here, architecture is a verb and not a noun.

We are primarily immersed in language and through language's reflexivity are increasingly transliterated into a digital domain.¹⁸ The continued pervasiveness of interface and immersion into technotopology situates life as forces and flows into event surfaces. The forces of digital media and the dynamics of the material world drive into relation with one another. This is accomplished through inflection as an artifact and modification of instrumental interface. A Moebius strip exemplifies both conditions: from above it seems to delineate an inside and an outside (an instrumentalist perspective), but if one navigates its surface it becomes a spatiotemporal continuity. Through interfaces we increasingly invest ourselves in techno surfaces. A static interface doesn't function, so interfaces are more thoroughly understood as event-generating mechanisms. If an interface is a means to instrumentalize, it is merely a tool; it becomes reified and reinforces only subject/object relations. But an interface is also a means to distribute and assuage desire, in which case flows are established that necessitate an architectural response.

The real virtual interrelationship is a crease or fold that enables new capabilities. It implements more effective maneuvering within an intermediary, immaterial world but also installs interconnection. The extent of connection may an unexpected effect of electronic technology. There are at least two positions worth considering: first, that VR is a technological, indeed social distancing and second, that the new possibilities of social intercourse in an internetted world elicit new technologies of self and intersubjectivity.

The radical confluence and mutation latent in the new media assure new possibilities for an intervention of nonreason in the world of reason. This intertwining may activate a new rigor in art and (through its interconnection with art) architecture.⁵ Art might then be rescued from its repressed condition within architecture. Art doesn't exaggerate the real/unreal division; it is not a category whose boundaries we can define separately from architecture, because it

is anterior to the dynamics of inhabitation. Art is a newness that emerges on the scene of culture due to dynamic forces that cannot be predicted or measured. Art is that which might appear in the midst of the real VR interface as other. Art is otherness, not a frontier to be conquered by hero-artists.

Art, praxis, and identity are interrelated issues that are being transformed by the logics of new media. Z10 Art and alarity, otherness, or poiesis are potentialities within this unprecedented, electronic context, activating new theories of art. What is different and thus at stake in a discussion of art and the new media is that an electronic nexus conjoins individuals and collectivities in real ways without establishing solid grounds for identity. With this prospect of internetted intersubjectivity, a new plane of immanence establishes a provisional base out of which newness and otherness may emerge. The most significant feature of this is that art, instead of being an autonomous practice, is now a possible affect emerging from the context and problematics of everyday life. The way we work and live, in the most banal (but thoroughly electronic) sense, is the context out of which art emerges as autopoiesis (this is not a dynamic modeled on biological metaphors). At the interface between language and substance in new media praxis is a critical juncture that may either repress or elicit otherness.

Otherness is that which cannot be named or known. This doesn't mean that we do not attempt to address the other: the potential for doing so now exists. Z09 The other could arise from interaction with a person, with something past or present, or from the paradox of death. Otherness offers art its vitality as it emerges to challenge the known. The known only veils the other, typically as a means to avoid genuine exchange. Knowing and understanding constitute control and instrumentality along with functionality. The other is that which eludes such tendencies while remaining tied to the frameworks of understanding.

If cyberspace is a reconstruction of reality, then to a certain extent it is a redundant world. Upon entering this redundant realm via new media interfaces, we posit metaphors as an application of the known into an undefined unknown, whereby habits of metaphor extend into virtuality. Z15 We explore the unknown through a superpositioning of the known. But as technology becomes more pervasive and envelops our existence, emerging problematics will fold onto and through one another. Instead of commuting into cyberspace, we might instead establish real connections throughout a hyperreal environment, interweaving realities into a continuous, multiplicitous fabric.

1. Theorist N. Katherine Hayles in "How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics," University of Chicago Press, 1997.
2. Inflection is a direct reference to both Bernard Cache and Gilles Deleuze, particularly in "The Fold."
3. This is in part described by post-Heideggerian philosopher Gianni Vattimo's thesis of the "crisis of humanism," in his text, "The End of Modernity."
4. According to Humberto Maturana (Maturana and Varela, "Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living," Boston: D. Reidel, 1980) the term was coined around 1972 by combining the Greek auto (self-) and poiesis (creation; production). The concept is defined formally as follows: An autopoietic system is organized (defined as a unity) as a network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of components that produces the components that: a. Through their interactions and transformations continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produced them; and b. Constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in the space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network.
5. Denis Hollier, "Against Architecture," 1989, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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