

CONSPIRE.

Stephen Kovats, Thomas Munz (Hg.)

den ursprünglichen Dualismus zwischen Körper und Geist zu überwinden: moralische und magische Dimensionen der Technik des Körpers sind verantwortlich für das psychologische Moment, das einfach mit einer konkreten physischen Handlung in Verbindung gebracht werden kann. Kurz gesagt, es gibt keine einzigartige, natürliche und universelle Art und Weise den Körper zu benutzen, sondern vielmehr eine permanente Anpassung an den Zweck, Effektivität zu erreichen, was sich in einer Reihe von mitwinander verbundenen Handlungen fortsetzt. Es ist nicht mehr schwierig, diese Handlungen, die von der Gesellschaft aus unterschiedlichen fundamentalen Techniken des Körpers zusammengesetzt werden, in das symbolische Leben des Geistes einzubeziehen, gemäß dem geistige Aktivität vorrangig ein System symbolischer Assemblage ist.

Dies hat zur Entwicklung des digitalen Prinzips als des Prinzips der Simulation per Excellence geführt. Digitalisierung bedeutet die Reduzierung phänomenaler Formen, Beziehungen und Prozessen auf strikt numerisch definierte Formen, die manipuliert werden können. Medienkünstler sprechen nicht nur über den Unterschied zwischen Natur und ihrer Simulation. Sie betonen auch, dass dieser Unterschied einfach nicht länger aufrecht erhalten werden kann, dass die Natur durch kulturelle Diskurse konstruiert wird, die sie erklären und dass sie als ihre eigene Simulation existiert. Kunst ist eine Form des Erkennens der Natur, in der die Konstruktion eines künstlerischen Modells gleichsam die Konstruktion der Natur durch einen kulturellen Diskurs sichtbar macht.

Aus dem Englischen von Kira Gee

Nature as a Simulation

Igor Spanjol

IDEAS OF ORDERED systems – in bio-technology, knowledge, society, nature and culture – are an essential part of modernity. Systems represent a means to achieve a balanced world offering to everyone possibilities for a good and meaningful life. But they cannot be connected merely to the utopian idea of a harmonic and rationally ordered society. They also reflect deep contradictions and tensions of our time.

Art itself is one of the interconnected social systems, although it functions as a particular and autonomous world. Artists are able to refer to essential issues of the contemporary world without necessarily using social, political or anthropological analysis or abandoning a highly personal approach. Provocative and compelling artists construct their own, often strictly defined, but nevertheless quite individual or personal systems,

or use existing systems in an individual, uncommon way. They do this with a good level of historical awareness, but also with a commitment to an artistic and technological avantgardism.

In that sense, one of the most interesting issues for contemporary media artists is the intersection of general political processes and media technology developments related to a biopolitical complex as described by Michel Foucault or Harun Farocki's minute dissections of the visuo-technical systems that guide modern biopolitical regimes.

Through the concept of biopolitics, Foucault was already pointing out in the seventies what, nowadays, is well on its way to being obvious: life and living beings are at the heart of new political-economic strategies of the human development of anti-biotechnology and life's forces for work, raphy of biopowers. put in question the power seizes life as exercise then Foucault determining what resists, and that, in creates forms of



Uršula Berlot, Pulsation

forms of life that escape its control. Foucault interprets the introduction of *entry of life into history* constructively because it presents the opportunity to propose a new ontology, one that begins with the body and its potential. The introduction of natural life into political life is the decisive event of modernity; it marks a radical transformation of the political and philosophical categories of classical thought.

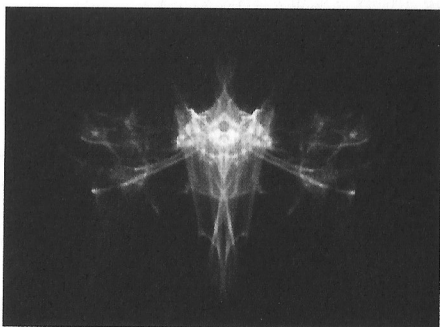
One of the premises of bio-organic systems is that the key element of art production from this field is parallelism between different instances of heterogeneous research in the sphere of the visual, despite the broad scope of dispersed artistic approaches ranging from criticism of the system and technology to issues of personal identity, the intertwining of biological and political territories and the networking and (de)coding of real and virtual spaces.

In their video installations, Uršula Berlot, Kimsooja and Norimichi Hirakawa are problematising the basic idea of the art tradition: the idea that art is an imitation of nature. This idea affirms that art is not only a production of aesthetic, but also of ontological, gnostic, and ethical relevance. As an imitation of nature, art is its own simulation, that is, art replicates and shows its own basic structure and the principles of its functioning. If, before modernity, we only knew natural phenomena – their appearance and results on the

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surface – the use of scientific analysis and artistic experimentation allows us to see what is actually going on within a natural phenomenon. Contemporary media artists have developed a poetic model which enables us to experimentally produce the effects of a natural phenomenon. For example, the trembling light apparition in Uršula Berlot's pulsation piece is a composite of the real and the simulated, the bodily and technological, that poses questions of oscillations between appearance and disappearance, presence and absence.

Perhaps the claim that we live in a time of simulation does not mean merely that we have lost genuine contact with nature and that we are surrounded by artificial environments. Artistic practice in Kimsooja's installation accompanied by the sounds of the artist's breathing adopts the dimension of art as a mode of recognition. The point is again that the recognition in its inner structure is closely related to simulation, and that the artist can simulate nature because she knows its secret essence. The recognised essence, expressed in the sound piece, is therefore not natural and can be displaced without difficulty. Contemporary artistic methods of recognition can reach into the laboratory of natural phenomena, and explain the processes developing within it. Thus pulsation, breathing, or even the sun turning around the earth as presented in Norimichi Hirakawa's installation, can no longer be timeless and general; rather they show themselves as interpretative and structured forms, which are historical and ideological.



Uršula Berlot, Pulsation

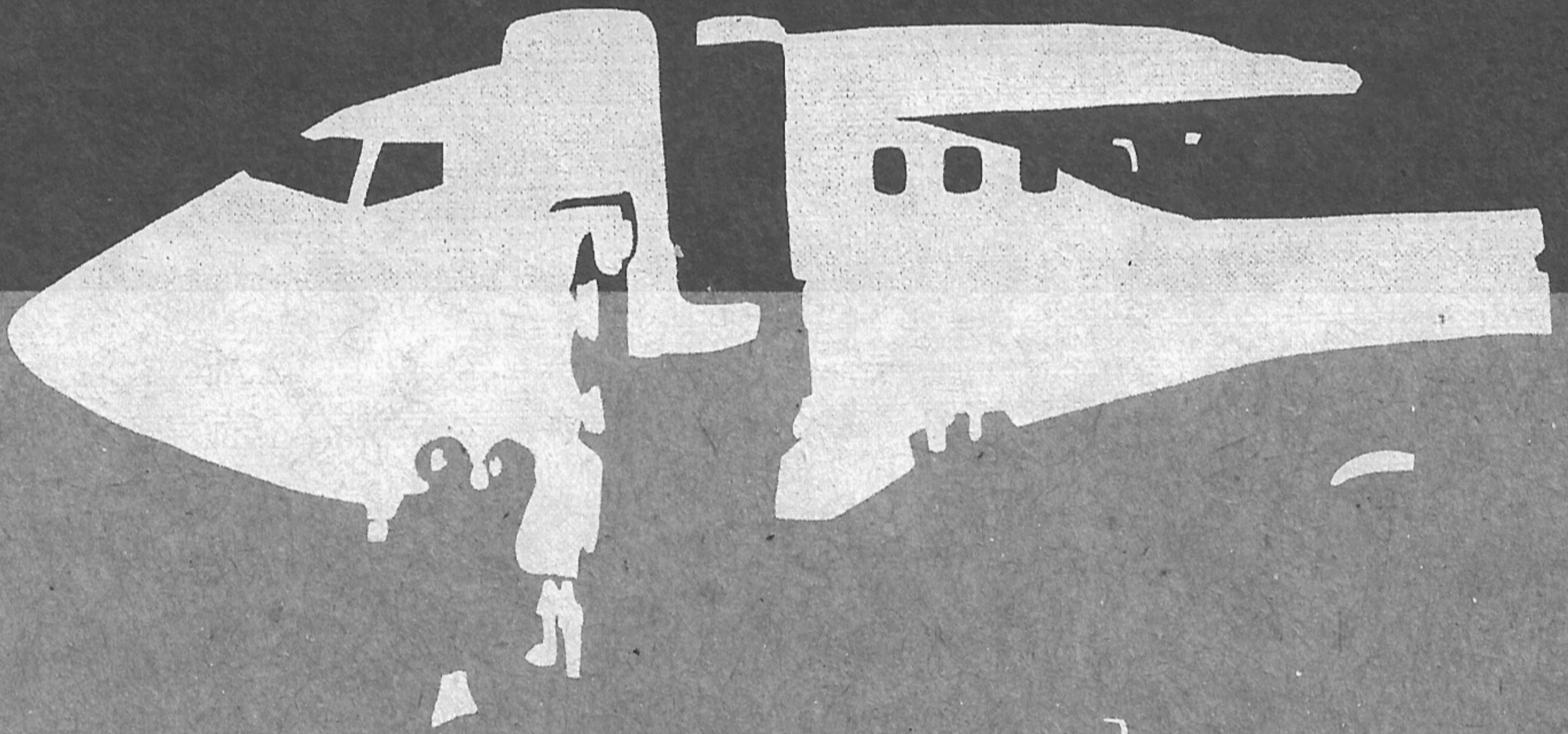
Changes in cultural and ideological discourse not only create each new interpretation of nature, but also redefine and change its own object. Timothy Morton argues that the chief stumbling block to environmental thinking is the image of nature itself. Ecological writers propose a new worldview, but their very zeal to preserve the natural world leads them away from the nature they revere. The problem is a symptom of the ecological catastrophe in which we are living. Morton sets out a seeming paradox: to have a properly ecological view, we must relinquish the idea of nature once and for all. In the words of Slavoj Žižek, ecology in developed western society is nowadays occupying the place that once belonged to religion, and what we need is ecology without nature, ecology that accepts this open, imbalanced, denaturalized, if you want, character of nature itself.

Thus organic systems, as presented by media artists, are always constructed, simulated, and artificial. Our first technical object, and also technical means, is our body, says Marcel Mauss, going on to describe a number of examples of cultural and historical influences on human physical activities, such as swimming, walking, or running, starting from the notion of the social nature of *habitus*. When relating the physical and the social,

and reflecting on the body in a cultural context, the essential role belongs to the psyche, although merely as a connecting cog and without casual relationships. The emphasis on the meaning of the body for the comprehension of nature and the characteristics of social life helps us to overcome the original dualism between body and mind: moral and magical dimensions of the techniques of the body are responsible for the psychological momentum that can be easily linked to a concrete physical action. In short, there is no unique, natural and universal manner of using the body but, rather, a permanent adaptation to the purpose of acquiring effectiveness, set forth in a series of interconnected actions. It is no longer difficult to include these actions, assembled by society from different fundamental techniques of the body, into the symbolic life of the mind, according to which mental activity is primarily a system of symbolic assemblages.

This has developed into the digital principle as the principle of simulation par excellence. Digitisation means a reduction of phenomenal forms, relationships, and processes to strictly numerically definable forms which can be manipulated. Media artists do not speak merely of the difference between nature and its simulation. They recount that this difference simply can no longer be established, that nature is constructed through cultural discourse, which explains it, and that it exists as its own simulation. Art is a form of recognition of nature, in which the construction of an artistic model makes visible the construction of nature through cultural discourse.

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