
Aesthetics of the technological arts: towards a new publishing economy

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2041>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.2041

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2002

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Didier Vivien, « Aesthetics of the technological arts: towards a new publishing economy », *Critique d'art* [Online], 20 | Automne 2002, Online since 29 February 2012, connection on 30 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2041> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.2041

This text was automatically generated on 30 April 2019.

Archives de la critique d'art

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Jacqueline Chambon, 2002, (Critiques d'art)

Pelé, Gérard. *Art, informatique et mimétisme*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2002, (Arts & sciences de l'art)

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- 1 Until quite recently, for those with an interest in the “technological arts”, the critical corpus was principally made up of articles, special issues and exhibition catalogues, all easier to read in certain libraries than in bookshops once their actual moment of publication was over. We are now witnessing an intensification of monographic publications, even though there are still many group works on the subject.
- 2 The earliest writings date back to the late 1970s: in France, Frank Popper, Edmond Couchot, Anne-Marie Duguet, Jean-Paul Fargier, Abraham Moles, Fred Forest, Raymond Bellour and Florence de Mèredieu were the pioneers in an area of thought that has become diversified since the 1990s, with the Internet surge, the dazzling progress of computers, and the growing number of artists using digital technologies. The 1995 Lyons Biennale lent these so-called technological arts an institutional and media visibility reaching beyond the tight circle of specialists. The works of aestheticians have been joined by essays from one or two philosophers, such as Paul Virilio, Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Lévy, Philippe Quéau, Alain Renaud and, needless to add, Marshall McLuhan. In the meantime, a new generation of authors has emerged, with, as an immediate corollary, a far greater number of publications.

- 3 We are all acquainted with the impact of the “new” in this array of digital arts, as we are, at times, with the flaw of memory. The fact is that certain decisive writings were produced during those years of research (1980-1995) and it is fortunate that publishers are re-publishing some of them today. Writings that are absolutely necessary for an understanding of the new crop, meaning that it is not enough to talk about the “new media” to say something that was not already perfectly dealt with fifteen years ago.
- 4 Jacqueline Chambon has just published *Déjouer l'image. Créations électroniques et numériques*, a collection of articles written by Anne-Marie Duguet. This book may well become a classic, for the analysis of works invariably conveys historical and theoretical perspectives which go beyond the circumstances of the writing and the consideration of works which are the foundation upon which the author constructs her argument. So it is a backward-looking book which creates the basis of what may possibly, in the near future, be a yardstick for the art essay: a textual object without any imagery and, affixed inside the back cover, a plastic case containing... a CD introducing animated extracts from the works in question (readers will have to be content with extracts for obvious reasons to do with royalties).
- 5 Publishing encompassing video art, participatory and interactive devices, and dynamic synthesized images invariably comes up against the fixedness of the printed image; the possibility of attaching an animated digital document to writings which, in spite of everything, it is much more agreeable to read on paper, represents a new deal and will configure the publishing arena in different ways. Artists, incidentally, were the first to gauge the potential of the CD and now of the DVD. Not only does digital publishing help to go beyond the restrictions of the Gutenberg system, it also offers a new space of presentation and reading which tallies with the specific features of these new media.
- 6 Even more hard to pin down in the traditional form of the book and the museum is Net-art. Nathalie Magnan and Annick Bureau, belonging to this new generation of critics and historians, offer a selection of texts (historical and contemporary, quite a few of which have been translated into French for the occasion) which help us to gain a better grasp of the ins and outs of these new forms of *praxis*—which are in many respects disconcerting. *Connexions. Art, réseaux, média* is the first work in French to present so much information. This book, which comes with no illustrations, may well become the theoretical reference work on the subject.
- 7 In France, where the synthesized image is concerned, Edmond Couchot has undeniably been the best-informed and most prolific critic since the 1980s. Carrying on this latter's work, Gérard Pelé, published by Harmattan—who, incidentally, have several essays on the digital arts to their credit—, has come up with a very comprehensive book titled *Art, informatique et mimétisme*. The treatment is extremely clear and should enable neophytes to get a much more accurate idea about the aesthetic implications and specific poietic aspects of the synthesized image. Notions of imitation, reproduction, modelling, simulation and virtualization are examined in detail, whereby it is demonstrated that these operations are based on the principle of mimetism, and that computer technology is not merely a tool but above all a way of thinking.
- 8 These three publications, along with various others, suggest that the aesthetics of the digital arts has entered a new publishing phase—in which, incidentally, there is confirmation of the importance of theory, if one wishes to acquire the means of understanding images over and above their dizzy-making technological brilliance. If

publishers seem to be increasingly appreciating the importance of digital artwork and theoretical reflection, it is up to the institutions to offer readers more occasion to view the works. For this is indeed the paradox of these so-called media arts: based on the fluidity of cybernetics, and on the calculating speed of machines, they sidestep—at times not without a dash of irony—those trap-like venues, museums and books. It is not always easy to “follow” these images, but critical knowledge definitely constitutes a vital prerequisite. Whence the need for these books.