

Road Stories for a Flesh Eating Future

Noncommercial use is encouraged. Commercial use only with my written consent. Feedback is appreciated. © Ana Viseu -- September, 1999

On Thursday, September 9, 1999, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, two of Canada's most prestigious Media Theorists, gave a talk at the Design Exchange in Toronto. This is an account of this event.

Marilouise and Arthur Kroker's talk revolved around the feeling that technology is accelerating and leaving the body behind. In this two-hour presentation they brought up the issue of digitization and virtuality and what it does to the human body (the human body being a metaphor for a larger body, society and culture). However, instead of a formal talk giving only hard core facts, they made a performance where they told some "Road Stories for a Flesh Eating Future".

One of the stories talked on the replacement of our body by its digital representation (of which, btw, Matrix's statement 'we are nothing but a representation of our digital self' is a good supporting example). To give some background to this issue the Krokroers summarized Carl Wiser's (Xerox Park) view of computer technological development in few words: First there was the mainframe computer (one computer, many users), quickly we went to the personal computer (one person, one computer), the third stage is ubiquitous computing (many computers share each of us). Ubiquitous computing is similar to other ubiquitous technologies such as writing and electricity, that are everywhere without being seen. According to Wiser, the CALM technology (developed by Xerox Park), is a good example of ubiquitous computing. CALM tech. is a technology that make us feel at home, that is invisible and everywhere, making us numb to their existence. Calm technology is "the Prozac to human attention" and it reconfigures the senses, not only their ratio.

This is not the only example of technologies that try to colonize human perception. The Krokroers also bring out a technology being developed in Britain, entitled Soul Capture that will improve human computational abilities. Or the artificial tongue being developed in Texas that is being programmed to recognized tastes... of course, "the problem starts when the digital tongue starts to talk: 0,1,0,1".

One of the most thought provoking statements was that of an engineer who

proudly announced that at the speed in which technology is evolving in 20/30 years the human race can actually disappear and our civilization will still go on. Which in an Era of techno hype is obviously a blessing.

The performance was followed by a period of questions and answers to which, I must say, Arthur Kroker was incredibly prepared, with a sharp answer to every and any comment or question. But personally the question that stroke me as being the most stimulating, and at the same time the only that did not get a straight answer was that of a man who said that he worked in a firm that had recently started updating with technology. Therefore, he had to quickly master the technology. But, he didn't know how, and he was scared. Scared because it is not an option, it is a must. He said that in order to learn, he went to talks like the one we were just attending. Nevertheless, as he sat there the only thing that comes to his mind was "I don't get it". He wanted to know how to learn technology.

Although in itself the issue of learning technology can be seen as a trivial issue, for it involves the same aspect of any other learning situation, this question is interesting because it comes from someone who is out of the so-called 'technology circle', and it may be a good indicator of how a big part of our society feels, those who are out of the technology hype. Technology is now a burden imposed by some on many.

The performance ended with Arthur Kroker saying that he, like Heidegger, believed that technology was something we could ignore or refuse, because technology is our DESTINY.