Tim Jaeger

Nano-Thought / Nano-Media

"The inhabitant becomes the habitat ... of technology. He is "phagocyted," if you prefer. And that's what exclusion is, you see. A man who is equipped like a territory is no longer an inhabitant; he becomes a habitat." - Virilio [1]

Modern communication is organizing itself into a number of different forms, but is optimizing itself in one that combines all aspects of text, video, and audio. Listservs and online user-driven forums allow for all sorts of customization, avatar-production, and surrogate ways of structuring the self, and catalyzing more successful P2P conversations. Blogs, games, and other online media include everything from rich media to Flash videos. E-mail voice / SMS messaging is exploding (in Europe especially): companies like Telecom Control Systems (TCS) have slogans like "the world is your (remote) control," offering users numerous ways of sending signal to varied devices, while others allow you to customize your avatar and send messages via mobile phones with customized ringtones, anime characters, and such. New-media 'phagocytes' the user, especially when the user carries with her/him varied media.

For example, "More than 72 percent of Internet users do more than just surf the Web. Popular Internet activities include instant messaging, downloading music, and watching video clips"
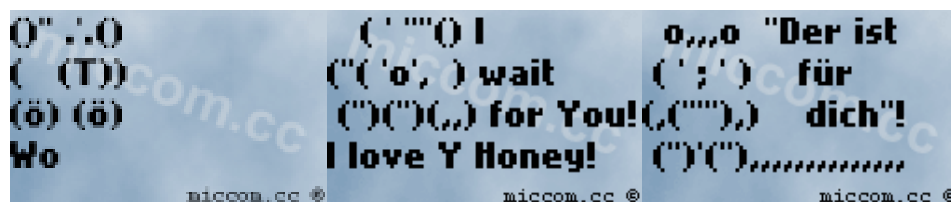
www.geilelogos.de

Other companies offer ways to transmit data from e-mail to SMS, e-mail to voice, voice to SMS, etc. DPS-Promatic has a way to program different messages that are capable of trans-mission to numerous GSM handsets, in an illustration that shows an army of cell-phones receiving signals from calculators and computers. The implications of this are both humorous and scary:
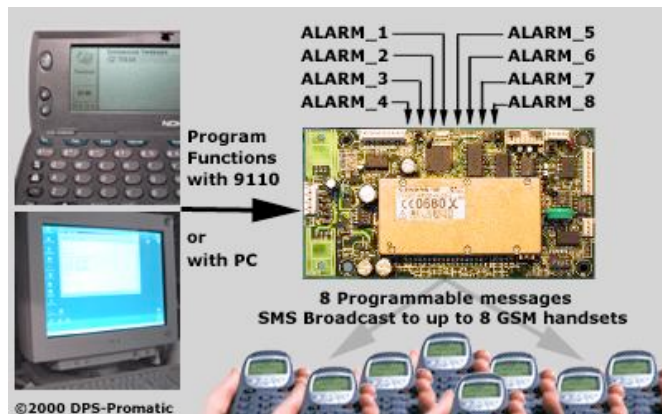
With almost countless possibilities, it's absolutely trans-media.

These, as well as the examples above, are just a few examples of how the world is embracing what Peter Lunenfeld calls 'nano-thoughts', or ideas, metaphors, and images processed down to their smallest units, and then repeated ad nauseam throughout digital databases. Because thought nowadays is produced, distributed, and replicated expressly for webcontexts more and more, I would say that these nano-thoughts quickly turn into nano-media which contribute to perpetual ambient conversations, because contexts to converse in are increasing exponentially, compared to that of the pre-90s Web-boom. There is an ambient data-cloud, combining both aspects of one-to-many communication (organizations like the New York Times web version, new webzines, etc.) as well as many-to-many (IM, chat rooms, video game sessions where people converse virtually such as J. C. Herz, author of *Joystick Nation*, writes about in reference to all of the conversations happening about wargames.) Just stop by any Internet gaming café to see the p2p datacloud of conversations and exclamations being uttered virtually.

With these new nano-media, there is becoming a drive towards the biological in everything, and you can trace the developments of these digital devices through a cornucopia of metaphors, like a 'stutter' and 'half-life' effects, for example. New artistic nano-media embody these biological metaphors, and I will show how they draw from certain trends in thought to arrive at an effect that more closely resembles an

STUTTER
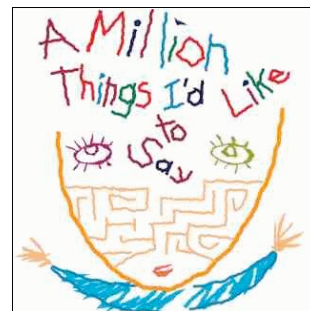
Stuttering is a disorder of

fluency characterized by intermittent,

involuntary interruptions in the flow of speech.

These interruptions are known as disfluencies.

People who stutter know what they want to say

but are momentarily unable to say it because of

disfluencies

ambient synthesis or data-cloud. New digital-cinema resembles a nano-cloud of audio, text, speech, rhythms, and images.

PREMISE/Beginnings/Mesh-Thought

In the books such as *Hatred of Capitalism*, Film-maker and author Chris Kraus mentions Southern California as being a place where you can enter a 'suspended kind of time' where you can float through the day allowing different influences, words, quotes, and texts to surround and influence you; in other words, allowing things to create a sort of 'mesh effect'[2]: Something breezy, that flows, never stops or rests, and is quite organic. Other examples of how thought itself, and its manifestations, assumes a mesh-like state is in Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book*: 'The topography of thinking shifts like the California coast' she writes [3], and continues to draw out an extended metaphor of deconstructing a telephone, and how it positions subjects. The book itself updates the design paradigm set by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore w/ their Medium is the Message.

Avital Ronell's *Telephone Book* just pulls at every-thing possible to flesh out an idea, and how this was perhaps a new paradigm of thought, and media. Half the time it doesn't matter where it begins, or ends, but it just flows, is organic. This is similar to the way new nano-media are working and relating with each other, and embedding themselves in our daily lives. The ambient data cloud absorbs everything, and continues, always mutating into something else, never quite ending. Metaphors of half-life or stut-terijng are just two. Recent media exhibit these characteristics, this drive towards new synthetic biology. Nano-media, media that are processed, over-processed, synthesized down to the smallest, continue and exacerbate this meshwork effect. The 90s are over, and the cyber-hype has burst. Now, we have media that live and breathe and scavenge in its aftereffects, in fact, possibly receive a positive energy from the crash.

HALF-LIFE

the time required for something to fall to half its initial value (in particular,the time for half the atoms in radioactive substance to disintegrate

MURMUR

Heart which is beating normal makes two sounds, "lubb" when the valves between the atria and ventricles close, and "dupp" when the valves between the ventricles and the major arteries close. A heart murmur is a series of vibratory sounds made by turbulent blood flow. The sounds are longer than normal heart sounds and can be heard between the normal sounds of the heart.

The recent present, the recent past: nano permutations

SMS-ing and peer-to-peer are quite recent…Taking some of the points above, I want to create a datascape of how this hyper-topia is playing itself out…All the media below function in a nano-space (meaning, there's some sort of drive towards the small, towards reduction and playing with these terms), and pull in some of the biological functions I mentioned above in various ways.

If Digital Cinema pulls at everything around it, and is currently here, right now, in the present, what ways does it exhibit itself? What anachronistic forms has it already taken, and how can we see it continue to emerge?

The Post-Godard Godard

Tina Frank, a video-maker for the MEGO label, embodies the new move towards what Godard began in films such as Letter to Jane.[4] Letter to Jane is discursive and pedagogical, it, like Ronell's Telephone Book, works by amassing numerous media, still clips, newspaper photos, and the authors' analyses to come to a collaged synthesis. But where Godard and Gorin, for example, attempted to reproduce and highlight a particular ideology through their work, Tina Frank's is more amorphous, less centered on discursive politics. Instead, its ambient, re-mixed, and appropriated-footage ready for the 21st century, taking media, both found and generated (old Austrian vacation videos, clips of houses, rivers, bridges, live footage, etc. as well as generated images). One video for Fennesz's Aus video is particularly compelling: images blobulate, morph, and turn into a pond. Real mutations. Frank does what Godard tried to do a long time ago, only in-update.[5]

Godard's ideological collage now makes way for media-makers like Frank. Lev Manovich says that "Thirty years of media art and post-modernism have inevitably led to a reaction. We are tired of always taking existing media as a starting point. We are tired of being always secondary, always reacting to what already exists." (*Generation Flash*) But even this type of 'software artist' is still a left-over from modernism. Like artist and theorists before who attempted to get at 'pure' painting, now there's those who attempt to manufacture the 'purest' code. It doesn't leave room for new kinds of formations (both peer-to-peer and otherwise) that hint at how new artists are

using both generated and found 'particles' as their source material, whether its cultural particles, raw code, or absolutely minimal sine-waves. And like Frank's videos, especially that done under the alias of SKOT, the work takes on its own life as a computer-aided organism: Shapes emerge, dance on the screen, and then disintegrate. You have micro-stories of birth, life, and death, all conducted with vectors, rhomboids, and cubes.

Godard's *Letter to Jane* (still)

Cary Peppermint: ambient nano drugs

Cary's work is nano in a different way: He takes software, images, and people and meshes them together in real time. His work is of a 'fuck modernism' ethos that tries to get at what p2p really is: By combining principles of open-source software culture and religious ritual, Peppermint's media performances contain a small-scale televised image of himself. As in a cinema, people gather around to watch not a large screen, but a small monitor, creating a more intimate environment. Watch the small screen, and get synthetic through a combination of net.art and drugs; your brain is the ultimate software, and altering its biological imprint through net.art and drugs, both artificial and real, is key part of understanding these things. A CP performance is like an ambient nano drug: it turns your mind into something of a Paolo Ucello painting: tetrahedronal. He is everyman, he is clone, and in throwing something biological (drugs) into the mix, he alters the software that makes the product, similar to ReamWeaver, Auto-Illustrator, etc. This causes the brain software to haemorhage, breaks open new disfluences, like Timothy Leary's acid trips.

The media output reflects this as well: Quicktime movies and stills document temporary net.artists hard at work. The subject of his digital cinema are the participants themselves. Projects like Conducter output a wide variety of media, small mp3s, stills and real-time performance that promotes an extended cinema.

still from *SOYLOVE*

still from a Conductor performance

ErikM: breaking open sound doors

I want to digress from cinema for a short bit to get at a slightly different example of what nano-media might possibly embody in the audio realm:

Enter ErikM in real space, a genuine surfer of sounds. His intended goal is: "no longer simply to quote his system of references but to create for himself a bank of singular material to compose without referring to other works. ErikM is now approaching a subtle abstraction, a new electronic position: like a pause in the contemporary sonic agitation, in opposition to this, a desire to weave a musical oeuvre whose intricacies are easy to follow, easing the listener into the vistas of his composition, without exaggerated technical or intellectual posturings." ErikM's idea was preceded in some ways by David Antin's, a postmodern poet moving in strange ways who distrusted

poetry, and tried to hammer away at the present, at poetry, by doing it live, unedited, remixed on the spot. In other words, it was a new, organic type of thinking that was in some ways very surface, just dealing with whatever off-the-cuff impressions, feelings, and memories that arise in the moment. This activity also precedes Chris Kraus' Californization of thought: lines of thought emerge, and disintegrate into something else: you are living with micro-narratives, things and stories that flow through you in the moment. Modern forms of media begin to resemble this trend, and this particular line follows what David Antin began as early as the 1970s:

"I wanted to work. At being a poet. In the present. So at this reading I started revising poems while I was reading them. Changing poems that were already written. But my way of thinking is very particular and concrete. It doesn't follow a continuous path. When I come up against an obstacle, some kind of resistance, I often find myself looking for some concrete example--a story that could throw light on it or interfere with it, kick it into a different space. So I found myself telling stories or, to use my term, constructing narratives, as part of my thinking."

If contemporary music has moved towards the sample, ErikM proposes a noble idea: let's move away from the sample. But not back to whatever it was we were doing before….Instead, let's create an ambient sample-scape, where things enter in, break off without resolving themselves. One particular loop I like of ErikM's is 'le pourquoi pas'…a broken sample is taken, and slowly stretched into something where the sample itself loses significance. It degenerates into itself. The entire thing becomes ambient, the samples: untraceable, the fragments: a maze of the murmer: ErikM extends the sample into the physio-logical, and literally takes the "lubb dupp" regularity that regular beats have and changes them, manipulates them, and granules them, but with the intent to create a new world of sound, or sound-references, unlike practitioners like John Oswald, whose intentionality is initially more parodic.

<erikm_-_le_pourquoi_pas.mp3>

What this comes down to is that a poet like David Antin precedes a sound artist like ErikM precedes an entire generation of SMS nano-artists to be, using every device to connect to every other device to communicate. However, ErikM is still

limited to the world of sound, but this same framework of creating an ambient sample-scape/nano-scape comes into play in the next example in the world of digital cinema.

Your life, your politics, our performance: YES-MEN as anachronism

Digital cinema-as-idea: Does it contain any, and how are they different than regular cinema? Do people have ideas about how to investigate such a thing (and how, so others can learn from them)?

THE YES MEN are a perfect example of a group that takes what some might think 'digital cinema' is; that is, work produced on digital cameras, using the most advanced software, with non-linear editing systems and motion graphics, and turns it on its head.

As a small aside, I am writing this for *keyframe.org*, a german digital cinema site, but so far have mostly been talking about widely different things like sound art, biological references, nano-media, murmers, and a type of California theory. Some of these concepts might be already produced, and branded, by certain real or art-world establishments, but -as an artist- who is concerned with making new definitions and contexts- I find 'digital cinema' to be more of a hype-machine than a reality. Or at least, if conventional cinema contains a limited number of convetions (being bound by non-interactive viewing, taking place in a theatre of some sort, shot on standard film, etc.), then the nascent digital cinema I advocate is one that is replete with such 'other' foreign references. Or, as Peter Lunenfeld says, 'Neologorrhea' that are there for the sake of being there.

I've spoken with people at a prominent post-production house in Southern California who say that 'digital cinema' won't take off, it's more like an insect that has no chance of surviving the big-studio world with stars, budgets, advanced editing equip-ment (and the people who can use it) like Flame, Inferno, Discreet, motion graphics software powered by Alias|Wavefront, and a host of others.

But Digital Cinema as powered by the YES MEN is different. The Yes Men, from how I understand their press-release, are members of Rtmark fictionalizing a gender-less performance group that use tons of pastiche, irony, and discreet placement

to further the cause of anti-globalization and a critique of the mechanisms of capitalism.

Their digital cinema contains stills taken from existing video of performance-interventions, and catalogued on their web-site. YES-MEN pieces are created through a mesh of text, audio, and video documentation that's been turned into varied Quicktime movies and audio files, scanned letters to various consulates and hacked web sites. For instance, a Yes-Men performance involves getting invited to a lecture in Salzburg, making a performance-intervention, and, in a fashion worthy of some of the institutional-critique artists of the '80s, cataloging it all on their website along with remnants from the killer apps (e-mail!) that helped to make it happen.

Their performances are ambient, intervention-scapes, and invoke a folk art history, a history through telling and showing. Folk as the new digital. They aren't actionscripting in Flash, they're hack-tionscripting live, in person, tonight. And the minutiae is there, creating for the press and audience members affected by the event a quite jarring disturbance, but for the active viewers at home watching the movies, reading the scripts, looking at the pictures one-by-one, the YES MEN offer up a type of cyber-stutter, only they're making the other side do the stuttering. This type of digital cinema is a peer-to-peer eventscape filled with minutiae that need to be assembled by the viewer/user to function.

Kodwo Eshun: Digital Cinema in the form of writing

The last example of a practitioner of this new kind of nano-thought/nano-media is Kodwo Eshun. Eshun synthesizes bits, pieces, bites, label covers, and movie references into some-thing, but it's not viewable as a movie per se. His book More Brilliant Than the Sun is an old-media take on a new pheno-menon, and resembles a movie script in its rapid jumping between scenes, voices, and places with headings like 'Of Pictogrammatology'. Ideas float, suspended by headers, and then proceed to fade away a few sentences later until the next jarring headline brings you back. The references stutter and murmer, and indeed Eshun wants the new producers to embody the murmur: "Today, the Futurist producer is always greater than one, always multiplying himself into omni-duos, simul-taneously diverging selves that never converge into knowledge of self."[6]

If we're seeing an exponential rise in targeted-demographic advertisements, window pop_undertisements, referential blurbs, tangential links, vintage spam, and now sites like internal-memos.com that offer up bits disfluential murmurings of certain companies' impending peril, new Futurist thought is replete with all sorts of these divergences: a real datacloud that has the power to offer up new challenges to a conventional form of cinema.

SMS / NANO / ICON-THOUGHT

While the preceding examples all touch on examples of how digital cinema might be redefined in terms of varied media not always found in RES Magazine, the main point is to show how they all translate new forms and trends of thought that are arising. SMS is merely one 'new' technological form of digital cinema in nano-media form, and is also perhaps one of the most interesting forms of digital cinema. Whether or not it catches on in the U.S. remains to be seen, but it will still exist as an idea, as a prototype, as a possibility for combining, reducing, and extending the datacloud. In it, the QWERTY keyboard is reduced to a few cell-phone keys. Thought is abbrvtd down to its consonants, to a 128x128 dimension care of iconfactory.com. Like a Futurist sound-poem, a Hugo Ball announcement, or Cagean HRPSCD performance and his experiments involving using only the consonants of words to make music.

Tim Jaeger
© 03/2003

[1] Paul Virilio, *Crepuscular Dawn. Semiotext(e),* Columbia: 2002
[2] Chris Kraus and Sylvere Lotringer, *Hatred of Capitalism*. Semiotext(e), Columbia, 2002
[3] Ronell, Avital. *The Telephone Book*. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1991
[4] Jean-Luc Godard and Pierre Gorin. *Letter to Jane*. 1971, France. 51 Mins.
[5] Skot. The Mego Videos 96 - 98. Mego023v www.mego.at
[6] Kodwo Eshun, More Brilliant Than the Sun. Interlink Publ. Group, 1999. (pgs. 106-7)