

Organic-inorganic

The body: the displaced interface

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Our body, as for other living creatures, is a set of organs, of elements pertaining to life. The Greek *organikos*, what serves as organon, is also an element of a working system, of an organisation. The body is an articulation of the environment, a link with what populates and forms it, a node of an independent collective entity with which it establishes a relation, building artificial realities and symbols, thus something that represents something else. As an interface the body travels between adjoining areas extending the existing - creating... I share with Margaret A. Boden the thesis that creativity is not a natural category, remembering that her starting question: "what is creativity?" concerns the relation between the latter and the use of the computer (1). "Evasive concept", as I summarise Mrs. Boden's thought, with historical, social aspects, which range "from originality of psychometry,.. to physiological and/or hereditary factors..". "An exhaustive theory, the author writes, should consider all these dimensions and display the connections" (2). Without going into the typologies of the computational approaches to creativity, which are the very ones that interest Margaret Boden (according to her, an idea is creative if it is "innovative, surprising and of value"), the question is not so much if an idea is creative, "but in which respect". Besides the "sometimes" that follows, this is the clarification: "a person is creative -and a computer is, at least apparently, creative- if it sometimes produces creative ideas...." (3). The disorganisation of the inorganic and the a-normality of its growth combine the essence of life with a falsification of nature, the mineral with the artificial, the lifeless nature and the *tekhne-art*. Will a possible original definition of simulation, understood as production of what appears, but that is not, fall within this? As in a game in a primordial metaphorical circle -environment...-, the environment, our species seems to obey a biological imperative that urges it to inexorably interface with it; the field and the rules of the game are left, as much as technology shall act as a destabilizing factor in a system that is apt to tend to equilibrium. As a species we are adapting, although

sometimes only partially, to the widespread existence of sensitive and inorganic environments which are experienced by us, as by others like us, as nodes, as interfaces. The difference with the past is that a possible, further creativity does exist, based on computer science; even though, from Turning onwards, we question and debate the limits beyond which computers would not be able to calculate. If the tekhn-art is both a physical and symbolic production of something and a cognitive process, the actions needed for all this fall within history, an approach with echoes of existentialism and anti-positivism, I admit.... The WEB, the membrane, allows the body a centrality which is relative and, at the same time, illusive and reassuring, thanks to the presence of the other, or rather, "to the remote presence of the other" as Edoardo Kac points out. According to this genial and unusual American artist, this is the reassurance delivered by telecommunication based on the exchange audio-visual information. "Telepresence -Kac writes- by mixing telecommunication media with tele-robotics and with the hardware remote control, allows us to have a presence feeling in a remote space....". According to him Telepresence Art would have the potential of reconcile "the metaphysical inclination of the cybernetic space with the phenomenological conditions of the physical environment". I agree with what according to me seems to be an assumption of his, which is that if you don't keep into consideration the hypothesis of a "machine consciousness" -hypothesis with an unlikely outcome-, "the a priori determination of the computer's or device's behaviour prevents a real sensitive answer, a surprise and a synergetic interaction" (4). The body acts as an interface in the fluid thresholds of a chaotic system and, as much as it can be considered "neuter", the fading of the borderline between organic and inorganic turns it even more into a machine and into a node of a reticular system. The interface is not, anyhow, just a thing that acts in an area placed, as if it was a door, between adjacent regions, inter-acting and connecting them. When the interface is a body it is also an abstract body, a body suspended in its movement and existence between abstraction and human sensual dimension, as Oskar Schlemmer grandiosely sensed. The tekhn-art has contributed to supply a continuous, or it rather be better to say discontinuous, anagram of the body! It's interesting, perhaps forcing the Austrian artist and theoretician Peter Weibel's intentions, to imagine a route of the arts in the transformations concerning der anagrammatische Koerper. The one suggested by Weibel is a media construction of the body based on four phases 1) Die Schrift des Koerpers lesen: Vereinzelnung, 2) Der Koerper schreiben: Rekombination, 3) Den Koerper korrekturlesen: der Cyborg, 4) Den Koerper kopieren: der virtuelle Koerper (5). Interpretation that in my opinion is very much connected with the noble movements of Modernity and to their consequences, a possible -I would add- neo-Modernity based on an all-embracing digitalisation

process long in progress. As mentioned above, the body, not only compared with matter, as in Schlemmer's intuition, but conjunction node itself in a system in which the certainty of the limit between organic and inorganic has been lost, can no longer be configured -unless for in a laboratory- as a defined, isolated (will this be the meaning that Weibel suggests while writing *Vereinzelung*?) element. Moreover, it has to be underlined how the term used by Weibel includes, and in this point I consider it very pertinent, separation and sporadicity. As an interface the body participates, takes part, it can't stay neutral, "idle" or be *au point mort*, as we can say in a couple of vehicular languages! It derives back from the origin of the historical reflection to assert that organic and inorganic don't express, after all, nothing else than the incessant comparison between orderly elements and non orderly elements. For the Egyptians, Barbara Russo writes, "the world was based on the dichotomy between orderly and not orderly". Their presence is simultaneous: "... just that the second cyclically swallows the first, but only to create the organikon, the orderly world...". What, according to Barbara Russo, the Greeks called "created" and "non created" (6). The fading of what separates order and non-order, created and non-created, confuses what is measured with what is not measured. At a close look, this fading deactivates a measure, a *modus*. And the measure (*modus*) is inseparable form Modernity. The late Latin *modernus*, from which the *modus*, the "exactly now" (7). Therefore, the contemporary and the measure, but a more and more fluid measure, a Modernity that is deactivating: we are in a period of Demodernism. The body that lives including abstraction and sensual dimension, as we were saying about Schlemmer, comprises -according to Paolo Soru- the thought out body and the anatomic body. According to him if is asserted, as I do, that the interface produces symbols and artificial realities, why can't we assert the opposite, that is that the symbols contribute to build the interface (8)? The body can be interface, but not all interfaces are living bodies, although the contrary might be true. If we, then, refer not only to an aspect of communication which the bodies put into action, but also to a creative process, we can see that creativity comes within a biological scheme, the one concerning the mechanisms of life. It's "...the mechanisms of life-as-we-know-it" that Mark Bedau compares with artificial life, which is "..life-as-it-could-be" (9). A first conclusion, looking at philosophy, drawn by Bedau is very interesting and is the one that philosophy shares, with artificial life, ".. a characteristic interest in the higher essence instead of in the limited contingencies". I will summarise what Bedau reminds us about: biology investigates the central mechanisms of life, while artificial life analyses " ... the essential processes shared by (...) systems similar to life". The author cites *Ecologies* as an instance and, as another example, "social groups that evolve autonomously". A key question is what the *tekhne-art* is becoming in this demodern

scenery if, on one side we think of human sensitivity, almost as a original aesthetic cross-reference, and on the other side of a scenery that can be shaped as a chaotic system. The scenery that sees us all immersed in bionomic relations, all caught up in interaction between environment and the beings that populate it, presents a range of interfaces that go... from life to artificial life. If I am allowed an heterodox assertion, aesthetics is now beyond beauty, is apt to the essential perception, to the aisthenasthai. The perception, the drive to perception, to the ability to receive sensorial impressions - esthesia - seems to me a vital function of arts that, after beauty, ugliness, connection for the sake of connection, the trash, are produced in societies where no longer the diffused aesthetics permeate the reference paradigm, but the evolutionary processes, adaptation and metabolism, in other words the processes of life. The philosophical reflection that, for years, concern artificial intelligence, the cognitive thought, the technological paradigm, belongs to the postmodern's decline or rather, to say it in a more classical and pertinent way, to the decline of the conditions of postmodernity. With hindsight I quote in the plural and not in the singular: condition and postmodernity, as instead is in their most lucid and classic treatment (Lyotard), therefore carrying out myself too an operation not immune from a modern heritage. Finally I return to Mark Bedau who, as is to be expected, discriminates very well between analogous fields of artificial intelligence and of artificial life, therefore between "...cognitive processes such as reasoning, memory and perception" and "...characteristic processes of living systems"(10). What Bedau calls "interdisciplinary innovation", innovation within which he places artificial life rather than the science of chaos, is part -although not single part- of our relation with the environment. We are only apparently all cyborgs: the adaptation of living systems is extremely slow! Little matters, besides, if the technologies will extend the bodies more than the bodies will extend the technologies, most likely both things have occurred. Creativity inherent in the tekhne-work of art is based on a gap that is produced between order and non-order: the unremovable artificiality of the work transforms the existing creating a different configuration, another organikon.

References

(1) Margaret A.Boden, "Use of the computer and creativity" in *The digital Phoenix-How Computers are Changing Philosophy*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd and The Metaphilosophy Foundation, Oxford, UK, 1998).

(2) Margaret A. Boden, *Dimensions of Creativity*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1994.

(3) M. A. Boden, "Use of the computer...", see ref. Essentially, the computer approaches to creativity, for the author, are the very ones "that emphasise the generative processes that make it possible..."

(4) Eduardo Kac, "The Dialogic Imagination in Electronic Art" (Art and Technology Department, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Center for Advanced Inquiry in the Interactive Arts, University of Wales College, Newport).

(5) *Der anagrammatische Koerper - Der Koerper und seine mediale Konstruktion* was an exhibition held in Muerzzuschlag (Kunsthau Muerz), in 1999-2000, edited by Peter Weibel (within the frame of the Austrian autumn Festival, in Stiria, Steirische Herbst 1999). The body would reach the "writing" (zur Schrift) from the photographic condition, as it was defined by Rosalind Krauss, expression that Weibel used in the introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition.

(6) Barbara Russo, regards to order and non order she reminds us that, for the Egyptians, the destination is also between what is (ntt) and what isn't (iwtt), referring to E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen- Aegyptische Gottesvorstellung*, Darmstadt, 1990. Barbara Russo is a researcher at the Università La Sapienza, in Rome.

(7) For an analysis of the terms, see *The Grolier International Dictionary*, vol. 1 e 2, Grolier Inc., (1981 edition), Danbury, USA.

(8) From a dialogue with Paolo Soru who is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in Varese, Italy.

(9) Mark Bedau, "Philosophical content and method of the artificial life", in *The digital Phoenix...* see ref. Bedau refers to C.Langton, "Artificial Life", in *Artificial Life*, edited by C.Langton, Addison-Wesley, Redwood City, 1989.

(10) M. Bedau, see ref.

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