

new & old media : sister Os' electric-theatric Operation's

Presented at the Colombia University of Medellin, Medellin, Colombia by Nancy Mauro-Flude

When..one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet, or some mute and inglorious Jane Austen, some Emily Bronte who dashed her brains out on the moor or mopped and mowed about the highways crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to. Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.

-Virginia Woolf .1929. A Room of One's Own.

You may not encounter ALL NEW GEN as she has many guises. But, do not fear, she is always in the matrix, an omnipresent intelligence, anarcho cyber terrorist acting as a virus of the new world disorder.
-VNS Matrix

I am going to talk about my working process as an artist using new & old media, and my experience with translocal spaces. Identity has long been connected to issues and ideas of space. By emphasizing the mutable, performative body in these spaces created by new and old media artists, issues of community and self are redefined. I recognize the essential political role of the body that serves as a marker of boundaries, I am interested in those who disguise and wreak havoc on the sanctity of these divisions.

My main impulse is the desire to speak as an artist that embraces contradiction and possibility. I am convinced that an artist must be a lucid thinker, a quick processor, who should have neither religion nor fatherland nor even any social conviction, but an understanding for contradiction and possibility rather than absolute skepticism. As Morriessy from the Smiths says, "I'd rather be famous than righteous or holy. Any day, Any day, Any day Or Nietchze "rather a clown than a saint", or Patti Smith "There's something so delicious about repentance; so seductive about shame", and myself, I say "rather a fool than a fascist". We could say, in other words, that I practice the method of radical empiricism-basing my quest for knowledge on my own experience, and not excluding it because it doesn't fit neatly with prevailing theories, belief systems or artistic movements.

I attempt to do this in an innovative way, using every possible medium to which I have access: live collaborative situations, performance, installation art, video, radio, sound, embodiment theory, using local/non local/translocal spaces via the internet. In my work, all of these dimensions and border zones are interconnected through a tendrillitic system of veins, electro-magnetic forces and flows. Like water eddies a stream these flow into one another, translate into one another, project shadows and light into all directions. Information trickles, spurts, suddenly breaks, foams away and is pitched into the great lake of memory, to eventually be retrieved and formed in my own particular way.

The 'electric-theatric operation' form, draws its influence from electro-magnetic, cyber-anarcho feminist, political cabaret movements and manifestos including the work of: Saint Teresa, VNS Matrix, Linda Dement, Michelle Teran, Shu-Lea Cheang, Valeska Gert, Patti Smith, Rudolf Laban, (among others). Although I give a lineage, my form of bricolage, photocopy chic, scrap book approach to making work is an attempt to emancipate and eclipse, rather than place my practice either amongst or in opposition to a string of history and traditions.

But first I will explain why I am in Colombia, for the past two months I have been artist-in-residence at the 'Society for Ethnomedicine' Fundacion de Investigaciones Chamanistas. In this time I have been intimately dealing with the questions of space, time and bodies, and their relationship to corporeality and virtuality. This research in experiential anatomy and physiology, via the traditional software of sound, dance and plants is in order to produce a merged reality work over a distance. I've also been conducting translocal collaboration between the sister O collective, building mixed media environments in the middle of a disorienting environment, a world in which body, ether and the technological myth are wedded. Here, rather than speaking as an expert, my work seeks to make a virtue out of incompetence: I write as an acknowledged outsider who has some interest in the question of space/time/place, mixed and merged realities, but whose interests are not necessarily those of a shaman. I do not criticise ethnology, shamanism, but place some of their interests beside my own to see what contaminations and cross-fertilizations occur among them. I focus on the possibility of forging a non-hierarchical relation between ethnomedicine and the arts, a relation of mutual enrichment rather than criticism or aesthetic evaluation. Here, my target is a smug and moral high grounding self-assured cadre of 'new age healers' or Western Medicine practitioners, who have never put their own work on the line, never dared to think what they do is also a reinforcement of stereotypes, roles, sex, class, and gender.

Often frustrated by dominant societies limited definitions of what classifies a human, an artist, I encourage people to interlace various strands of experience. However, this way of thinking and practicing does not come without conflict. An instance of the many is during my first week in Colombia I had a vision of uneasy tension rising - a Dutch visitor 'a trance dance hopeful', got very angry with me, and said my reasons for being there was not honest because I was working a lot on my computer. The outburst left me a bit puzzled as work was exactly what I came to do. Did I forget to mention that morning I accidentally gave a bone to a dog, the bone was in a package with a dog picture on it in the kitchen, but it was meant to be recreated into a ceremony rattle. That night I was distressed so trekked to the nearest Net access point [that was a two hours walk across the pan American Highway through fields with barking dogs in a families lounge] I emailed my 'mentor' and collaborator for the project Michelle Teran who replied:

Question: when is a Dog bone with a picture of a dog on it not for a dog? Answer: When a dutch girl subverts it for a rattle.

What is more embracing of animals, an artist giving a dog a bone or a shaking a rattle to the spirit of a dog?

Not only is a classic instance of misunderstanding of interface and techno-fear, as humans often have been known to demonise what they do not understand especially technology. Not to mention the etymology Luce / Lucifer. The Radium discovered by madame curie and as we know Radium is, among other things, a stone that emits a light of its own [Ital. luce]. Therefore mysteriously close in etymology to the word "Lucifer." The true radioactive nature of radium's glow was not known at that time. It was nevertheless a light which penetrated bones; it had something evil about it. It was also however the light of knowledge.

Another time I was walking around the institute with a woman who lived in the nearest city and we saw beautiful red flowers high up in a tree. She said it is a pity about the electrical wires framing the view. But I loved this embedded media in the landscape it was actually augmenting the environment. It was just being made transparent, as there is electricity everywhere, in lightning, in the nervous system and so on.

So maybe I am not honest. Who defines honest anyway? I am an artist, I go with what drives me. I believe making art is a compulsion and hopefully larger than individual emotional catharsis, as there are many different spaces / forms / ways of knowing that can be created in the transformation of our own mad noises.

Instead of the eternal status of Truth, or the more provisional status of knowledge, belief systems have short term effects, though they may continue to be circulated for generations, they only remain effective and live if they have effects, produce realignments, shake things up. In Deleuzian terms, such thought or the discourses surrounding it, could be described as fundamentally moving, nomadological. I think shifting language is a perilous and necessary crusade, because the beast of globalisation

has begun to devour itself, and we need a raw language to drive it off. To break the spell, is to act to sever learned customs and habits, an enduring pursuit.

I like to map opposing often militant positions. I am concerned with what transpires when there are interference's, glitches in the flow of human communication when transmitting, receiving and entwining apparently incongruent sensory codes, signs and knowledge's. Glitches, scars, interference are access points to start a conversation with others, especially those who don't see us as we see ourselves. After making a film - once he considers it perfect, Martin Scorsese cuts out a few frames as he believes, "Mistakes are where the soul shines through". Interference, traumas, scratches, maps, glitches are a place where you can enter into a conversation. These are also moments that can't be processed or integrated and are replaying in the system, the nervous system to become in a way hidden knowledge, challenging thresholds to discover. In the underwater data base water carries memory of the ancestors, it is a portal to the other side where unfinished business, subjugated knowledge circulate in waiting to manifest itself through apparitions.

The Insectgerl Star cluster by sister O is located in the constellation of Curseovdialect, when it makes it's first dawn appearance (sister O rising), people of the new world disorder know that this is the start of the annual dancing season in order to energize cell life. A short time afterward these communities dance, sing in death metal choirs outside capitalists houses, pirate electricity & chat about the lost knowledge of the night sky. In this Area the stellar realm of indigenous Australian's name this group the Pleiades - a group of women sitting in the sky with a group of kangaroos, a little akin to the European story of the seven sisters. Arcturus is a star near the tail of the constellation Great Bedar; its rising and setting were supposed to foretell Tempests.

Kathy Acker sums up this dilemma well in her understanding of mythical concepts, mapping and theoretical principals, not guidelines, rules or blueprints for struggle, but as tools and weapons of struggle; "I do know that writing or making is magic. I'm not referring to "magic realism."... Here was a model of change: ugliness changed through worse ugliness, even destruction, into love. I placed the second text on top of the first text, crudely. You do what you have to do however you have to do it...Daedalus escaped prison by his art. He made wings for himself and his son. His son got too high, flew too high, soared into the sun, and drowned." Kathy Acker, 1997: 8.

The moral is that 'no bird fly's to high on its own wings?'. It is no longer a matter of maintaining a theoretical purity at the cost of political principles, not is it simply a matter of the ad hoc adoption of theoretical principles according to momentary needs or whims. My practice negotiates a path between always impure positions – seeing that art/politics/shamanism is always already bound up with what it contests (including

theories) – and that theories are always implicated in various social/personal political struggles (whether this is acknowledged or not).

image of isabelle before

and her transformation after

sister O trinity : nancy mauro-flude & michelle teran in Amsterdam, Linda Dement in Sydney online connection via KeyWorx software. 3 hours approx

"St Isabelle and 11000 maidens" [qtime]Qtime movie of a sculpture by "anonymous" at Rijks Museum, Amsterdam.

A quicktime image of "St. Isabelle and 11 000 maidens" was broken down and released into a sea of butterflies, text embedded in landscape, digital palimpsest. "St. Isabelle and 11 000 maidens" who in 1400's were brutally killed by the Huns on a pilgrimage back from Rome. These women were killed because they were nomads.

This story really moved me these women were killed because they were nomads and did things differently. It was kind of spooky that the sculpture 'Saint Ursula and her virgins 1525' was by some one anonymous - most likely a woman who would have not otherwise been given the chance to exhibit her sculpture in the Rijk's Museum. And it was also that I really just imported the Qtime without even thinking into keyworx, and then this compulsion just overtook sister O that this media must be released into another state.

hanging with st teresa [qtime]

I have been mapping mesmerism the vaudeville practice of channeling spirits, and Benigni's sculpture of St Teresa Ecstasy, I have been looking at her as a Radio....a receiver and transmitter of forces and flows.

This is documentation around a live conversation about "The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa" sculpture by Benigni, we discussed St Teresa's writings and how she describes the body as an inner castle. These are seven virtual domains, one has to cross gates to go to the next domain as if it were an initiation journey through a labyrinth. She constructs this place by writing it. Teresa was a radio, a receiver and transmitter of forces and flows, she participated in a subversive wireless practice, her direct connection with the divine to overcome hierarchies at the time. She deftly maneuvered in and around difficult situations with the church and male superiors.

"Text journey by Linda and Nancy in relation to a still image of the Ecstasy of St. Teresa. The image of St. Teresa was selected because of her writings on a series of mansions, the

seventh which is closer to god. This reminded me of online multi-user environments like MUDs and MOOs, which use text to describe narrate and navigate through rooms. St. Teresa also constructs her mansions through writing. Nancy and Linda held a conversation about these seven gates, talking about going through the gates with understanding, and often being stuck turning in circles at a threshold simultaneously. In relation to St. Teresa, other contemporary modes of thought and knowledge's that are not usually spoken about especially in relation to St. Teresa were included; witches, black jaguars, discipline as a limitation and a gateway including S&M practice. I used the situation to create a visual environment around the words, which also aided in teaching the software as Linda and Nancy monitored what I was doing. [by misha]"

sister O re-maps herself/ves and her community in an electronic theatre of operations that is halfway between the physical and the virtual. sister O character that I have developed, is also transmitter and receiver in her 'electric-theatric Operations'. sister O steps from the underwater netherworld of fugitive status to present a new body, one wonderfully attuned to redefinition of unfixed roles and unstable subjectivity.

sister O is the illegitimate sister of Ophelia. sister O frequently portrayed as an unrivalled beauty, a consort of a prince, driven to drowning by his strange ways, who lies prostrate. As she continued sinking deeper into a transcendental state, through the water, secret messages were channeled to her in this horizontal state, about a New World Order by her illegitimate Sister. sister O seized the original tool of rupture and permeated the membrane of her prone, damned and mythical deadlock. sister O is on a quest to re-circuit the landscapes, which she is portrayed to commonly inhabit, highly unsatisfied and misunderstood, she is now in the business of re-definition.

Michelle Teran said "sister O grounds digital experience in the compost heaps of the real world. She cleans ashtrays while sitting in a sea of pixels". The dividing line between herself/ves and the world is an ever-changing interface. sister O is a space/time traveler, she transmits sound, light and movement across horizontal planes, in order re code archetypal genealogies, social inscriptions into spiralic lines of force, from cyclic patterns of inertia that resist surges and flow.

sister O during a burial [re coding cell rejuvenation] in sth Colombia

sister O does this with her computer as a divination tool an extension of herself, that is not unlike the shaman rattle that I consider as a wireless communication device. Like the computer, the shaker has an antennae at the top, that you can detect certain electro magnetic forces with. I conducted connected session mediated through the KeyWorx, this software is used as an extension of: performer, audience and environment. The shaker is a part of you!! it becomes at part of you . it give you signs and omens it is an oracle also you have to listen to it. Like an internet/cable/wireless connection to the virtual world the feathers take you in to the magical realm/the virtual realm of visions. In Colombia the shaker is a personal thing - like a personal computer.

I know that control and eradication of ancient software such as bodies, sound, dance, plants and herbs is undoubtedly one of the most enduring and effects on those who generate life and the formless world of the dead and undead. For instance the ancient knowledge of midwifery was taken away from women by the modern western medical regime.

I build merged-reality environments over a non-local and local network, also mixing in with the physical space. I am concerned with disorientated, ostracized, banished or imperiled bodies of knowledge and am interested in the transmission and retrieving of them. Out of the necessity to experiment with other ways of sensing the world, I communicate via the concept of a transverse wireless area network in which increasing private limitations on public space, including the ether! is a crucial subject. By synthesis real-time text sound, light, performance transmissions, I investigate how the body is susceptible to various kinds of conducts, defying the current idea of human anatomy and linear space/time perception; knowing that everything in the world is made up of electricity, animate and inanimate things alike. Via, the importance of encrypted wireless transmission, for instance electromagnetic voice phenomena, conjuring, shamanism, mesmerism, Jurgensen, Raudive; Georges Bataille's 'acephalic revolution', Houdini's mother code, the Spiritist tradition (the body as an avatar), messenger-pigeons (training of proprioceptors), also sub-genres that practice particular forms of encryption from rocks, flowers and palimpsests.

Entering this research project I initially called it the 'i am a transmitter' research project, this title is a eulogy to the play 'I am A Camera', based on the stories of Christopher Isherwood which was published in the roughly continuous narrative as Goodbye to Berlin (later to be adapted to the stage and film musical Cabaret). As the character Chris states "I am a camera, with its shutter open, quite passive", however, I advocate that we are, and should become more and more like transmitters and receivers.

An electric-theatric Operation is an electro-vaudville translocal dance that explores divination as a subversive ancient wireless practice in combination with KeyStroke software. sister O has various transmission sites which re code the texts of bodies and societies from the well written archetypes that confine identity to other possible methods

of ordering the world, into spiralic lines of forces and altered frequencies; as parallel to scientific rationalism. Reason is only one of the paths to truth and understanding. I weaken the link between science and rationality, returning to an older and broader notion of media / wireless communication as a complete account of the cosmos achieved through all human faculties and taking into account different orders / levels of reality. These durational performance zones convert humans back into complex sets of ideas and matter in flux. sister O conjures different modes of transverse communication sites, she manifests on the screen, the street, the club, the page, the stage; she is a vessel of infinite veracities.

The form of “electric-theatric operation”, is a new media performance, where realities often merge; I am particularly interested in the combination of the 'high-class' act of a scientific medical 'Professor' - and the sleight-of-hand magician, mesmerising routines.

Show poster

This is the only proof I have of my ancestors' escapades in the magic field, apart the anecdotes from my late grandmother. I have a single poster dated 1877 starring my great-great grandmother, it writes “Bellerive Institute. Magic!! Magic! Magic!. Thursday. Dec. 13. 1877. Grand Performance of Legerdemain Mysteries by Professor Allan. The Celebrated Magician of the Age will perform the most wonderful Sleight-of-Hand Tricks, which will be perfectly astonish the audience. The only Lady Professor in Tasmania. This talented lady will appear as above, when no one should miss the opportunity of witnessing her astounding performances”. Notably, the extra-ordinary fact that this woman was a practicing magician in Australia in 1877, considering in the late 19 C Australia (7 men: 1 woman) women were seen little more than a sexual commodity in everyday life. Notwithstanding, they were usually the unfortunate assistants in the magic show well into the 20 C.

Furthermore, I am also interested in retrieving, sources of phenomena, remnants from instance Australia's most famous bush ranger, Ned Kelly's suit of armor (1880), as a unique form of old Australian technology. I am also fascinated in those who are not necessarily labeled as ‘artists’ but who I re-define as activist and/or media artists because they re in the tradition of breaking taboos in order to broaden out their world with prosthetic and unconventional forms of old media. Out of the necessity to experiment with other ways of sensing the world activists and artists often communicated with the public via augmented devices. Similar to their predecessors, artists and other innovative radicals use software as an extension of self. People often transcend the modern concept of human anatomy with the particular apparatuses they implement. Another great example is Harry Houdini.

I believe that passion and commitment have their own rigor and seek out appropriate techniques; I question notions of 'pedigree' and 'validations of self', as we are often encouraged to negate the dissonances, things we are told to be ashamed of which are inherent to one's genealogy and the most remarkable and interesting points. In 2002 I worked with digital media artist, Shu Lea Cheang who as a mentor, assisted me in developing "sister Outsider's Manual for the Heart", based on the theme of "HUMANMATERIALMACHINEFACTOR.

The "electric-theatric operation's" conception has since involved an intensive research period first learning KeyWorx software in July 2002. In February 2003, I further developed the 'electric-theatric operation' form, with a series of research and activities in new and old media, including the formation and meetings with the 'sister O' collective. During a residency in Waag Society for New and Old Media's Sensing Presence lab, translocal meetings in a KeyWorx environment between Linda Dement, Michelle Teran and myself (the sister O collective) have taken place.

I have devised a non-traditional script that has seven tracks that I integrate disoriented time/space realities; it plays and works within different spatial intersections, different voices and manifestations of a single character. It is the basis for the 'electric-theatric Operation' a new media performance, with the collaborative software KeyWorx, developed by the Society of New and Old media. On Friday night I will have a live translocal session with the collective Linda Dement and Michelle Teran, this meeting will specifically circulate around script tracks 2 and 4.

Michelle Teran: Amsterdam-The Netherlands
Linda Dement: Sydney-Australia with
Nancy Mauro-Flude: Medellin- Colombia

I believe in the actual possibility for performance zones of collective regenerations, rather than a practice that encourages complete individual abandonment and societal dysfunction. A parallel emergence that is both virtual and visceral at once, which in fact permeates the cellular level, the organs of our embryology. In the early 1990's, a cyber feminist manifesto appeared on an Australian billboard and declared, "The clitoris is a direct line to the matrix," a line which refers to both the womb - matrix is that Latin term, just as hysteria is the Greek - and the abstract networks of communication which were increasingly assembling themselves. Therefore, mythologically informed cyber feminist cultural fictions potentially break up inherent chains of signification because they see themselves as self-organising networks, blossoming with theories of chaos, complexity, a labyrinth of interacting components. I understand interactive new media performance as an operating network, a space of multiple viewpoints; performance as an effective political tool. My efforts to re-configure and reeducate cells, organs and neural networks, with Sister O her weapons, old and new technology's, is a desire to create interactive durational performative zones that transgress boundaries and reformulate their contours by synthesising old and new forms of media, that communicate perceptions of space, language, time and place. I am interested in reshaping the environment by creating a zone

placed in the factual everyday environment, where reality is irrigated by this alienation between reality and fiction. A place of virtuality, mapped by the force of fictional entities.