

FRANC FENG

FECUNDITY OF VIRTUAL DYSTOPIA AS CURRICULUM:
INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA S(CR)EEN AND POETIC
INJUSTICE

The media in this special issue unfold as hypermedia in the *lingua franca*, formations and currency of cyberculture. Whether with the wormhole invitation of participatory spirituality, consciousness and elusive peace in metaphysical mediations of Hall, de-centering and reversed Kantian immersive phenomenology of Reid, unfolding order of autopoiesis in Dosch, identity politics in globalization and colonial trajectories of cocoa consumption in Sayson, reflections of digital aesthetics in Randle, lingering hints of nature amidst suburban themes of architecture and transport in Kojima, polyvocalities of talking heads and property rights in Kulich, intersections unfolding of hope in the pathos of signs within the *topos virtualis* explored by Kaminski, poetic musings of the coming singularity of machinic memories of the Emetics (James & Klassen), or wastelands of postsuburban societies and terrains of real virtuality in Castro, we are at once reminded of the threshold of new millennia. The authors of these media weave vivid imagery at the *fin de siecle*, reminding us of the heteroglossia that call for humility, openness, plurality, diversity and nuanced intersections of nature, culture, technology and divinity.

These artifacts hint of their makers and learning contexts, whether within a formal course (i.e., ETEC 531)¹ context or from a more informal experimentation. As we view their originality and poignancy, we are led to wonder what curriculum could possibly have unfolded within these disparate artifacts? Did they come from the same lived cauldron? If so, have these media and their authors met? To answer these questions around artifacts, origins, creativity, practices and more, we begin by following two sets of enigmatic questions.

What happens when simulacra abound all around us and we have destroyed the originals and sources? What happens when we are told cyberspace is nowhere? What happens when we forget that presence equals truth? What happens if our consciousness might be reduced to pure machinic function of complexity? What happens when we realize virtuality is but psychic phenomenon? Moreover, what happens when we but nod yes, when seeing a price on a bottle of life-saving water? What happens when we no longer feel anguish, as we walk over yet another homeless person? What happens when we feel the cold breath of nihilism on our shoulders? What happens if we begin to suspect the cosmos cares *not* for us? What

¹ We are grateful to five ETEC 531 students featured here (Rebecca Dosch, Lauren Hall, Peter Kulich, Kerry Randle and Eugene Sayson) and to our students present and past who enrolled in ETEC 531 and who have contributed to an unique learning environment. Thank you all.

if the cyborg and all that it stands for is an omen of the loss of the human? A harbinger that might have arrived too early? What happens when we see strange as familiar? What happens when we are reduced to pure image, text or binary digit with a danger of subsequent loss of our humanity?

Then again, perhaps the power of simulacra has been greatly exaggerated and the original persists? If so, what happens, even when cyberspace is exposed as ganglia of wild fi(b)re-optics, traces of data hints at neural pathways to the heart? What happens when we begin to re-equate presence with truth? What happens if what we call consciousness turns out to be indivisibly integral with beings that house the im/pulses, who are inextricably woven into a larger context that defies replication? What if we realize even as cyberspace is a meeting of minds, it could also be a place for affirmation of beings?

What happens when we refuse to acquiesce upon seeing yet more water commodified with yet another, higher price-tag? What happens when the heart returns, as we recoil at the thought of stepping over another being, just because s/he numbers among the nameless huddling in the cold? What if the cold breath we mistake as nihilism is merely the reminder of what could be, when we lose our sense of purpose and forget the death of gods are only the paper ones we have deconstructed? What if we are wrong in assuming life is contingent with blind force abounding, when caring abounds and the Divine lives yet? What if the problems of border crossing and transgression of spaces exemplified by the cyborg turns out to be an opportune opening to revisit reified spaces? As problems of technology remerge as problems of culture and biology, when we revisit questions of human nature and divinity? What happens when we are once again attentive to the always already before us, as we relearn to regard strange as strange? What happens when the moment of reduction to pure image, text and binary digit, turns out to be precisely a turning point, when we might find ourselves compelled to respond to each other without the confounding of labels and appearances, that in our spontaneity, allow for possibility for us to be more, rather than less, human?

Pondering theses and antitheses, it is important that we trace these existential questions of nature, culture and technology that hint of theology caught in the gridlocks of cybercultural studies and science and technology studies, where these questions were problematized over the past three years. As a whole, these questions congeal in ETEC 531, a graduate course in the MET program in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. In ETEC 531, students learn new media through a critique of new media.²

The media in this special issue are products of experiments in real-time yet virtual space. As such these media are material attestations of a fecundity inscribed

² For a better idea of patterning as theorizing in the weaves between artist, artifact and practice and a larger context in which production of these cultural artifacts unfold, see Feng, F. (2006). Toward a Framework/Data Model: From ePortfolio Thinking to Folio Culture. In A. Jafari & C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on ePortfolios* (pp. 217-233). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishers.

VIRTUAL DYSTOPIA AS CURRICULUM

within an enigmatic question space and curriculum we call virtual dystopia.³ These cultural artifacts hint at makers, practices and networks inscribing them. Those whose labors are featured express virtual dystopia as lived subjectivities. They share a common experience of learning in lived contradiction, a visible sign of our utterance of things past and yet to come.

AFFILIATIONS

*Franc Feng, SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow
University of British Columbia*

³ I am grateful to David Jardine for the richness with which he theorizes fecundity. For more on fecundity, see: Jardine, D. W. (1992). *Speaking with a boneless tongue*. Bragg Creek, AB: M? Ky? Press.