

## The Sacredness of Performative Technology

Bless all forms of intelligence. I'll start with being honest. That the search for God was to be abandoned there was no doubt about. But that this search would be missed and then pursued in a context where it lacked meaning, was not expected. How do you introduce a pragmatic spirituality in a secular humanity? For spirituality had to be grown in a laboratory environment like bacterial cultures and controlled so that the seed of fanaticism would not find its way into the suburbs. A virus for visionaries. Everything for the hobby rabbi. This honesty will be our light when we travel the veins of the machine down beyond, to its centre where the buzzing oily heart of the Sacred resides.

I believe that a constructive development is to be obsessed with introspective methods that are directed to obtain such abstractions as Wisdom and Maturity, that which creates steps towards becoming a responsible emphatic human being. To go beyond the self-denial, the approval-seeking and the fear of being rejected and maybe...reach fulfilment but also peace. Hear me out and praise, what I am talking about is *technologies of the mind*, that uses the actions of the body, in all the perceived realities that we consider real, as an ontological key.

What is the drumming of a shaman drum? What is the mixing of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* to create Ayahuasca? When a Christian nun navigates through her emotions what is that? It's a knowledge of tools, techniques, crafts, systems or methods of organization, strictly speaking what we define as technology, that in itself are based on the limitations and possibilities within experiences of the human body's interaction with a mind no longer bound by the borders of a materialistic universe. Through these experiences and actions, through it we travel in an inevitable and inseparable partnership of human beings and technology.

And in this partnership we sometimes appropriated the Sacred, with various degrees of success. A good example was the Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 by Col. Henry Steel Olcott and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, a cigar-smoking trickster from Russia. Their mix of Freemasonry, Hermeticism, "Eastern" metaphysics and science-fiction tales of Tibetan masters and Atlantean cataclysms frequently mingled with Enlightenment values that had everything to do with the freethinking spirit of progress. These mystics of modernism matched their esoteric knowledge with the new evolutionary and electromagnetic worldviews of science. They tried to fit matter into a incorporeal universe of spirit and gained from this an avalanche of followers. Imagining the Victorian world's population in awe of the progress of science, in their perspective indistinguishable from the myth and magic of old. Or as the cultural theorist Avital Ronell points out, "Science acquires its staying power from a sustained struggle to keep down the demons of the supernatural with whose visions, however, it competes."

Therefore it's not preposterous to perceive that contemporary technology such as robot-, bio- and nanotechnology contains the possibility to be assimilated into a symbiosis with the Sacred. The contemporary Transhumanism is such a blessing. What is this? It is;

1. *The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate ageing and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.*
2. *The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies.*

Though a secular movement with a focus on the enhancement of the matter we humans call the body, Transhumanism is in its inner ideological structure locked with religious ideas. But first it's important to understand that this intellectual movement has greater goals and advocates a search for definitive solutions for reducing poverty, disease, disability, and malnutrition worldwide. Basically they mean that it's inherently important from an evolutionary perspective to improve all aspects of life. However Transhumanism is distinctive in its specific focus on technologies that improve the human body on an individual level where the fulfilment of legal and political equality is produced through eliminating congenital mental and physical barriers. Their philosophical base is mainly among an utilitarian, socially progressive, politically and economically liberal perspective.

The next step of evolution is thus to incorporate advanced technology into the body to make it better. The flesh is weak, but not so technology. Remember the pride of Plato? There is a distinction between the idea object and the physical object. The latter is only a crude representation, corrupted and flawed. A concept that further on was adopted by the early antique movement of Gnosticism. Though consisting of various belief systems it was generally united in the teaching that the material cosmos was created by an imperfect god, the demiurge with some of the supreme God's soul. The matter is thus a prison and the humans prisoners, but inside carrying the spark of greater beings. The gnosis in the name is thus referred to a form of mystic, esoteric knowledge through which the spiritual elements of humanity are reminded of their true origins and being permitted to escape the flawed existence of materiality. This line of thought is present in Transhumanism. But instead of searching for a more ethereal "Kingdom of Heaven" beyond the materialistic borders, it's the materialism in itself that contain the salvation and liberation from flawed traits within the structure of matter, like ageing and death. Who needs God, brothers and sisters, when we have the technology to enhance our own bodies and minds and with that step finally find our place in the long awaited Paradise? A paradise that also is of our own making.

When an artist with ties to this intellectual movement such as STELARC uses technology in a performative situation it's also an appropriating of the Paradise through those means that are present within the ideas of Transhumanism. The matter itself is the key. *"This body is obsolete, absent, empty and performs largely involuntarily...This obsolete, absent and empty body needs to be augmented."* There is nothing but the body, even in its existence as a negation and its through it we can reach enlightenment: *"The higher form of existence outside the body happens between bodies..."* STELARC strongly believes that mind, soul and self-hood are social and language constructs and that they are not some intrinsic essence: *"Nietzsche asserts that there is no being behind the doing. (Agency is what we attribute to an act in retrospect). Wittgenstein reveals that thinking occurs on the paper upon which you write. (Thinking is not what happens simply inside your head). What's important is what happens between us, not within us..."* It's through these matter-based ideas that the technological Sacred is perceived, understood and performatively (through the action of the body/matter) reached.

If fearful of the change inherit in these ideas, understand that it is inevitable as a technological imperative. Accept its presence in life. It's not a question about the end of the Sacred but its contemporary manifestation, first through the filter of the ideas inherit in the Enlightenment and then through a much older dream, now closer than ever. The immortality that Gilgamesh craved and tried to steal from the Gods is within reach. But only through a symbiotic relationship with the machine, transforming us from humans to posthumans. Just remember: Resistance is futile.

- Carl-Erik Engqvist -

Selected bibliography

Erik Davis, *TechGnosis*, Harmony Books, 2004

[http://www.transalchemy.com/2009/06/transalchemy-interviews-stelarc\\_1629.html](http://www.transalchemy.com/2009/06/transalchemy-interviews-stelarc_1629.html)