Watching the spiderweb: Enrique Rivera.

V!RUS

The Chilean Enrique Rivera (Santiago, 1977) works on the convergence between art and digital media, from a social and political perspective since the beginning of his career. Researcher in art and cultural manager, Rivera refers the conception of his work on principles of second-order cybernetics, which includes the observer in the observed system and accepts that, from external stimuli to the system, new, non-planned interactions work to expand and enable it to overcome the limits of art. His work Cybersyn, 2006, was exhibited at the ZKM Center for Art and Media, Germany, at the Cultural Center of La Moneda Palace, Chile, and at the SantralIstanbul, Turkey. It retrieves the Cybersyn Project, 1971, commissioned by the government of Salvador Allende to interconnect Chilean public industries by a telex network controlled by a central computer so as to expedite the resolution of common problems.

Cybersyn or Synco was a foreshadowing of what would be the Internet two decades later, created with the English cyberneticist Stafford Beer, who was invited by Allende to design and implement the network in the country. The high degree of the project's involvement with public interests and its democratic character of establishing direct links between the various nodes of the network - from bottom to top - explain Rivera's interest in looking for reconstruct its records and submit it to the world as a locus where the being and the becoming collide and recombine, to be continually revisited.

This is the art of Enrique, deeply committed to its public-observer, especially for being the bearer of a critical vision on the behavior of the same observer, as a mirror that seeks to awaken the societies of the torpor which is continually offered by big business in an enticing way. Pulses in his work the fundamental question on the relevance of authorial art with the possibilities offered by telematic networks and the use of digital media. If it is no longer important that the artist is identified as the sole author of a work no longer limited in time and space, why not include in its conception the notion of indeterminism, unpredictability, allowing self-organization and densification, recursively?

The following interview was held on April 30, 2010, via Skype, in writing only, no audio or cameras, connecting us from Nomads.usp in San Carlos, to Enrique, in Santiago. The text retains the formatting and phrases flashes that use low-case in writing, to be the graphic face of that communication process and, somehow, determinant of the conversation itself.

It is therefore with enormous pleasure that the V!RUS journal invites the reader to realize the spiderweb mentioned in the title, watchfully and critically, as suggested by Enrique Rivera.

Information on Enrique Rivera at:

PCD Digital Culture Platform: www.plataformaculturadigital.cl/

Cybersyn Project: www.cybersyn.cl/

or-am Lab of art, science and technology: www.or-am.cl/

marcelo tramontano: could you please make a summary of your personal history as an artist and your interests in a systemic vision of art?

enrique rivera: i start my work as an artist with the intervention of images found and produced by me, which then turned into installations using slide projectors and 16mm film in public spaces, generating spontaneous instances of public participation.

in this sense, my systemic vision has to do with the perceptual inclusion of people in the artwork, appealing to the idea of a sort of collective hallucination.

from this initial area, i started working and researching participatory, inclusive art, in which from one survey to the observation of social, ethnographic patterns on the internet are considered valid source of inspiration for the work.

in that sense, cybersyn has been a kind of paradigm of the work on systems.

however, today i am more interested in the 'disblackboxation' and the freeing of knots or nodes that comprise an extended structure.

marcelo tramontano: that means you got to do something that involved different people working together? online only or also in attendance experiments?

enrique rivera: exactly, i'll send you a link where you can see objectively that collective construction: www.multinode-metagame.cl.

in this project, our intention was to provide the same tools proposed by the Cybersyn project, but using contemporary technologies and the Internet as the basis of transmission and connection between people.

moreover, the very process of conceptualization and technique creation of the work involved a multidisciplinary group of professionals, both presential and virtual.

marcelo tramontano: how did the *cybersyn* project help you for your later work?

enrique rivera: this is a sort of paradox, because at this moment rather than being concentrated in more recent historical research, we travel further back in time interested in the contribution of the Functional Labor in Chile during the 1920s, which proposed the setting of social structures based on organic inspiration of the brain.

they proposed a collective synapse, heterarchical and decentralized.

i'm interested in that historical moment because we're somehow living it right now, or we could live it easily if a wildness in the use of ict would not exist.

protocols are nowadays designed to tame intentions, as in the case of *facebook*, where the homogenization of the interface requires to cancel your identity, making users obsessive voyeurs and where extimacy makes more sense than ever.

marcelo tramontano: yes, precisely we wanted to ask you about relationships between your work and the so-called social media.

enrique rivera: regarding to social media, i am in the process of creating a work that consists of a confessional connected to the internet, where people go to tell their sins and are uploaded to a website where you can go and practice this rampant voyeurism.

this is a response to this current ethnological phenomenon of social media.

marcelo tramontano: do you think it is correct to do a rapprochement between the voyeurism of which you speak and the role of the observer under the cybernetic theory? could we say that, in some cases, social media make more intense, for the worse, such a role?

enrique rivera: i think it is important to have a critical attitude to what happens in social media because they are a tool that can easily be used for neo-liberal purposes.

the cybernetics' second-order observation is a scientific process of social construction of reality.

what is currently happening in the social networks is rather subscribed in a primary action of using a tool that is not well used yet.

marcelo tramontano: yes, but then some of these means can be converted to unintended uses, less interesting than we would like?

enrique rivera: yes, of course. i think there are different levels of use and appropriation.

for example, the CERN scientific social network has much more to do with the scientific process of construction of the social reality than with the use granted by a group of former college students.

however, i find that the tool is unavoidable.

marcelo tramontano: that brings us to the concept of network itself, which is being reviewed precisely because of social media. it concerns no longer the traditional concept of network intentionally organized, but of networks that are made and broken as flashes, but still truly connecting people and their ideas.

enrique rivera: yes, it is important to make a difference between the web and the internet. networks are made and unmade in a much more synaptic way.

marcelo tramontano: what can we say about that 'synaptic' way of understanding digitally mediated relationships?

enrique rivera: i think that the pioneer experience of E.A.T. is a very important example, in which the resistance to a commercial way of using networks moved towards the area of aesthetics.

this synaptic process is revolutionary because we, as a society, have the opportunity to go beyond domain tactics imposed globally by multinationals.

marcelo tramontano: when you say "we, as a society...", what part of the society are you talking about?

enrique rivera: yes, it is good that you ask me that.

i'm talking about the organized civil society, the community, the neighborhood, the union and the association, the cooperatives above all.

marcelo tramontano: one might think of parallels between networks such as twitter and those parts of society? i am mentioning twitter because it seems a bit different from other social media.

enrique rivera: i think a project that goes further in this regard is, for example, the internet autonomous networks that have been set from the CCC (chaos computer club), creating an alternative network to those provided by telecommunications multinationals.

i have nothing against these companies, but i do think that in order to achieve a real maturity in this sense we should stop relying on others to make up the systems we use, because otherwise we will always be slaves to others' systems (alfredo jaar).

i find great the tool proposed by twitter, but i would find it still more cool if people used it in a way more oriented to do something good for their own community rather than as an ego exercise.

marcelo tramontano: does the interface of which you spoke (the confessional) allow collective production of contents? do you believe that producing collectively contents on the web (wiki maybe?) is still important to the sense of network today?

enrique rivera: at the interface of what i was talking about the content is produced by the visitors.

the truth is i do not know if it is important, but if someone does it and this makes him reflect on the theme of extimity i think it is essential the content to be produced collaboratively.

for example, ricardo vega talks a lot of prosumers. i believe it's interesting to understand it, from that perspective, as an emerging paradigm of a society that is willing to participate in the processes that occur in the emerging knowledge society.

but anyway i have always doubts when concepts are "tamed".

as Baudrillard said, we could be falling into a trap made by our own fatal strategies.

the network can also be a spiderweb where our predator is waiting to eat. this is pure natural selection.

with regard to obsolescence, i believe that when concepts as well as things work they are obsolete ([Stafford Beer](#)), and we say that if they are obsolete, they work.

we believe in recycling as a current survival methodology.

for example, one of the projects that interested me most after the recent chilean earthquake (which, in parentheses, is like living in an enormous work of [Matta Clark](#)), has been the recycling of destroyed structures for building basic housing.

here, after the earthquake, people used the internet more than ever, because it was all what worked. the phone died, and a social network was created powered by a mega natural disaster.

this phenomenon did not die after that, and chileans (always addicted to technology and communications for being separated from the world by monumental geographical boundaries), have developed a trend of survival by technologies.

this systemic, integrative phenomenon is impressive from the ethnographic point of view.

marcelo tramontano: do you think that chileans are more open to internet use in general or rather to a few tipped tooling and websites?

enrique rivera: yes, definitely, but my fear is that this heavy use, which was caused by our geographic condition – the vast extension north to south, and most recently the earthquake –, keep that "use" only in this space and not in the reflection needed to truly understand what interpersonal relationships through the internet are.

for example, when we do this interview, i am subject to a keyboard, i cancel my performance to speak, and you only have the possibility to interpret me by a text.

marcelo tramontano: yes, and vice versa... :-)

enrique rivera: of course.

then we both have to deal with a level of tolerance facing the tremendous frustration for not being able to communicate in the way we have been accustomed for centuries.

marcelo tramontano: from a viewpoint of art production, the possibility of collaboration with actors from other fields of knowledge can open true possibilities? for example, for creating supports for these networks which we are talking about, or even for designing their limits...?

enrique rivera: of course!

vincent van gogh told his brother theo that he believed that art in the future would be produced by collectives rather than by individuals.

look, about that, let's review what wikipedia says about system:

"a system (from latin *systēma*, in turn from greek σύστημα systēma) is a set of functions, virtually referenced on axes, either real or abstract."

the word axes interests me here.

i immediately think that to define an axis within the collective production, you and i must agree on what is the correct axis to our joint initiative.

at this moment, we have an agreement which we should give our lives for to defend it, if necessary.

but also you as an individual artist can perfectly create an artwork based on the networks without involving anyone else.

in [relational aesthetics](), of [bourriaud](), there are excellent examples seen from a thoughtful look today, considering the creation of temporary existences devices.

now, marcelo, i would like us also to speak against the systems,…

marcelo tramontano: yes, let's do it.

enrique rivera: …on resistance to the systems, because systems dominate.

we live in a time of civilization full of irresponsible leaders, jealousy, and conceptual blurs. we need still a lot to be worthy of [thomas more]()'s utopia.

cybersyn proposed to live by a system based on trust rather than technology, and unfortunately a brutal coup d'état stepped on it and eliminated it.

we are currently in the system of all against all, rather than on the set of all with all.

from cybernetics, the control has a very different sense of what we know.

in cybernetics, control has more to do with stabilization than with domain.

to achieve this stability, you must observe, diagnose and act, then you can control by [homeostasis]().

which leads us to think of the systems regulation according to their environment.

where the neologism of [autopoiesis]() is essential to understanding organic structures, both natural and social ones.

marcelo tramontano: i would like to ask you a last question.

enrique rivera: yes, of course.

marcelo tramontano: it is a very general question about everything we have said here.

enrique rivera: go ahead.

marcelo tramontano: does the future look promising in your opinion?

enrique rivera: the truth is no, but give me a second to respond.

i am by nature suspicious and skeptical of human nature.

if you look at the past, you realize that for thousands of years we have been eliminating races, animals, plants... the denaturalization in which we are involved

keeps us accustomed to life in an artificial way, disconnected with nature and natural cycles.

when we talk about climate change, as a society we do it from the convenience of our comfort. we believe that separating plastic from paper we will do something powerful, when in fact what we should be doing is not to use or plastic or paper.

we are domesticated, and our only solution, as a society, is the complete restructuring, and we will not get it until the occurrence of a strong social cataclysm.

for the human race, the future is not promising, but for nature, yes.

we are a virus ready to be healed, the worst kind, but once we were in harmony.

maybe, hopefully, it will be back, but if we analyze it from past patterns, we are doomed to self-extermination.

marcelo tramontano: enrique, i remember that we met, you and i, some years ago by means of relationships made via social networks on the web... so we are a good example of much of what we have said here, aren't we? :-)

enrique rivera: yes, of course we are a good example, because we have a critical eye and not domesticated. ;)

marcelo tramontano: what you told about the recent experiences of networks in chile makes me want to go there.

enrique rivera: yes, we are now focused to create the lab here in santiago.

marcelo tramontano: good! do well! thank you, enrique, see you soon hopefully!

enrique rivera: thank you very much, greetings to everyone.

enrique rivera: muchas gracias, un abrazo a todos.